

REGIONAL DISTRICT OF BULKLEY-NECHAKO

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE MEETING
(Committee of the Whole)

Thursday, February 11, 2016

PRESENT: Chair Mark Parker

Directors Eileen Benedict
Shane Brienen
Mark Fisher
Dwayne Lindstrom
Rob MacDougall
Bill Miller
Rob Newell
Jerry Petersen
Darcy Repen
Luke Strimbold
Gerry Thiessen

Directors Taylor Bachrach, Town of Smithers
Absent Tom Greenaway, Electoral Area "C" (Fort St. James Rural)
Thomas Liversidge, Village of Granisle

Alternate Director Bob Hughes, Electoral Area "C" (Fort St. James Rural)

Staff Gail Chapman, Chief Administrative Officer
Cheryl Anderson, Manager of Administrative Services
Hans Berendorff, Financial Administrator
Jason Llewellyn, Director of Planning
Corrine Swenson, Manager of Regional Economic Development
Wendy Wainwright, Executive Assistant

CALL TO ORDER Chair Parker called the meeting to order at 2:19 p.m.

AGENDA & SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA Moved by Director Miller
Seconded by Director Lindstrom

AG.2016-1-1 "That the Agriculture Committee Meeting Agenda of February 11, 2016 be adopted; and further, that the Supplementary Agenda be received."

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

OPENING COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

Chair Parker acknowledged the Regional Board and staff's recognition of the need for an Agricultural Committee and he thanked the RDBN Executive Committee for appointing him as Chair. He believes passionately about the importance of agriculture in the region and that it will be an industry that will help to sustain the region and province through difficult economic times. Chair Parker spoke of the importance for agriculture success, from market gardens to large scale farming and ranching.

OPENING COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR (CONT'D)

He noted the importance of garnering information to make good sound decisions and it is the hope that the Agriculture Committee will concentrate on one or two items per meeting to make swift and educated decisions.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Direction of the Committee, Goals and Priorities

Director Petersen noted that agriculture is a very large part of the economy in the region and that settlement occurred in the Vanderhoof area because of agriculture. He mentioned that over the past 10-15 years agriculture has experienced a number of challenges and there needs to be a concentrated effort to improve the agriculture sector in the region. He commented that beef production has also struggled. Although beef prices are rising the ability to make a living on a farm is very challenging. He noted the importance of food security and the need to grow, produce and consume foods locally and regionally rather than importing from other countries.

Director Benedict spoke with Art Kaehn, Chair, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George in regard to a program being developed at the University of Northern B.C. (UNBC) in regard to climate and soils in the region. Director Benedict noted the need to obtain more information regarding the potential program. Director Benedict spoke of experimental farms being used again to determine seeds and plantations that can be grown in northern climates and soils. She noted that there are private lands in the Peace River that have been planted with different seeds to determine benefits and growth in the area. Chair Parker mentioned that the Regional Cattlemen's Association is currently working on trial plantations that were developed in the southern region of the province but could potentially be grown in the north.

Discussion took place regarding the need for succession planning for the industry and perhaps UNBC could assist with a program to provide information.

Director Miller mentioned his concerns regarding the lack of on the ground work provincially in regard to food security and that there is a need for policy advisory work to be completed.

Director Miller stated the need to have an open discussion workshop/forum in regard to gathering stakeholders together to determine the best and highest priorities in regard to Agriculture in the region. It would be an opportunity to work together with key stakeholders to develop a better, more diverse affordable agriculture industry.

Chair Parker mentioned that the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) decisions and the overturning of decisions by the ALC Executive may require further investigation by the Agriculture Committee.

Director Strimbold commented that the RDBN completed an Agriculture Plan in 2012 and developed specific action items. The Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) also developed an agriculture paper and further review of the reports may assist the Agriculture Committee in moving forward.

Director Thiessen noted that his family settled in the Vanderhoof area to farm and during his time owning a farm he spent a considerable amount of time learning about farming practices in Alberta. He noted that in Alberta, farm children would take a college farming program. He spoke of the benefits of education and the need to focus on education as a priority. He mentioned that colleges would be a very suitable avenue for a farming program. Programs that provide information in regard to the economics, bookkeeping, management, soil health, etc. of farming would be very beneficial to the needs of current day farming. He spoke of new farmers needing to find alternative ways to make farming profitable.

DISCUSSION ITEMS (CONT'D)

Discussion took place regarding the benefits of developing co-ops to promote growth, production, and marketing of products.

Director Brienen noted concerns regarding the purchase of farm land by foreign owners to produce hay to export to other countries and creating a hay shortage regionally. Director Brienen, on behalf of OBAC, attended a "Keeping it Rural" workshop in Salmon Arm that discussed a trust fund model utilized by other provinces that provided low interest loans for people wanting to rent small parcels of land from farmers to grow local produce/products. This would enable people to farm who were unable to purchase large tracks of land.

Director Brienen commented that he had recently attended an event with four of Metro Vancouver's Top Chefs that discussed food quality. They noted that some of the best foods come from B.C. but the food is exported and very difficult for local chefs to purchase. One chef noted through studying in France that in order to make the best croissants the highest grade of wheat was required. That quality of wheat came from Canada but they could not purchase that wheat in Canada.

Director Brienen also noted his passion for agriculture and the importance of the industry to the region and the province.

Director MacDougall mentioned the potential for the use of shavings and ash from local sawmills for the farming industry and the potential for the industries to work together. Chair Parker mentioned that two options, the Ministry of Environment (MoE) or the *Fertilizers Act* are being investigated in regard to the use of ash as fertilizer for farming.

Director Repen commented that there are numerous seeds and varieties of plants that can grow in northern climates and the benefits of continually investigating and developing products further promotes the region.

Director Repen noted his frustration in regard to the ALC not addressing the needs of different areas and different scales of farming that can be very successful. He noted the need for available leasable land and identifying areas of the region that can grow and be utilized for specific farming purposes.

2. Information Points for Beef Production in the Nechako Area

Chair Parker spoke of the amount of monies invested in the local economy and region by farming and beef production. He noted the high percentage of monies received by beef producers at auction is returned directly back into the local economy and region.

CORRESPONDENCE

Nechako Valley Secondary School – Greenhouse – "Living Classroom" Infrastructure Project Moved by Director MacDougall
Seconded by Director Lindstrom

AG.2016-1-2

"That the Agriculture Committee receive the correspondence from the Nechako Valley Secondary School titled "Greenhouse – "Living Classroom" Infrastructure Project."

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

CORRESPONDENCE (CONT'D)

Director Petersen noted his support for the Nechako Valley Secondary School Greenhouse "Living Classroom" Infrastructure Project. Chair Parker mentioned that he has contacted School District 91 Nechako Lakes to encourage implementation of the project throughout School District 91. Director Fisher commented that School District 54 Bulkley Valley has several greenhouses operating. Discussion took place regarding the benefits of the program. Directors Thiessen and MacDougall spoke of the benefits of the community gardens in Vanderhoof and Fort St. James. Chair Miller noted the importance for school children to learn the connection between food and food production.

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

CORRESPONDENCE

Beyond the Market
-February News

Moved by Director Newell
Seconded by Director Miller

AG.2016-1-3

"That the Agriculture Committee receive the correspondence from the Beyond the Market titled "February News."

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

SPECIAL IN-CAMERA MEETING

Moved by Director Miller
Seconded by Director Newell

AG.2016-1-4

"In accordance with Section 90 (1)(g) of the *Community Charter*, it is the opinion of the Board of the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Rural Directors Committee that litigation or potential litigation affecting the local government (Fire Department Liability) or information received relating to the matter must be closed to the public therefore exercise their option of excluding the public for this meeting."

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Director Miller
Seconded by Director MacDougall

AG.2016-1-5

"That the meeting be adjourned at 3:02 p.m."

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Mark Parker, Chair

Wendy Wainwright, Executive Assistant