1. Elections

Councillor Brian Baty, past Chair of the Agricultural Sub-Committee (ASC), requested nominations for ASC Chair for 2009. Following the practice of the ASC to rotate the Chair between the Regional Councillors and the Niagara North and South Federations, the 2009 Chair is to be a Federation member this year. Robert Bator accepted Arden Vaughan’s nomination (seconded by Albert Witteveen) and was acclaimed as Chair. Robert Bator assumed the Chair and opened up nominations for ASC Vice-Chair. Councillor Barbara Henderson accepted Arden Vaughan’s nomination (seconded by Brian Baty) and was acclaimed as Vice-Chair.

Robert Bator thanked and commended Councillor Baty on his work as ASC Chair the past year. Mr. Bator also informed the Sub-Committee that Regional Chair Peter Partington in a recent discussion commended the ASC for its work noting that the ASC’s recommendations are well thought-out.

Mr. Bator asked if there was any other business to be added to the agenda. Joe Schonberger indicated that he would like to present an update on the Tree By-law Advisory Committee. Councillor Baty suggested that this can be presented under Item 6 on the agenda on the NPCA Forest By-law.
2. Minutes of Meeting ASC 4-2008

As there was no discussion on or corrections to the minutes, the following motion was put forward:

Moved by Joe Schonberger
Seconded by Brian Baty

That the minutes of Meeting ASC 4-2008 be accepted as presented.

Carried


Drew Semple, Senior Planner, Integrated Community Planning (ICP), noted that the proposed Wine Country Policies are different than typical Regional Plan policies. The proposed Amendment has been circulated to a variety of agencies and comments have been received from the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Niagara Parks Commission. A final recommendation report will be presented to the Integrated Community Planning and Public Works (ICPPW) Committee once all comments are received.

Mr. Semple provided some background on the proposed Amendment noting that the Niagara Economic Development Corporation (NEDC) approached ICP to assist with implementing NEDC’s “Energizing Niagara's Wine Country Communities” study. ICP agreed that some components of the study had value as policy in the Regional Policy Plan.

Mr. Semple identified a number of concerns that have been raised with the Amendment. Niagara-on-the-Lake has indicated that its agricultural community has noted a concern that the Region is promoting bicycle lanes on the Wine Route throughout the agricultural area. Mr. Semple agreed that the wording in this regard is vague but that was not the intention. The policy in question is meant to encourage municipalities to provide bike lanes on routes identified on the Region’s Bicycle Network. Mr. Semple also indicated that engineering staff for Niagara-on-the-Lake and Lincoln raised concerns that the policies would lead to additional engineering costs to provide trees and bike lanes. In response, Mr. Semple indicated that he is meeting with Niagara-on-the-Lake and Lincoln’s engineers to clarify this matter noting that the enhancements referred to in the Amendment are meant to deal with routes in urban areas.

Robert Bator noted that John Kirkby from Niagara-on-the-Lake had contacted him regarding the proposed policies to which Drew Semple added that John and Austin Kirkby have provided some suggestions for policies.

In reply to Henry Swierenga’s request for clarification regarding the intent of the policies with respect to trails and bike lanes in the agricultural area, Mr. Semple noted that the Region does not provide trails and reiterated that the policies encourage bike lanes only on routes identified on the Regional Bicycle Network.

Mr. Semple invited individual comments from ASC members within the next two to three weeks noting that he hopes to present a report to the ICPPW Committee in May. In response to Henry Swierenga’s question on whether the proposed policies are restricted to the wine area or have broader application, Mr. Semple noted that although the study focused on the wine country the proposed policies go beyond the wine regions and are applicable to any municipality. Also, Mr.
Semple indicated that he saw an opportunity to integrate this with other initiatives such as the Local Food Network.

4. Value-Added Agricultural Study: Update

Drew Semple provided a verbal update on the status of this study noting that this work arose out of the Agricultural Task Force’s Action Plan, which identified the provision for value-added activities as a priority. Mr. Semple noted that Planscape was commissioned to undertake the study and outlined the composition of the Study Working Group. Mr. Semple also noted that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs is looking to Niagara for direction on value-added uses as part of its review of the Provincial Policy Statement. Mr. Semple noted that the Regional Policy Plan already has policies regarding value-added uses and the objective of the study is to provide further policy direction.

Mr. Semple indicated that the Province in recent comments raised some concerns and is looking for more clarity on what is meant by agriculture-related uses, secondary uses, and value-added uses. Mr. Semple added that the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs has indicated that it will take the lead and provide comments on behalf of the Province instead of Municipal Affairs and Housing as is the normal process, which highlights the Province’s interest in this study.

Mr. Semple passed out copies of the draft study to the ASC for review and noted that he is looking towards holding a workshop sometime in April (possibly the 28th). Mr. Semple also noted that another meeting of the Working Group is scheduled in April and encouraged the Sub-Committee to provide comments before then.

In response to questions raised by Henry Swierenga, Drew Semple indicated that the timing for the completion of the Province’s review of the Provincial Policy Statement is two years. Also, Mr. Semple noted that while the Province has not raised the issue of value-retention, Margaret Walton of Planscape has indicated that she would like to explore this concept further.

In response to Robert Bator’s request for clarification of value retention versus value-added, Drew Semple provided an example noting that storing and packing fruit (value retention) are integral to an agricultural operation and should be distinguished from value-added activities.

Responding to Councillor Baty’s question on whether the ASC wished to put foreword a motion to support or oppose the study, Albert Witteveen stated that he has no problem supporting the study as long as it addresses all of the relevant criteria/issues. Accordingly, the following motion was put forward:

Moved by Albert Witteveen  
Seconded by Arden Vaughan

That the Agricultural Sub-Committee is generally supportive of the proposed Value-Added Agricultural Study.

Carried

5. Request for Comments on Proposed Regional Policy Plan Amendment 1-2008 Pleasantview Memorial Gardens Expansion/Reception Centre, City of Thorold

Pat Busnello provided an overview of this application and supporting studies submitted, applicable Provincial and Regional policies to be considered, and comments received to date
noting that the Province and the City have not yet provided their comments. Mr. Busnello noted that the proposed reception centre building and laneway would impact a significant woodland within the southeast corner of the expansion area, which was partly overlooked by the Environmental Impact Study. As a result of recent discussions, the applicant is receptive to modifying the proposed development by relocating the laneway outside of the woodlot and minimizing encroachment of the reception centre into the woodlot. The Sub-Committee did not raise any concerns and was generally supportive of the proposed Amendment.

6. NPCA Forest By-law Book

Councillor Brian Baty distributed copies of the NPCA’s book on the Niagara Region Tree and Forest Conservation By-law and noted that with the delegation of By-law administration/enforcement to the Authority the NPCA Board now receives monthly reports on forest activities. Councillor Baty added that the initial budget to assume this function did not include funds for a Forestry Technician.

Joe Schonberger indicated that the NPCA has hired a Registered Professional Forester and a Forestry Technician, who are both affable people, which is important because of their contact with the agricultural community, and are more directly involved than Regional staff were because they are more knowledgeable (i.e. given their training) and also have more time available. Mr. Schonberger added that they have laid three charges under the By-law suggesting that perhaps they are more willing to lay charges.

In regard to the Tree and Forest Conservation By-law Advisory Committee (BAC), Mr. Schonberger indicated that in the past the Region placed a good deal of trust and responsibility on the BAC, which included having discussions on By-law contraventions. Mr. Schonberger stated that the BAC gets along well on a personal level with NPCA staff but commented that the BAC is not involved in doing much adding that the NPCA staff has been reluctant to share too much information. The BAC is provided regular status reports but has been told that it will not be given any information that is not public. Mr. Schonberger noted that the BAC’s role is quite limited but noted it is a work in progress and added that the NPCA’s website is quite improved as is the Region’s as it is easier to access meeting minutes.

In response to a question from Robert Bator on how the NPCA’s Tree By-law Officers carry out their enforcement responsibilities, Joe Schonberger indicated that the Officers act on complaints received from the public as well as drive around the Region to observe tree cutting activities. Councillor Baty added that the NPCA has the ability to provide “24/7” enforcement.

Robert Bator also asked whether the application process for tree cutting results in delays when someone wishes to undertake cutting activities to which Joe Schonberger indicated that the NPCA does go out on-site to check when a Forest Management Plan or Prescription is submitted.

On a somewhat related matter, Councillor Baty noted that as part of the NPCA’s 50th anniversary, the NPCA has created a competition called the “Simply Treemendous Challenge” with a goal of having 50,000 native trees planted over the next two years.

7. Correspondence/News Items for Information

Robert Bator commented on a news article on blended wines selected as the official wines of the Vancouver Winter Olympics and stated that some Niagara wines should have been chosen since the Olympics are to be held in Canada.
There was no discussion on the remaining correspondence/news articles, which were accepted as circulated.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Pat Busnello, MCIP, RPP
Sub-Committee Coordinator