

AGRICULTURAL SUB-COMMITTEE

REPORT ASC 1– 2007

Minutes of a meeting of the Agricultural Sub-Committee held in Committee Room 4, Regional Municipal Building, Thorold, Ontario on **Tuesday, March 27, 2007** commencing at 7:30 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Committee:

Brian Baty	Regional Councillor, ASC Chair (2006)
Albert Witteveen	Niagara North Federation of Agriculture (President)
Robert Bator	Niagara North Federation of Agriculture
Arden Vaughn	Niagara North Federation of Agriculture
Joe Schonberger	Niagara South Federation of Agriculture, ASC Vice Chair (2006)
Rej Picard	Flowers Canada (Ontario)
Henry Swierenga	Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Carol Pupo	Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs, Vineland Station

Staff:

David Farley	Regional Niagara Planning
Ken Forgeron	Regional Niagara Planning
Drew Semple	Regional Niagara Planning
Pat Busnello	Regional Niagara Planning, Committee Co-ordinator

Regrets:

Cathy Mous	Niagara North Federation of Agriculture
Roger Miller	Niagara South Federation of Agriculture (President)
Barbara Henderson	Regional Councillor (Mayor, Township of Wainfleet)

Councillor Brian Baty passed on Mayor Barbara Henderson’s regrets as she was unable to attend due to a Wainfleet Council meeting. At the request of Robert Bator, a discussion of the recent plight of Concord grape growers was added to the agenda under Other Business.

1. Elections

Councillor Baty opened up nominations for Sub-Committee Chair, which is to be a Federation member this year. Albert Witteveen nominated Joe Schonberger (seconded by Robert Bator) who accepted the nomination and was acclaimed. Joe Schonberger assumed the Chair and opened up nominations for Sub-Committee Vice-Chair. Councillor Baty accepted Arden Vaughn’s nomination (seconded by Rej Picard) and also was acclaimed.

2. Minutes of Meeting ASC 5-2006

Albert Witteveen requested an update on the status of the application to permit an animal sanctuary in Thorold. David Farley noted that a public meeting was held and the Region is awaiting the City's comments before bringing forward a recommendation report. Councillor Baty added that the public meeting was well attended and a number of concerns were raised by the public such as groundwater impact. Joe Schonberger noted that a news article indicated the proposal was not popular with some public meeting attendees.

Moved by Albert Witteveen
Seconded by Rej Picard

That the minutes of Meeting ASC 5-2006 be accepted.

Carried

3. Request for Comments on Regional Policy Plan Amendment 190 Expansion to Sawmill Golf Course – Sawmill Road Town of Pelham

Drew Semple provided a brief overview of this application for a golf practice facility on 16 acres of land next to the existing Sawmill Golf Course. Mr. Semple noted that the application was submitted three years ago but never proceeded as the owners had other priorities. The owners have now provided additional information including a fuller description of the proposal and a planning justification report.

Mr. Semple noted that the timing of the application is significant as it was submitted prior to the Minister's Zoning Order issued prior to the establishment of the Greenbelt. This application is, therefore, not subject to the Greenbelt Plan but is subject to the Provincial Policy Statement and the Regional Policy Plan. The site is within the headwaters of the 15 Mile Creek and is identified as specialty crop land.

In reply to questions regarding assessing and mitigating impacts on 15 Mile Creek, Mr. Semple indicated that the applicants do not propose any grade changes in the area next to the creek. In addition, an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) would not be required if site alteration/development is kept at least 30 metres from the stream. An EIS has not been submitted by the applicants.

With respect to any proposed tree cutting, Mr. Semple noted that the application does not propose to develop any woodlands.

Joe Schonberger asked whether a berm was proposed along Maple Street as the site plan appears to show one and questioned whether a proposed berm would cut off the drainage from the site. Drew Semple noted that drainage from the site is generally to the south and he was not aware of any work that would block off drainage. Mr. Semple added that a drainage plan will be required by the Town.

In response to Mr. Schonberger's question on whether there was a staff report on this application, Mr. Semple indicated that a recommendation report has not yet been prepared. In addition, Mr. Semple advised that the original background report prepared for this application is dated. A copy, however, can be provided if anyone is interested. Mr. Schonberger requested a copy for information.

Mr. Semple briefly highlighted the criteria in the Regional Policy Plan that must be considered in the review of this application and noted that the 1997 Provincial Policy Statement criteria are similar.

4. Request for Comments on Regional Policy Plan Amendment 1-2007 Proposed Walker Landfill Expansion – Taylor Road City of Niagara Falls

Ken Forgeron provided a brief overview of this application by Walker Brothers Quarries Ltd. to permit an expansion to its existing landfill. Mr. Forgeron referred to the Sub-Committee's previous review of the proposed expansion through the Environmental Assessment process (approved in November 2006). Approval under the Environmental Protection Act is also required, which will address detailed operational aspects of the proposed landfill.

Ken Forgeron indicated that an amendment to the Regional Policy Plan is required because the use of the quarry for a landfill is not permitted by the Regional Policy Plan. Mr. Forgeron noted that the City of Niagara Falls recently adopted and passed amendments to its Official Plan and Zoning By-law to allow the landfill.

Mr. Forgeron, referring to the applicant's proposal to rehabilitate the landfill to agriculture once it is filled up, noted that he was not aware of any landfill in Ontario that has been rehabilitated as such. A pilot project examining the potential for growing biofuels (switchgrass) on a former landfill is to be carried out.

Henry Swierenga noted that he is somewhat concerned that the Region is undertaking a waste management review which is still looking at burying waste whereas the Ontario Federation of Agriculture strongly supports incineration. Mr. Swierenga also suggested that growing crops on a rehabilitated landfill is merely "window dressing".

With regard to incineration, Mr. Forgeron indicated that Walker Brothers prepared a report on incineration as part of the Environmental Assessment, which concluded that it was too expensive. Mr. Swierenga added that burying more garbage defeats energy-from-waste possibilities.

In response to a question, Mr. Forgeron advised that the Ecological and Environmental Advisory Committee (EEAC) raised questions during the Environmental Assessment on the proposed landfill design and requested that the Ministry-developed generic liner system be reviewed before approval is given.

Joe Schonberger raised questions regarding the relocation of Mountain Road to which Ken Forgeron indicated that he believes Walker Brothers constructed Taylor Road in return for acquiring the former Mountain Road.

Mr. Schonberger questioned how much of a factor odour is in determining the approval of the landfill. Ken Forgeron noted that odour is a key issue in the Environmental Assessment and added that the existing landfill has a methane collection system.

Albert Witteveen, noting that he belongs to a Citizen Liaison Committee for the Road 12 landfill in West Lincoln, asked whether there is a mechanism in place to involve local landowners. Ken Forgeron noted that Walker Brothers has had a Public Liaison Committee (PLC) in place since the early 1990s, which is ongoing and provides valuable information to Walker Brothers on issues requiring attention. Mr. Forgeron confirmed that the PLC will continue noting that it is a good practice for landfills and quarries and is encouraged by the Ministry of the Environment.

Councillor Baty indicated that it should be noted up to 100,000 tonnes of the proposed expansion is to be reserved for the Region for emergency purposes.

5. Regional Niagara's Response to A Business Case – The Vineland Renaissance Project: Establishment of the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre

David Farley provided a brief summary of Report DPD 31-2007 responding to the Business Case put forth by the Vineland Renaissance Advisory Panel, which the Sub-Committee had the opportunity at the last meeting of a first hand presentation on the Business Case by Jamie Warner, one of the Advisory Panel members). The report was approved by Regional Council, which recommends that a federal contribution to the project be provided in addition to the Business Case's recommendation for a \$25 million Provincial contribution.

The following motion was put forward:

Moved by Albert Witteveen
Seconded by Robert Bator

That the Agricultural Sub-Committee supports the Business Case prepared by the Vineland Renaissance Advisory Panel for the revitalization of the Vineland Station Research Centre as well as Regional Niagara's Response to the Business Case.

Carried

Robert Bator added that he understood the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) would like to make the Vineland Centre a model on which to base changes to other research centres such as Ridgetown.

In reply to a question by Joe Schonberger, Carol Pupo indicated that the Vineland Research Station was run by OMAFRA until 1996 when the Provincial government of the day transferred the operation of Vineland to the University of Guelph. Ms. Pupo added that she has been on the Renaissance project since last April and has been told that she will remain on the project for some time.

(Note: On April 3, 2007, an announcement was made at the Vineland Research Station that the federal and provincial governments are providing contributions towards the Vineland Research and Innovations Centre. Ontario is providing \$12.5 million and Canada is making a financial and in-kind commitment valued at \$15.5 million over the next five years towards research projects that support the mission of the new Centre. A copy of the News Release is attached).

6. Appointment to the Tree and Forest Conservation By-law Advisory Committee (Referred from Meeting ASC 5-2006)

Albert Witteveen noted that he continues to represent the Agricultural Sub-Committee on the Tree and Forest By-law Advisory Committee. Joe Schonberger indicated that he would bring this matter up with the Niagara South Federation Board. Mr. Schonberger suggested the possibility that if someone else from Niagara South takes over his role on the Advisory Committee on behalf of Niagara South it could free him up to represent the Sub-Committee. Mr. Schonberger noted, however, that the Niagara South Board specifically wanted him to represent Niagara South on the Advisory Committee.

Rej Picard noted that tree cutting is generally not an issue the greenhouse industry deals with and, as such, he has no particular expertise but he offered his service if the Sub-Committee is unsuccessful in obtaining a second farmer representative. David Farley noted that this matter can be considered at the next meeting.

7. Correspondence/News Items

These items were received for information.

8. Other Business

With regard to the recent announcement by Cadbury Schweppes to close the St. Catharines Concord grape processing plant, Robert Bator advised that Cadbury is honouring grower contracts to the end of this year. Growers have been told that they will be paid \$75/tonne to buy out their contracts or alternatively the grapes would be taken to the United States to process. Some growers will probably take the buyout and leave the grapes on the vine.

Mr. Bator indicated that some growers may be able to replant to vinifera grapes if they are in the right climatic area. There, however, needs to be a replant program available due to the high costs of replanting otherwise vineyards will remain abandoned. While the Province has indicated that it will fund its share of a replant program, there is a need for the Federal government to also provide funding. The Federal government, however, is reluctant to provide fund programs that are not universal.

Mr. Bator stated that if vineyards are left abandoned, the fruit will rot and attract pests, which will impact nearby vinifera vines. Mr. Bator noted that the cost just to remove the vines, posts and wires is \$1,000/acre and that farmers do not have the funds available. The government should, therefore, at the least provide funding to remove the vines and clean up the fields to allow the planting of field crops. Mr. Bator added that in the past farmers had the ability to sever a residential lot from the farm (i.e. farm retirement lot or infill lot) and sell it to generate capital but this is no longer possible under the Greenbelt

legislation (or the Provincial Policy Statement as well). Mr. Bator suggested that the Region could ask the Province for an exemption from the prohibition on the creation of residential lots in the agricultural area. The Sub-Committee, however, understood that an exemption would not be possible and did not pursue discussion on this.

Rej Picard asked if there was any possibility of redrawing the Greenbelt boundaries above the escarpment in order to exclude lands that are unsuitable for the growing of vinifera grapes. It was noted that the need for revisions to the Greenbelt Plan would be determined through the 10 year review of the Plan. Staff, however, suggested that changes to the boundaries would be very difficult as the total land area within the Greenbelt Plan is fixed and, therefore, a reduction in one location would have to be balanced by adding lands to the Greenbelt elsewhere.

David Farley suggested that getting more processors to use grapes as a base in other products would assist growers noting that Concord grapes are listed as an ingredient in other juices and products. Robert Bator noted, however, that growers are unable to get a price that makes it worthwhile to grow ConCORDS.

Albert Witteveen noted that it will be difficult to find a solution to this problem and agreed that the issue will become what to do with abandoned orchards. Henry Swierenga added that the Abandoned Orchards Act, which is complaint driven, would come into play. *(Note: The Abandoned Orchards Act was repealed effective March 1, 1997. No reference was available with regard to any replacement legislation).*

Henry Swierenga suggested the possibility of a letter from the Sub-Committee requesting that the Province take care of abandoned vineyards. Joe Schonberger pointed out the other challenge facing the industry is how to get a processor for Concord grapes.

Following up on Mr. Swierenga's suggestion, Robert Bator put forward a motion on sending a letter to the Province requesting that action be taken on abandoned vineyards. Arden Vaughn did not agree with the need for such a request at this time noting that vineyards have not yet been abandoned and it is not a crisis situation yet.

In response, Robert Bator put forth an amended resolution as follows:

Moved by Robert Bator
Seconded by Rej Picard

That the Agricultural Sub-Committee prepare a letter to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs requesting support for grape growers in their replanting efforts/request for a replant program.

Carried

David Farley indicated that a draft letter will be prepared and presented to the Sub-Committee at its next meeting for review and discussion.

9. 2007 Meeting Dates

The following dates were provided for the 2007 Sub-Committee meeting schedule: May 29, July 24 and September 4. In addition, November 6 is a possible date for the final meeting of the year.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Pat Busnello, MCIP, RPP
Sub-Committee Co-ordinator