

AGRICULTURAL SUB-COMMITTEE

REPORT ASC 1– 2008

Minutes of a meeting of the Agricultural Sub-Committee held in Committee Room 4, Regional Municipal Building, Thorold, Ontario on **Monday, March 31, 2008** commencing at 7:30 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Committee:

Robert Bator	Niagara North Federation of Agriculture, ASC Vice Chair
Brian Baty	Regional Councillor, ASC Chair
Joe Schonberger	Niagara South Federation of Agriculture
Cathy Mous	Niagara North Federation of Agriculture
Arden Vaughn	Niagara North Federation of Agriculture
Rej Picard	Flowers Canada (Ontario)
Henry Swierenga	Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Tom Wiley	Niagara Peninsula Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association

Staff:

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

Regrets:

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

Guests:

Austin Kirkby	Niagara-on-the-Lake Irrigation Committee
Len Troup	Ontario Tender Fruit Producers Marketing Board

1. Elections

Following a brief summary of the role of the Agricultural Sub-Committee, Dave Farley requested nominations for Sub-Committee Chair, which is to be a Regional Councillor this year. Councillor Brian Baty accepted Robert Bator's nomination (seconded by Arden Vaughn) and was acclaimed as Chair. Councillor Baty assumed the Chair and opened up nominations for Sub-Committee Vice-Chair. Rej Picard nominated Robert Bator and Mr. Bator subsequently nominated Mr. Picard. Mr. Picard declined the nomination. As a result, the initial nomination was seconded by Ms. Vaughn and Mr. Bator accepted the nomination and was acclaimed.

2. Minutes of Meeting ASC 3-2007

Austin Kirkby provided some clarification on the costs of the studies required for the Niagara-on-the-Lake irrigation channels in order to obtain permits to take water from both channels. Ms. Kirkby noted that the first study would cost \$77,000 and it appeared that the second study required by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) would cost over \$200,000. The Irrigation Committee met with the NPCA last week, which agreed to only require an engineer's stamp. The Irrigation Committee has spent \$20,000 for a preliminary study.

Robert Bator noted that as the agricultural representative on the Source Water Protection Committee he has met with agricultural representatives in other jurisdictions who have indicated that Conservation Authorities in their areas have a positive working relationship with agricultural groups. Mr. Bator stated that he does not feel that there is the same positive relationship in Niagara and that farmers desire to have good cooperation and communication with the NPCA.

Councillor Baty indicated that the NPCA Board of Director's has had discussions on this matter and noted that the new CAO is open to maintaining good communications with agriculture. Joe Schonberger added that Niagara South recently met with NPCA staff and he indicated that the meeting was positive.

Moved by Joe Schonberger
Seconded by Arden Vaughn

That the minutes of Meeting ASC 3-2007 be accepted as presented.

Carried

3. Phase 2 Raw Water for Agricultural Irrigation Study: Summary of Major Conclusions and Next Steps (Report DPD 5-2008) and Further Information (PD 4-2008)

Drew Semple indicated that Report DPD 5-2008 provided a summary of the major conclusions of the Stantec study, which was completed in December 2007. Subsequently, Mr. Semple noted that he has made presentations to the Niagara Peninsula Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and the Regional Chair's Agricultural Task Force. The report was initially deferred at the request of the Lord Mayor, Niagara-on-the-Lake to allow discussions with the Town's Irrigation Committee. The additional information presented as PD 4-2008 summarized staff's meeting with the Irrigation Committee. Mr. Semple indicated that subsequently the first two recommendations of the Report have been approved while Recommendation 3 been deferred.

Mr. Semple briefly summarized the study recommendations, implementation costs, economic benefits to growers, conclusions and phasing.

Robert Bator indicated that N-o-t-L's system is very efficient as it returns more water to the lake than assumed under the Great Lakes Charter (i.e. 20% of water taken). Austin

Kirkby added that 86% of the water taken last year for their irrigation system was returned based on a study by Stantec. Ms. Kirkby also noted that the Town will be proceeding with a \$3 million expansion and will be seeking funding on that basis.

Drew Semple acknowledged the efficiency of the N-o-t-L system but noted that unfortunately an open channel system is not feasible in the west part of the Region due to geographical limitations. Mr. Semple also pointed to an advantage of a piped system, which is the ability to control the amount of water taken to only the amount of water that is needed.

Henry Swierenga asked if staff has any information on the availability of funding. Drew Semple advised that there have been discussions at the staff level regarding funding and added that Len Troup has been working on this since the inception of the study. Mr. Swierenga also asked whether a piped system would be affected by the federal Fisheries Act to which Dave Farley noted that water would not be taken from streams but there may be a need for stream crossings.

Len Troup indicated that he has been involved in promoting the need for irrigation water for approximately five years noting that he does not favour one particular system as the goal is to obtain water for agriculture. Mr. Troup noted that he is confident that this can be achieved but there is a need to sell it politically, which will determine whether an irrigation system moves ahead. Mr. Troup added that Niagara is the only major agricultural area without an irrigation system.

Mr. Troup emphasized the need to obtain irrigation water to sustain agriculture, pointing to recent difficulties facing agriculture such as the collapse of the juice grape industry and the closing of CanGro resulting in fruit trees being bulldozed. Mr. Troup suggested that the senior levels of government are ready to assist with the irrigation system noting that the Federal government recently provided support for an irrigation system in Manitoba. He also noted that the timing is right for assistance from the Province and, therefore, indicated that the Region needs to proceed with a formal request for funding. Mr. Troup added that the request should be for the whole project (i.e. for the entire length of the water main as the first stage) since his opinion is that a big project will be an easier sell than smaller projects.

Robert Bator felt that N-o-t-L should maintain its open channel system, which could then be studied and compared with other systems.

Drew Semple indicated that he is convinced this project is essential to the agricultural industry and noted that it is now a matter of how we move it forward. Tom Wiley referenced a study undertaken at Brock University (Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute) which also concluded that irrigation is essential.

Councillor Baty suggested that the Sub-Committee put forward a motion on this matter to which the following motion was presented:

Moved by Robert Bator
Seconded by Joe Schonberger

That the Agricultural Sub-Committee recommends that the Region of Niagara move forward and request funding from senior government levels for a communal irrigation system as recommended in the Phase 2 Raw Water for Agricultural Irrigation Study.

Carried

In summing up the importance of irrigation, which is essential in order to grow fruit that meets today's standards, Len Troup indicated that his loss due to the lack of water was significant and therefore, costs to connect to an irrigation system would be minor in comparison.

4. Discussion on CanGro Foods Plant Sale/Closure Announcement

Dave Farley noted that Lord Mayor Gary Burroughs and others have been working diligently at trying to keep the CanGro Foods plant from closing.

Len Troup stated that it is very likely that the plant will close noting that today (March 31) was the deadline for a buyer to come forward. Mr. Troup, who indicated that he is not involved with the Lord Mayor in looking for buyers or other options, noted that all of the proposals put forward to purchase the plant involve a substantial amount of public money and felt that the Provincial government is reluctant to get involved as it would be a precedent for other requests. Mr. Troup also noted that a co-op model would not work as similar difficulties would continue thereby resulting in financial liabilities for the member farms.

Mr. Troup suggested that if the plant closure is inevitable it should be left to happen noting that nothing should be done out of desperation. Mr. Troup indicated that growers have a realistic attitude and that if the plant closes they will move on and work at making their farms viable such as working at increasing the fresh market.

Austin Kirkby was in agreement with Mr. Troup and indicated that many other farmers are as well noting that the plant has been operating at a loss for seven years and that they need to be realistic.

In response to Robert Bator's question on what has happened with Donald Ziraldo's proposal to promote a Niagara label, Len Troup indicated that this proposal is still on the table. Mr. Troup added that farmers have been suggesting this for many years now. Mr. Troup also noted that while buying local is a good thing he was not optimistic that this would be enough to save the industry.

Robert Bator pointed to the problem with Canada's labeling law which allows the labeling of imported produce as Product of Canada such as in canned fruit as long as it is processed in Canada. Len Troup advised that there will be a change to this soon as the Federal government will be following the "political wind" whereby consumers are now demanding local produce.

5. Correspondence/News Items for Information

Henry Swierenga, in commenting on the news articles on road salt, stated that Niagara is leading the pack in reducing the use of road salt.

6. Other Business

(i) Regional Chair's Agricultural Task Force

Arden Vaughn asked whether there is any information available on the Region's website with regard to the Agricultural Task Force such as the membership, the Task Force Report, and minutes. Dave Farley indicated that staff would look into this.

(ii) Zoning/Designation of Municipal/Irrigation Drains

Austin Kirkby noted that N-o-t-L's Zoning By-law Update proposes a requirement for an Environmental Impact Study within 120 metres of drainage features and was concerned about costs for landowners to protect these features.

Robert Bator noted that irrigation drains were shown on the final Greenbelt Natural Heritage System Map as part of the Natural Heritage System but were not initially included on the draft map. Mr. Bator expressed concerns about NPCA permit fees and indicated that the N-o-t-L Agricultural Sub-Committee is looking into having the Levine Drain removed from the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System. Mr. Bator suggested that this Sub-Committee adopt a motion recommending that the Region support the N-o-t-L Sub-Committee in this regard.

Austin Kirkby suggested that the motion should also include support for removing/correcting other inaccuracies on the Natural Heritage System Map.

Councillor Baty asked whether this issue affects other municipalities to which Henry Swierenga indicated that it affects all municipal drains.

Dave Farley suggested that Don Campbell be invited to attend the next Sub-Committee meeting for a discussion on this issue.

(iii) 911 Street Addressing

Arden Vaughn asked for an update on her earlier question as to why St. Catharines does not have 911 street addressing. David Farley advised that he talked to EMS staff who understood that it was up to each municipality to decide on implementing the 911 numbering system. Mr. Farley also contacted the St. Catharines Fire Chief who confirmed that it was up to the municipality and, as such, St. Catharines opted against implementing the 911 numbering system.

Ms. Vaughn put the following motion forward:

Moved by Arden Vaughn
Seconded by Robert Bator

That the Agricultural Sub-Committee recommends that the Region look into the necessary procedures for requesting implementation of 911 street addressing system by a municipality.

Carried

(iv) Growing the Greenbelt Draft Criteria

In response to Joe Schonberger's inquiry, Dave Farley informed the Sub-Committee that Planning staff will be preparing a report on the draft criteria. Henry Swierenga questioned whether any Niagara municipalities have asked to be included in the Greenbelt to which Mr. Farley indicated that he was not aware of any.

(v) Tree and Forest By-law Delegation Update

Joe Schonberger requested an update on the delegation of the Tree and Forest By-law administration to the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. Dave Farley indicated that a report on amendments to the By-law will be presented at the next Planning and Public Works Committee meeting of April 2, 2008. Mr. Schonberger indicated that he only received a copy of the report this morning and was concerned with the lateness as members of the Tree By-law Advisory Committee were assured that they would be kept informed.

In response to Mr. Schonberger's question on whether there is a statutory requirement for a Public Meeting with regard to the proposed By-law changes, Mr. Farley indicated that he was not aware if there is a requirement and would look into it.

Mr. Schonberger noted that the NPCA has reported that they will require over \$200,000 in additional funding in order to carry out the Tree By-law responsibilities and questioned whether the Region was willing to fund this annually given that funding was initially an issue when the Region delegated the authority to the NPCA. Mr. Schonberger also pointed out that the NPCA does not feel that the permit system is necessary and encouraged the Region to ensure that the permit system is continued.

(vi) Rural Mailboxes

Austin Kirkby indicated that she understood Canada Post is looking at terminating delivery service to rural mailboxes and wondered whether the Agricultural Sub-Committee would get involved with this type of issue. Arden Vaughn responded that Canada Post has already undertaken this in St. Catharines noting that it is considered on a property by property basis whereby delivery would continue if the delivery vehicle can safely pull off the roadway.

7. 2008 Possible Meeting Dates

There were no comments on the tentative future meeting dates of May 20, August 26 and November 4.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Pat Busnello, MCIP, RPP
Sub-Committee Coordinator

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