Regional Ramp Up on Food Policy and Planning - Further Reading

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Central Saanich Land Use Decisions under review by CRD

The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) and the Urban Containment Boundary are key land use planning tools established by the CRD in 2003 by member municipalities. These tools were reviewed and reconfirmed through the RGS review in 2005. Recently Saanich councilor Vic Derman brought a motion forward asking CRD staff to review several Central Saanich municipal decisions, which he feels, contravene the terms of the growth strategy. The decisions indicated for review were the Vantreight housing development, Wallace Drive development, the Peninsula Co-op grocery store on three hectares of land on West Saanich Road at Keating; the Senanus water line, and the Woodwynn Farm proposed rezoning of farmland on West Saanich Road; and a proposed urban servicing for the northwest sector of Central Saanich.

An article in the Times Colonist quoted Derman as saying "If the regional growth strategy is to fulfill the common vision of sustainability that members of the region have agreed upon, it must be enforceable," Here is a link to the article:

The CRD hearing on the subject in June was packed with citizens who had strong views on the subject, and during July and August, local media has carried many stories and letters to the editor stating opinions from community, and politicians on the topic.

Many wonder if this alongside the Juan de Fuca lands controversy (see http://www.canada.com/victoriatimescolonist/news/capital_van_isl/story.html?id=b9b17572-7d9c-4e8a-843e-7a9e94060edd) will further spurn on talks of either amalgamation or of splitting in two of the CRD. The CRD actions to review the Central Saanich decisions are an important part of the regional planning process and highlight the complexity involved in protecting farmland over competing interests for land, while at the same time supporting farm and food business viability in the region. Stay tuned this one is just warming up!
Although not a sure bet, many are saying this one is a winner! I can’t resist making horse race analogies around the District of North Saanich proposal for the property known as the Sandown Racetrack. The proposal is to work to amend the zoning and North Saanich Official Community Plan bylaws to allow for the development of an agriculture asset for the municipality. Rob Buchan, Administrator for North Saanich came to present to the Food Policy Working Group about the proposal in June.

He began by giving a history of the land, stating that it has been a racetrack since the 1950's and in the ALR. It is zoned for commercial uses, and has operated as a racetrack, clubhouse and lounge over the years. Currently the land is 95 acres in eight parcels. The proposal is to create two parcels. The first parcel would be 12 acres along the roadside adjacent to the industrial area on the Sidney side, and with consideration of new commercial uses on those 12 acres. The second parcel (83 of the 95 acres) would be given to the Municipality. The Municipality would then add 12.05 acres of municipal land to the parcel (so there is no net loss to the Land Reserve), as well as register a covenant on title to ensure that the land remains in agriculture uses in perpetuity.

An interesting aspect of the agreement being put forward is that an MOU would be signed with the ALC to commit 50% of the tax increases generated by these land changes go towards agriculture related initiatives in the District. The District says it is open to ideas for this new parcel in terms of using it for leasing to new farmers, training grounds, and community gardens etc. The District held a public consultation on June 23, 2011, and will continue to solicit input to move the proposal forward.

Understandably, there are many concerns to be addressed as this idea is fleshed out. How do we balance the development of this site with other pressing concerns in the community (such as affordable housing)? How do we ensure that current farmers are supported and feel the benefits of such a proposal? Many people have spoken to are very excited about the prospects and I have heard of lots of creative ideas for the property and for partnerships to make it happen. This includes creating accessible land and a supportive environment for new farmers, leasing land to existing farmers to expand their operations, looking to partner with the University of Victoria or other institutions to create a teaching and learning or agriculture business development and innovation center, and/or potentially facilities for a central storage, packing, processing and distribution center.

Corrine Green, North Saanich Councilor says, “There will be a lot of hoops to jump through, ensuring that the public and the CRD are consulted and that other regulatory bodies/approvals are obtained for any such proposal that would change the current zoning and use of the site. But, if all goes well over the next few months, Sandown’s future and its ALR designation could be secured in perpetuity as a public asset. I gather that the site could be re-developed for, among other things, a variety of agricultural activities and uses and leave a significant legacy for future North Saanich generations”.

The next Community Town Hall Meeting for the Sandown Racetrack Proposal
The residents of North Saanich are invited to attend the second Community Town Hall Meeting regarding the proposal for Sandown Racetrack. This meeting has been scheduled for 7:00 p.m., Tuesday, September 20, 2011 at the Municipal Hall, 1620 Mills Rd. There will be a presentation and an opportunity for questions and answers. Please attend the meeting to learn more about the Sandown Racetrack proposal.

Rob Buchan
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Saanich –Buy Local Policy Adopted

Saanich Council has recently approved a recommendation from the Healthy Saanich Advisory Committee to develop a Local Food Procurement Policy that will give preference to local food producers when ordering for Saanich events and food services.

Saanich Councilor Dean Murdock believes that the policy uses Saanich’s buying power to expand the local food marketplace for local producers. In a statement he released Murdock stated:

A local food procurement policy creates environmental, social, and economic benefits, including:

1. Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from transportation because local food does not travel as far as imported foods;

2. Fresher and healthier food choices because local food is harvested when it is ripe rather than when it needs to be shipped;

3. Expanded local marketplace and local economy by supporting local food producers and keeping our dollars within the region;

4. Profitable, productive farms that protect agricultural land from development and ensure that farmland is available as a global food crisis emerges; and

5. Achievement of Saanich’s Official Community Plan objectives of supporting local food production and food security.

This is another feather in Saanich’s cap to create constructive policies that support food sustainability in the region, Kudos to the Healthy Saanich Advisory committee and Councilor Murdock for moving this forward.
There has been talk of Saanich developing a Food and Agriculture Strategy and at the June Peninsula Agriculture Commission (PAC) Meeting; Councilor Member Dean Murdock was requested to obtain an update on that process from Saanich planning staff to report back to PAC. In our next CR-FAIR letter we hope to report on any developments.

Central Saanich-Call to Action on Dumping of Fill

One very important issue for agriculture that continues to come before council is dumping fill on agriculture land. As development occurs around the region, much soil and material is removed from sites and must be relocated. An example is the redevelopment of the Uptown Center. The truckloads and truckloads of material that were removed from that site needed to go somewhere. Where did it go?

At a recent Central Saanich Council meeting, Councilor Kubek requested Council discuss the issue that agricultural land in the district is becoming a regular dumping site for development fill from other parts of the region. This item was also discussed at the most recent Tri-Municipal Council meeting in North Saanich and continues to be problematic for the Peninsula. The discussion led to a motion being put forward on Development Fill from Regional Municipalities. Central Saanich will ask the CRD to “adopt a strategy, regionally, that requires Municipalities to have a fill removal disposition plan as part of any new development they approve and that if that fill is to be removed from one district and located to another then the district approving such project will seek the approval of the Municipality from which it is dumping fill or the fill is being dumped on by the developer.”

As well, in September the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) will be hosted in Vancouver and it is an opportunity for municipalities to bring issues and proposals to the UBCM for consideration, this issue also will be top of Central Saanich’s agenda for their meetings at the UBCM:

- Dumping Fill on Agricultural Properties
- Agricultural Area Plan
- Farm Worker Housing Policy Review

Agriculture Land Protection: A Regional Land Bank?

In the Capital Region we are faced with the challenge of rapid growth and competitive interests for farmland. This is pushing the value of farmland out of the reach of farmers. Many say that when agriculture becomes viable, then the land will be protected. Others argue that with each parcel developed or becoming an estate home, we lose our food production capacity in the region. By estimates from our Regional Agrologist, we have less than 10% of our land base that is needed to feed the residents in the region currently designated for agriculture. If we thought it prudent to increase local production by even a small percentage, land would be an issue.
There has been a large amount of conversation and work done by farmers, community organizations and government to address the “market failure” around agriculture land, that is where the private market does not adequately supply a resource that is critical to the functioning and long term sustainability of the region (in this case food security). A range of actions and policy options to combat the rising price of farmland (currently between $70,000 and $100,000 an acre in this region) have been discussed and in some case implemented.

Currently among the range of proposals to ensure we have land for agriculture into the future is the consideration of the purchase of lands to be held by government or public organizations that would make certain that they are held and utilized for the purposes of food growing in perpetuity-a land bank if you will. There are a number of examples of these types of arrangements in our region, from the purchase by the Land Conservancy of Madrona Farm in the Blenkinsop Valley, to the creation of Saanich’s Haliburton Community Farm.

Currently we already purchase and retain land for a number of purposes for the residents of the region. This includes land for education, roads, waste management, parks and watersheds. The idea of exploring public land ownership for food production is not new. In Europe (for example Britain, France, the Netherlands) there have been a range of initiatives implemented, but some examples closer to home from North America include: the Bayfield Farmland Preservation Program of Wisconsin; the Open Space, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund in Hunterdon County New Jersey; and the Peninsula Township of Michigan Purchase of Development Rights Program.

An example of a successful land preservation project funded by a property tax levy is the CRD Regional Parks Land Acquisition Fund. In 2000 a $10.00 per parcel fee was implemented and collected annually as part of the property tax levy. This levy raises approximately 1.7 million dollars per year. These funds have been used to buy almost 3000 hectares of parkland in the CRD. Determined to be a successful tool, the fund has recently been approved for another 10 years and to increase the levy to $20.

Creating a regional property tax levy for the preservation of farmland is within the jurisdiction of the CRD and its member municipalities under the Local Government Act. In addition, while there are a number of municipalities who do not have agriculture land, it can be argued that ensuring regional food production capacity would be a benefit to the entire region.

There are many options for implementing such a levy. It could be created as a stand-alone levy or incorporated into another land acquisition fund. Another opportunity could be to follow the Langford model, whereby an amenities fee is collected on new developments. If we went the route of a tax levy, it would need to be approved by either a referendum, by consent of the CRD board members, municipal councils and electoral area directors on behalf of the residents, or an alternative approval process.
Working with the Environmental Law Center at the University of Victoria, the Food Policy Working Group undertook a preliminary exploration of a range of policy options and mechanisms that could be utilized by the CRD. This includes a preliminary exploration of a Regional Farmland Preservation Levy. A report by Patricia Blair, concludes “Farmland preservation is already a part of the CRD’s Regional Growth Strategy and is stated as a goal or objective in many of the member municipalities Official Community Plans. Revenue raised by a Regional Farmland Preservation Levy could do much to secure farmland in a number of different ways: through purchase of farmland and resale within an agricultural covenant registered on title, purchase and retention in order to provide long-term leases at affordable rates to young farmers or purchase and re-sale, with an agricultural covenant registered on title, at below market value. The success of the Regional Parks Acquisition Fund demonstrates strong public support for the preservation of parkland within the CRD. Public consultation and education will be needed in order to determine whether an equal or greater level of support is present for farmland preservation”.

It is clear that any suggestion to increase taxation or fees would not be without contention; however a healthy discussion of a range of options and benefits may be timely in the region. Options that would fit this region could be put forward for consideration through the CRD Regional Food Strategy consultation process. Could it be that with thorough research, collaboration between key actors, and strong public support, that we could establish a model in the CRD that will be a beacon of farmland protection across North America?

**Provincial Policy-A Review of ALR Boundaries on the Horizon?**

Last Fall Richard Bullock, the incoming Chair and CEO of the Agriculture Land Commission toured the Province getting input from stakeholders about the Agriculture Land Reserve and the Commission. He wrote and submitted his report and recommendations to the Premier and since then the Ministry of Agriculture, the policy branch, insiders, and Cabinet have been masticating budgets and directions for the Agriculture Land Commission. A few things emerging that are noteworthy and cause for discussion are:

- Calls to increase the budget for the ALC to adequately steward the ALR have not been supported
- Steps to undertake a review of the ALR boundaries across the Province are moving forward
- Considerations of the decision making structure for the ALC are under review. Over the last decade we saw the shift from a centralized panel to five Regional Panels, a model where small committees of representatives from a region are making decisions on applications for exclusion happening at that same regional level. This structure has come under fire as farmland advocates have pointed to potential conflicts of interest of panel members who have their fingers in regional development schemes. Will the regional panel model change?
Due to the potential impacts that these policy decisions will have on the agriculture land reserve and the operations of the Land Commission, it will be important to keep abreast of these issues over the coming months and push for continued consultation throughout the process.

**Deer o Dear! Who will tackle this challenging public policy issue?**

Many hardworking folks managed to get all the players around the table to launch the development of a Geese Management Strategy in the region. Now say many, we have got to tackle the deer issue. With deer populations increasing in the region we are not only seeing it affecting farmer’s crops, but progressively more urban gardeners are up in arms. Citizens are voicing concern about safety issues related to deer, as well as the potential for health risks related to the deer’s role in the spread parasites that carry Lyme disease

**So what are the issues and what are the options?**

Many point to the issue being humans, not only have we killed off their natural predators but we have gobbled up habitat through the reach of development. On top of that we fertilize, water, and create plantings that deer prefer over their natural habitat, especially during the drier days of summer. The result? More deer on farmers’ fields, in urban gardens, and crisscrossing streets and highways.

There are also concerns raised over an overabundant deer population and the impacts on the integrity of ecosystems. Large numbers have the ability to significantly alter both plant and animal communities. Deer eat understory vegetation, directly impacting plant and animal communities. Reduced vegetative cover can damage nesting locations for birds, cover for frogs and salamanders, insects and other wildlife. In addition deer also reduce their own food supply and cause them to become weak and die from starvation. Overabundant deer populations also increase the risk for disease transmission (e.g. Chronic Wasting Disease), parasite transmission (e.g. deer ticks which can carry the bacteria that causes Lyme disease).

Farmers are very concerned about crop losses associated with ungulates, Check News recently reported (August 10, 2011) about crop losses due to deer, alongside anecdotal evidence that farmers will not plant certain crops due to previous heavy losses to deer.
Who’s jurisdiction?
Good question. Unless we are talking about deer in national parks, the first stop to look is the Province. The Provincial Wildlife Act regulates hunting and identified species at risk. Municipalities may regulate, prohibit and impose requirement by bylaw to control designated wildlife species and regarding the feeding or attracting of dangerous wildlife, (Community Charter Spheres of Concurrent Jurisdictions-Environment and Wildlife Regulation BC Reg. 144/2004) as well as regulate the discharge of firearms.


In January of this year the CRD Planning Transportation and Protective Services Committee received a staff report around the Deer issue. The staff report referenced the Hesse report and provided a background of the issues, potential courses of action and provided recommendations for the CRD and its role in resolving the regional issue.

Courses of Action?
The CRD Staff referenced the Hesse report, indicating some of the pieces involved in deer management include: “changing stakeholder attitudes or behaviours; developing community capacity to increase participation in management decisions; establishing measureable management objectives for each community; modifying deer behaviour; modifying human behaviour; reducing herd size; and amending provincial and municipal regulations to facilitate management interventions.
They pointed out that the report outlines that “no single technique will be universally appropriate and that complexities of deer management and limitations on available interventions make quick-fix solutions unlikely. Further, it notes that because both the positive and negative values associated with ungulates are so high, setting management goals and determining treatment options can be very difficult”.

The report goes on to state: that management options fall into four categories: conflict reduction, population reduction, fertility control, and administrative options. Where it is determined that the problems and impacts are severe the report indicates that most researchers suggest populations be lowered using lethal control, and then, when proven practical, population levels can be maintained using fertility control.

**Conflict reduction techniques** refer to strategies to deter deer from coming on property or minimizing damage, and include fencing, landscape design, plant selection, repellents and scaring devices. The report concludes that “Many of these options could be addressed through changes to the CRD and municipal animal control bylaws and are often supported by the public”.

**Population reduction programs** involve capture and relocate, capture and euthanize, controlled public hunting, sharp shooting and natural predator reintroduction. Many issues are raised about the impact of capture and release on the animal mortality, and hunting in urban areas is both a safety and social issue. The report concludes that these measures would require changes to provincial, CRD and municipal bylaws regarding the use of lethal measures in urban areas and “would not widely supported by the public”.

**Fertility control measures** can be used to maintain a reduced population level. This option “requires more scientific research and testing prior to being implemented in the region”.

**Administrative options** The Hesse report indicates that municipalities can implement bylaws that take active ungulate population interventions. Bylaws can limit the type or landscaping, restrict feeding, provide wildlife corridors, green space considerations and riparian zone protection in future development applications and regulate the discharge of weapons and hunting. The report also identifies public education about the management process (ongoing activities, timing, funding, who is involved) and information about the animal control issue.

**Recommendations?**

The CRD staff report recommendation was to create a committee to investigate creating an Ungulates Management Plan, which they estimated would run the CRD around $100,000-$150,000. Upon receiving the staff report the CRD Planning, Transportation, and Protective Services Committee passed a motion that “concerns regarding the effect of urban deer population be expressed to the Province with the recommendation to have them develop a deer management plan including a public consultation framework and funding”, and pushed it off to the Province.
In summary, the CRD staff report and actions highlight that this is a tricky issue that will require study, planning and $, and will cause public upset. A multi-prong approach is needed which includes public education, but will also most likely include culling deer. No one wants to touch it.

What is happening elsewhere?

Public forums to address the issue have been held over the last year on Pender island, and Mayne Island to discuss deer overpopulation on the Southern Gulf Islands and the cities of Victoria and Nanaimo recently amended their Animal Control Bylaw prohibiting the feeding of wildlife.

The Plan for the Management of European Fallow Deer at Sidney Spit, on the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve (Golumbia, 2010) recommended specific activities include capture, culling, hunting and processing of deer from park reserve lands as well as monitoring ecosystem response, review of the deer management program and goals and communication of the program results, and is underway.

This spring the Grand Forks Deer Committee called a meeting in Cranbrook to look at the different ways communities are looking at the issue of deer management. Representatives from five different communities were there, as well as officials from Victoria and conservation officers from the East Kootenays.

An outcome of the Cranbrook meeting was discussion to set up a trapping program. The program would be modeled on the Helena Montana deer cull. It would use a clover trap, and then utilize bolt guns to euthanize the deer trapped. The trap could be shared in communities around the region. First they determined they would need to create a deer management plan, have it approved by the committee and sent to council for approval. Then it would be a matter of finding the funding. The Province said it was unlikely to cover any costs in fear of creating a run of requests from communities across BC.

On August 10, City of Penticton Councilor Mike Pearce put forward a motion to cull deer. While you can’t shoot firearms in city limits, he suggests the city could seek permission or get trained people to tranquilize the deer and then kill them. (Global News: Global BC | Penticton councilor suggests culling deer).

Lake County Forest Preserves in Milwaukee Illinois have an active Deer Management Program as part of their Natural Resource Management Program. Deer numbers are estimated each winter with helicopter survey flights, with the average goal, dependent on habitat type, is 15 deer per square mile. They have determined that based on published research recommendations, at that level, they will have a better chance of sustaining habitat for the deer themselves, and other species.
Where to next?

As politicians and levels of government shy away from this issue the community and farmers are getting restless. Groups are starting to meet and the media is bringing the issue into the public debate. It is clear that as with the Geese Management Strategy that this will take all levels of government working with farmers and community members to come up with a plan. This will include a process and study to determine the best course of action. In the meanwhile we may continue to see deer shot by cross bows and farmers struggling with crop losses. This issue is not going away and the costs of doing nothing will start to mount up. The bunny debate was a warm up, and if it is telling of anything this one is sure to be a hot topic this coming year.

To learn more or get involved in the discussion join us for a night of “Policy and Pints”, coming this fall where we will open up the floor for debate on the deer issue, (date and time to be announced on the CR-FAIR on-line events calendar).

Update on Meat Processing: More Changes Afoot in BC?

With a growing concern for food safety, there have been many changes over the past decade in regards to meat processing in the Province. The Meat Enhancement Strategy and the BC Meat Inspection Regulations were implemented and we saw the loss of many of our processing facilities due to increased requirements to upgrade facilities to the new standards.

Currently the slaughter of livestock to produce meat for human consumption is governed by the Meat Inspection Regulation (MIR) and it must be done in a licensed facility. The Meat Processors Association of BC has recently published a helpful brochure that outlines the different types of licenses in BC.

An E license (small scale, direct sales 1-10 animals) and Class D license (small scale, 1-25 animals for retail sales) covers meat to be sold within a restricted geographical region (within the regional district where license is obtained). A Class B license covers slaughter for retail in BC, and a Class A license covers slaughter AND Cut and Wrap for sale in BC. The only exemption from the need for a license is to slaughter for personal use.

Presently we also federally licensed and inspected facilities in British Columbia, and the Meat Inspection Act and Regulations governs these facilities for the licensing of meat for sale out of province or export. However there are changes in the works that will see the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFAI) shifting inspection to a duty of the Province. I haven’t been able to dig up much on those changes yet but it will be a topic to watch for in the fall.

For more information on licensing see the brochure entitled “Producing Livestock for Meat in British Columbia – What Producers Need to Know”. It explains the different types of
slaughter licenses, who can obtain them, what is required, what exemptions exist and who to contact for more information

To access the brochure on-line it is available for download from the BCFPA website: http://bcfpa.ca/story/2011/07/26/producing-livestock-meat-british-columbia-what-producers-need-know

Further information about BC's meat inspection system is available on the Ministry of Health website, http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/protect/meat-regulation/, or from the Health Authority contact person:

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