



STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE

DATE OF REPORT November 22, 2023
MEETING TYPE & DATE Electoral Area Services Committee of December 6, 2023
FROM: Planning – Strategic Initiatives
Land Use Services Department
SUBJECT: Agricultural Policy and Planning
FILE: 3900-30 4373

PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this report are to provide:

1. A summary of public input on the report *Agricultural Policy and Regulations Best Practices for the Cowichan Valley Regional District* (the Report) by Upland Agricultural Consulting.
2. The *Regional Agriculture Meeting Summary Report* (the Summary Report), a summary of the regional agriculture stakeholder meeting held September 26, 2023.
3. Options for next steps in regional agriculture planning.

RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION

For direction.

BACKGROUND

Protection of our food system is vital for the sustainability of the Cowichan Valley. More specifically, our agricultural lands and productive soils are a defining feature of the Cowichan Valley's ambience and beauty; its associated industries form an important sector of our local economy.

Official community plans and agriculture plans can establish clear priorities for strengthening local food and agricultural systems beyond farmland protection to include the full spectrum of production, processing, storage, distribution, consumption and nutrient cycling/composting.

Upland Agricultural Consulting provided professional agrologist services to review draft agricultural policies and regulations for the CVRD within the context of the planning process associated with the Official Community Plan for the Electoral Areas (OCP) and Modernized Zoning Bylaw (MZB). The analysis required applying a lens of consistency with updated Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) regulations and other pertinent agricultural policies, guidelines and best practices. The analysis did uncover important areas for revision and further alignment with provincial policies and regulations.

[*Agricultural Policy and Regulations Best Practices for the Cowichan Valley Regional District*](#) (the Report) was presented to the EASC on April 19, 2023.

Following the Report's presentation, the Board resolved (April 26, 2023, resolution 23-189.9):

"That the recommendations of the Agricultural Policy and Regulations Best Practices for the CVRD report be incorporated in electoral area bylaw development for CVRD Official Community Plan for the Electoral Areas Bylaw No. 4373 and Comprehensive Land Use Bylaw No. 4374.

That the Agricultural Policy and Regulations Best Practices for the CVRD report be posted on planyourcowichan.ca with a 90-day opportunity for the public to submit ideas on agricultural policy implementation."

Also, at the April 26, 2023, meeting, the Board resolved (resolution 23-185):

"That staff investigate the possibility of development of a Regional Agricultural Plan and a Regional Agricultural Committee and report back to the Electoral Area Services Committee."

Subsequently, the Report was posted on the CVRD's public engagement platform PlanYourCowichan.ca. Comment opportunity was open from April 26 to July 12, 2023. In addition to individual feedback, a self-organized farmers group met and provided collective feedback.

On September 26, 2023, the CVRD held a meeting for agriculture stakeholders to share ideas on how the CVRD can best support agriculture. More than 90 farmers and agricultural stakeholders attended, in addition to staff and elected officials from the CVRD's electoral areas and the Municipality of North Cowichan.

The meeting was facilitated by Ione Smith, Upland Agricultural Consulting, and it was chaired by Ben Maartman, Electoral Area H – North Oyster/Diamond Director.

The event included three presenters:

- Nicole Mak and Sarah Clements, Agricultural Land Commission
- Reed Bailey, Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- Ione Smith, Upland Agricultural Consulting

The presentations provided clarity on key issues such as housing within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), the effects of subdivision of farmland, and examples of best practices from other local governments that are undertaking initiatives to support the agricultural sector.

This staff report provides:

1. *Agricultural Policy and Regulations Best Practices for the Cowichan Valley Regional District*

Summary of public input received through the Plan Your Cowichan comment portal between April 26 and July 17, 2023, on the Report by Upland Consulting and comments received from a self-organized group of 64 working farmers from the electoral areas.

The summary focuses on comments pertaining to OCP policy (see Attachment A).

2. Regional Agriculture Meeting Summary Report

A *Regional Agriculture Meeting Summary Report*, a summary of the regional agriculture stakeholder meeting held September 26, 2023. The Summary Report will be presented to the Electoral Areas Services Committee (EASC) by the author and meeting facilitator Ione Smith, Upland Agriculture Consulting (December 6, 2023) and it is attached to this staff report as Attachment B.

3. Options for Next Steps

Options for next steps in regional agriculture policy and planning for Board direction.

Agricultural Policy and Regulations Best Practices for the CVRD – Summary of Public Input

Approximately 25 responses were received during the public comment period of April 26 to July 17, 2023, in addition to 64 people who attended the self organized farmers meeting. The public input received pertained to OCP policy, zoning regulations, building, enforcement and administrative process. Comments and analysis pertaining to OCP policy are within this staff report.

The draft OCP for the Electoral Areas policies already addresses the majority of public comments/questions received. The exception is the addition of one policy to the Strengthen Local Food and Agriculture policy chapter: *Establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee. (AAC)*

Note that the policy recommendations from Upland Consulting's *Agricultural Policy and Regulations Best Practices for the CVRD* have already been reviewed and incorporated into the draft OCP.

The Ideas Book has been updated with input received on agricultural policy. The Fall 2023 updated Ideas Book is posted on PlanYourCowichan.ca.

Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw

The majority of the public comments received pertain to regulations (allowance for secondary dwellings, setbacks, etc.) applicable to zoning, as well as bylaw enforcement. The comments have been provided to Community Planning Division for the development of the comprehensive zoning bylaw.

Regional Agriculture Meeting Summary Report

Based on the outcomes of the regional agriculture meeting September 26, 2023, the following three recommendations are put forth:

1. Continue to provide opportunities for the agricultural community to meet with provincial and local government representatives.
2. Re-instate the CVRD's Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC).
3. Review and update the CVRD's 2009 Agricultural Plan in alignment with the Municipality of North Cowichan as it updates its Agricultural Plan.

CVRD Agriculture Designation and Agricultural Land Reserve Profile Maps are located here:

planyourcowichan.ca/agricultural-policy

Regional Planning Service

On February 22, 2023, the Board resolved:

“That a letter be sent to municipal councils inviting input on the potential establishment of a regional planning service.”

A letter was sent to councils for the City of Duncan, Town of Ladysmith, Town of Lake Cowichan and Municipality of North Cowichan on April 28, 2023.

All municipal councils have provided resolutions for Board consideration (see [Report to Committee of the Whole, November 8, 2023](#)).

At the time of writing this staff report November 22, 2023, there is not Board direction to establish a regional planning service.

ANALYSIS

The following options correspond with the recommendations in the Regional Agricultural Meeting Summary Report. All of these options have various costs which are not budgeted for in 2024.

Option 1 – Agricultural stakeholder meetings

The Board could direct staff to convene other community meetings on various agriculture specific topics, particularly as provincial regulations change, including those from the Agricultural Land Commission. CVRD staff suggest that an AAC could play a role in identifying relevant issues that would benefit from opportunities for the agricultural community to meet with provincial and local government representatives.

Option 2 - Re-instate the CVRD's AAC.

The Board could advance this recommendation with an updated term of reference from the previous AAC, which was discontinued several years ago. The initial terms of reference for a period of one year could include reviewing the Summary Report recommendations, reviewing the 2009 Agricultural Plan recommendations, and developing a coordinated action plan between the electoral areas and respective municipalities on agriculture initiatives. Recommendations would be provided to the Board at term.

Some of the 2009 Agricultural Plan objectives and recommendations remain relevant, while others are now outdated. The plan could be re-developed using a local government implementation lens, such that the recommended actions reflect the needs of the agricultural community but focus specifically on actions that are within local government's jurisdiction and capacity.

Option 3 - Update the CVRD Agricultural Plan.

There is an opportunity to align this work with the Municipality of North Cowichan and its new initiative to update its Agricultural Plan. The CVRD could work with Municipality of North Cowichan on complementary agricultural plan development and, when appropriate, host joint meetings with AACs from both the CVRD and the Municipality of North Cowichan (should they each establish AACs). The Municipality of North Cowichan adopted Terms of Reference for an Agricultural Advisory Committee November 1, 2023.

Embarking upon these plans in a coordinated fashion may create efficiencies to ensure the plans are harmonized and complementary while also attending to specific local issues and concerns.

Discussion

While options are presented, staff are requesting direction for potential policy initiation in 2025 due to work program and budget constraints. In addition, the Board may consider establishing a regional planning service, which is where this policy work would best be situated.

Recommendation

Consider the options presented in this report, concurrent with discussion on establishment of a regional planning service, for potential implementation in 2025.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Budget 250 (Electoral Area Services) covered the costs of the meeting, including facilitation, report writing, meeting costs and advertising. The meeting costs were within the anticipated budget of \$7,500.

COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS

Attachments are posted on PlanYourCowichan.ca.

The September 26, 2023, Cobble Hill Farmers Institute meeting was advertised in the *Cowichan Valley Voice*, the *Cowichan Valley Citizen*, on social media (Facebook, X and Instagram), through known agricultural organizations and networks via email, and through the PlanYourCowichan.ca distribution list.

STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

The current CVRD Strategic Plan (2020-2022) Action 1.5 is *Develop through collaboration with First Nations and Municipalities a Regional Strategy on Food Security*.

OCP complementary policy includes FA.35 *Identify the need for local agricultural strategies and work collaboratively across the region to update the 2001 Regional Agricultural Plan and 2013 Implementation Plan and update/align with the 2010 Cowichan Food Security Plan*.

The Economic Development Strategic Plan (2018-2022) identifies action 2.2: Act on Board recommendations to establish an Agriculture Select Committee for the CVRD.

Referred to (upon completion):

- ☐ Community Services (*Cowichan Community Centre, Cowichan Lake Recreation, South Cowichan Recreation, Arts & Culture, Facilities & Transit*)
- ☐ Corporate Services (*Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legislative Services*)
- ☐ Operations (*Utilities, Parks & Trails, Recycling & Waste Management*)
- ☒ Land Use Services (*Community Planning, Strategic Initiatives, Development Services, Building Inspection & Bylaw Enforcement*)
- ☐ Strategic Services (*Communications & Engagement, Economic Development, Emergency Management, Environmental Services*)

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Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Committee:

Resolution:

☒ Corporate Officer

Financial Considerations:

☒ Chief Financial Officer

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Summary of Public Input – Policy

Attachment B – Regional Agriculture Meeting Summary Report (October 23, 2023) Upland
Agriculture Consulting