



MEMORANDUM

TO: Jeremy Holm
Manager, Current Planning

DATE: September 27, 2012

FROM: Lainya Rowett
Senior Planner

FILE: 0360 20 AAC

SUBJECT: **Agricultural Area Plan – Completion of Final Draft**

PURPOSE

To present the final draft of the RDN Agricultural Area Plan (AAP) to the Committee of the Whole and receive the Committee's recommendations to the Board regarding adoption and implementation of the Plan.

BACKGROUND

The Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Agricultural Area Plan (AAP) project began in July 2011 and included a fourteen-month research and community engagement process guided by the AAP Steering Committee (RDN Agricultural Advisory Committee), staff, and the project consultant (Upland Consulting). Although project activities did not formally start until 2011, a grassroots movement to address agriculture-related issues first emerged in 2007 and 2008 through Board delegations and community concerns raised during the Regional Growth Strategy and Official Community Plan reviews (see Attachment 1 for a detailed timeline of the project).

The draft AAP goals and recommendations were reviewed extensively by the Steering Committee, staff, external agencies, provincial ministries, the BC Agricultural Land Commission, and many community stakeholders and citizens (residents, food producers, farmers, educators, retailers, grocers, etc.). The AAP process successfully increased public awareness of agriculture and aquaculture in the region, and was met with broad community support and an interest to see the Plan implemented and more food grown locally.

In July 2012, the Committee of the Whole received the AAP survey results and proposed revisions to the Plan endorsed by the Steering Committee at its meeting June 22, 2012. These revisions were incorporated into the Plan and the final AAP was presented to the Committee of the Whole on September 11, 2012. Upon receiving the Plan and staff report, the Committee passed the following resolution:

That the "Growing Our Future Together - Regional District of Nanaimo Agricultural Area Plan" (AAP) dated August 2012 be referred to the October 9, 2012 Committee of the Whole meeting.

As a result, the Plan dated August 2012 (as circulated to the Committee of the Whole September 11, 2012) has been brought back to the Committee with the same recommendations for adoption and implementation. No further changes were made to the Plan dated August 2012 or the staff recommendations.

DISCUSSION

Agricultural Area Plan Objectives & Results

The purpose of conducting an Agricultural Area Plan study for the RDN is summarized in five key objectives:

- Identify issues, trends, constraints and barriers to opportunities for agriculture and aquaculture;
- Establish an inventory of agricultural uses, products and farming practices;
- Articulate a meaningful vision for agriculture, including aquaculture, as a vibrant industry;
- Increase public awareness and understanding of the importance of agriculture and aquaculture as an economic drivers; and
- Work with the agricultural community to develop recommendations and an implementation strategy to support and enhance local agriculture and aquaculture.

The RDN Agricultural Advisory Committee served as the Steering Committee for the AAP providing continuous support and input during the Plan process, from the selection of the project consultant to the review of the AAP goals and recommendations. The Committee included representatives from the local agricultural and aquaculture (shellfish) communities and staff from the BC Ministry of Agriculture.

At its meeting of June 22, 2012, the Steering Committee received the draft AAP along with a summary of survey results and related recommended revisions. The Steering Committee provided recommendations for additional final revisions to the AAP and adopted the following motion:

That the Draft Agricultural Area Plan dated June 15, 2012, as amended be received and forwarded to the Regional Board upon completion of the final revisions with a recommendation that the Board adopt the Plan.

The AAP includes recommendations for action in support of local agriculture and aquaculture in the RDN. The Plan also includes a review of the regional planning framework; a vision statement for agriculture/aquaculture; eight broad goals and objectives to achieve the vision; an implementation strategy and work plan; a monitoring and evaluation plan; and a list of potential funding resources. Collectively, the AAP Public Consultation Summary Report (January 2012), technical Background Report (February 2012), and final Plan comprehensively address the project objectives and provide a framework for taking action towards achieving the eight AAP goals to:

- 1) Protect and Enhance the Agricultural Land Base in the RDN;
- 2) Strengthen the Local Agriculture and Aquaculture Economy;
- 3) Improve Training, Skills, and Labour Opportunities in the RDN;
- 4) Improve Opportunities for On-Farm Water Resource Management;
- 5) Address Environmental Sustainability, Wildlife, and Climate Change Challenges in the RDN;
- 6) Promote Awareness and Value of Local Agriculture and Aquaculture;
- 7) Support Agriculture and Aquaculture in Land Use Regulations and Policies; and
- 8) Consider Agriculture in Emergency Planning Initiatives.

Implementation of AAP

Many of the recommended actions in the AAP require resources that extend beyond the RDN's mandate and jurisdiction. Implementation of the AAP will therefore be a shared responsibility between the RDN and other stakeholders. One approach to implementation, as recommended in the AAP, is to establish an Implementation Steering Committee (see Section 7.1 in Attachment 2, as circulated). Members of this Committee could include:

- Staff and Elected Officials from the RDN and member municipalities;
- Members of the RDN Agricultural Advisory Committee;
- BC Shellfish Growers Association;
- Local chamber of commerce;
- Economic Development Corporation;
- Vancouver Island University;
- VIEX;
- BC Ministry of Agriculture;
- Other representatives, as required.

The Committee would be tasked with several functions: to develop a work plan; identify funding resources; monitor and evaluate progress of implementation; prepare regular reports to the Board; and review/revise the work plan as required. The creation of this committee and its Terms of Reference would require Board approval, as would any recommendations from the Committee to the Board.

The Board could consider other options including implementation overseen by the RDN Agricultural Advisory Committee (the Steering Committee for the AAP) or RDN staff in the absence of an organized committee; or the Board may choose an alternate arrangement for implementation. Each of these options will result in different resource commitments.

The AAP recommends that the first task for implementation would be to develop a three-year work plan to address the "high priority", "short term" recommendations, and that this work plan be developed within the budget year following the AAP adoption. Therefore, the Board's consideration of adoption at this time coincides well with the upcoming 2013 budget review.

The AAP further identifies seven key actions for the work plan, which are "high priority" items to be addressed in the "short term", and in some cases necessary to allow other actions to proceed (see Section 7.2, Table 8 in Attachment 2, 'Growing Our Future Together – Regional District of Nanaimo Agricultural Area Plan' as circulated September 11, 2012). Each recommendation and associated action will require further direction from the Board if the Plan is adopted.

ALTERNATIVES

1. To adopt the "Growing Our Future Together - Regional District of Nanaimo Agricultural Area Plan" (AAP) dated August 2012.
2. To adopt the "Growing Our Future Together - Regional District of Nanaimo Agricultural Area Plan" (AAP) dated August 2012 and to direct staff to develop an Implementation Strategy and Work Plan for the Board's consideration.
3. To provide staff with alternative direction.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If the Agricultural Area Plan is adopted, there will be financial and resource implications for the Board's consideration and prioritization in order to effectively implement the recommended actions of the AAP. It is intended that these resource commitments would be reviewed in conjunction with an approved work plan and would require direction from the Board as they are considered through the adoption of annual budgets along with other competing priorities.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

The RDN Agricultural Area Plan (AAP) has been completed and was presented to the Committee of the Whole on September 11, 2012. The Committee passed a resolution to refer the Plan to the next Committee meeting. The Plan is being presented again to the Committee in order to receive a recommendation for the Board's consideration of adoption and implementation of the Plan. There are no changes to the Plan document or staff recommendations that were circulated at the September 11, 2012 Committee of the Whole meeting.

Despite challenges to the profitability and viability of agriculture and aquaculture in the region the AAP reveals that there are opportunities for growth and diversification in these industries, and it recommends eight broad goals and numerous actions for the RDN and other stakeholders in support of local agriculture/aquaculture. Given the significance of these sectors to the local economy and cultural landscape, and the need for a clear strategy to support these uses, staff recommends the AAP be adopted and that an AAP Action Plan be developed to determine resource allocations within the 2013 budget year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the "Growing Our Future Together - Regional District of Nanaimo Agricultural Area Plan" (AAP) dated August 2012 be adopted.
2. That staff be directed to develop an AAP Action Plan for the Board's consideration within the 2013 budget process.

Report Writer

General Manager Concurrence

Manager Concurrence

CAO Concurrence

**Attachment 1
 AAP Project Timeline**

Date	Action	Board Consideration
April 2007	Delegation to Board from agricultural groups requesting formation of AAC.	Board directed staff to review opportunity to establish an AAC.
2008	Agricultural issues raised by community during OCP and RGS reviews.	
June 2008		Board resolution to establish AAC.
2009	AAC established.	
January 2010	AAC recommended development of Agricultural Area Plan (AAP).	
March 2010		Board received recommendation from AAC and directed staff to review.
May 2010		Board directed staff to apply for AAP project funding.
January 2011	Funding request approved by Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC (IAF).	
April 2011	Terms of Reference for AAP established.	Board appointed AAC as Steering Committee.
April – May 2011	Request for Proposal advertised.	
July 2011	Project consultant selected by AAC.	Board received an update on selection of consultant.
August – September 2011	Information hand-outs & displays presented at community events to publicly launch the project; Land Use Inventory completed; Growing our Future web site created.	
October 2011	AAP video interviews completed.	
November 2011	Public open houses & focus group #1 held.	
January 2012	Focus group #2 held; public consultation report and AAP story-telling video series 'Agriculture in Action' completed.	Board received the Public Consultation Summary Report and Agricultural Area Plan video series.
February 2012	AAP draft recommendations completed and reviewed by staff; project website updated.	Board received AAP – Phase 1: Background Report containing results of Land Use Inventory.
March 2012	AAP – Phase 2: Draft Plan completed and reviewed by staff and AAC.	
April 2012		Board received AAP – Phase 2: Draft Plan.
May 2012	Online public opinion survey of AAP Goals.	Board workshop to discuss draft AAP.
June 2012	Survey complete; Plan revised based on comments from the public, Board, AAC and referrals.	Board follow-up workshop; Board received survey results and proposed revisions to AAP.
July 2012	Revisions incorporated into final AAP.	
September 2012	Final AAP submitted to Committee of the Whole with a recommendation for the Board to adopt the Plan.	Board referred the Plan to the Committee of the Whole meeting in October.
October 2012	Final AAP submitted to Committee of the Whole with a recommendation for the Board to adopt the Plan.	

Attachment 2
“Growing Our Future Together -
Regional District of Nanaimo Agricultural Area Plan”
(August 2012)

As circulated to the Committee of the Whole at its regular meeting held on September 11, 2012, and as made available on the Agricultural Area Plan website: www.growingourfuture.ca.