

Report

Date	August 21, 2024	File:
Subject	Agricultural Advisory Committee 27 June 2024 Meeting Minutes and Recommendations	

PURPOSE

To provide the Agricultural Advisory Committee (AgAC) minutes for receipt, along with associated recommendations for Council's consideration.

BACKGROUND

The AgAC held its second meeting on June 27, 2024. The draft minutes are attached to this report (Attachment 2) and staff are providing additional input before Council considers the committee's requests.

DISCUSSION

Climate Adaptation Strategy (Item 4.1)

The Committee discussed the draft Climate Adaptation Strategy. The AgAC passed the following motions with respect to item 4.1:

THAT the Agricultural Advisory Committee supports proactive measures to include agricultural land in climate adaptation measures and endorses the Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability Assessment; and

THAT the Agricultural Advisory Committee provides the following feedback for Council's consideration:

- 1. Communicate to CVRD's Emergency Planning function a desire for Agriculture to be represented within Emergency Management Planning, including development of an emergency food plan and assisting local farmers in developing livestock evacuation plans.*
- 2. Highlight in the Strategy the importance of the agricultural sector and impact greater climatic variability has upon agricultural productivity and consider how the Municipality can help mobilize responses, including a focus on soil quality.*
- 3. Ensure that all opportunities for expanding infrastructure for agricultural water access, usage, storage and management are prioritized.*

Item 4.1 Resolutions 1 & 2

North Cowichan's draft Adaptation Strategy takes a municipal service view to address the highest climate risks identified in the risk and vulnerability assessment, in order to supplement the Cowichan Valley Regional District's Climate Change Adaptation and Risk Management Strategy (2021). This Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) Strategy has several actions supporting regional agriculture; North Cowichan has limited further authority than the regional strategy, as agriculture is predominantly regulated at the provincial level.

Soil quality is an area where North Cowichan has limited ability to influence, and actions in this area would be restricted to education, advocacy and municipal bylaws that speak to soil quality where authority is provided. In the event of a weather event, municipal roles are limited to infrastructure recovery and providing information on services to impacted property owners as Emergency Management Cowichan would coordinate regional response. North Cowichan will continue to collaborate with the agricultural sector and explore best practices on areas where soil quality can be addressed to determine how best to proceed with support.

Item 4.1 Resolution 3

North Cowichan has historically not supplied water, nor has it planned for the provision of water for agricultural use. Expanding municipal infrastructure to service agriculture has significant implications as the water systems are incapable of delivering the required volumes, would impact our ability to service housing requirements as directed by the Province, and the water licenses do not provide the capacity to support the provision of water for agriculture. The provincial *Water Sustainability Act* provides oversight for water extraction and use, and the province can curtail the use of this sector in drought conditions. The Ministry of Agriculture has supporting programs through the Agricultural Water Infrastructure Program to improve water availability and storage and programs for agricultural water supply, storage, and extraction.

Staff recommendation

In response to the AgAC's input, staff suggest that the draft Adaptation Strategy consider additional commentary on the importance of the agricultural sector in North Cowichan, highlight coordination needs with Emergency Management Cowichan, and clarify the authority and roles that the different agencies have. Actions that could be explored include:

- Improve coordination with Emergency Management Cowichan and the Province of B.C.
- Provide information on resources that provide support to the agricultural sector
- Review North Cowichan bylaws to ensure no impediments for actions supporting greater climate resiliency for the agricultural sector.

AgAC Workplan (Item 4.3)

The committee's draft workplan was prepared by staff and discussed by the Committee (item 4.3). Staff had recommended the following scheme of referral of Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) applications, to ensure that only significant applications are referred:

- ALC applications
 - Exclusion and Inclusion } Automatic referral to [AgAC](#)
 - Non-delegated subdivision } Automatic referral to [AgAC](#)
 - Non-farm uses } Referral to [AgAC](#) at staff/Council discretion
 - Transportation, Utility & Recreation Corridors } Referral to [AgAC](#) at staff/Council discretion
 - Soil & fill notifications } No referral to [AgAC](#)
 - Statutory Right of Way } No referral to [AgAC](#)
 - Residential non-adherence } No referral to [AgAC](#)
 - Delegated subdivision } No referral to [AgAC](#)
- Development applications impacting ALR or farmland
(Referral to [AgAC](#) at staff/Council discretion)

The committee made three resolutions regarding the workplan, which are discussed in turn:

1. *Including all non-farm use applications for review by the AgAC.*
2. *Including all residential non-adhering applications for review by the AgAC.*
3. *Defining opportunities for short-term agricultural action, including investigating partnership with interested individuals and relevant organizations for use or lease of municipally-owned land for agricultural purposes.*

Item 4.3 Resolutions 1 & 2

The committee's resolutions would result in approximately twice as many applications going before the AgAC, including minor applications, and ones that ultimately end up being cancelled or converted into a different type of application (such as Notice of Intent). The table below gives some further context on the ALR application types referenced above, along with an approximate assessment of how many applications in each category received by North Cowichan over the past five years would have been appropriate to forward to the AgAC.

ALR Application Type	Purpose	# rec'd since 2019	Ref to AgAC as initially proposed	Ref to AgAC as per resolutions	Ref to AgAC as per recommendation
Exclusion	remove land from ALR	3	3	3	3
Inclusion	include land within ALR	2	2	2	2
Non-delegated Subdivision	non-trivial subdivision	0	0	0	0
Non-farm Use	land uses in ALR not related to farming	12	~5	12	~5
Residential non-adherence	additional and oversize residences	3	0	3	2
Notice of Intent	Placement of fill or soil removal	24	0	0	0
Utility corridors	Linear infrastructure crossing ALR land	0	0	0	0
Delegated subdivision	Boundary line adjustments, etc.	4	0	0	0
	TOTAL	48	10	20	12
			always referred		
			referred if non-trivial or not cancelled		
			not referred		

North Cowichan has averaged approximately ten ALR-related applications per year since 2019; half of which are Notices of Intent, which are primarily informative and do not come to Council. It is recommended that in the interests of timely application processing and the AgAC's own time, that staff retains discretion on which applications are referred to the committee to avoid trivial or uncontentious time-sensitive applications being held up, or alternatively, ultimately fruitless or unnecessary applications consuming AgAC time.

However, the AgAC's desire to review residential non-adherence applications has been added to the staff-recommended workplan. Again, this is recommended to be subject to staff discretion not to refer applications that are either trivial or move towards cancellation or conversion into a different application type (which subsequently may or may not end up being referred to the AgAC).

It should be noted that staff retaining discretion allows for effective application processing and is not intended to circumvent the AgAC where there remains a meaningful role for input. Upon receiving an ALR application and staff report, it is always an option for Council to refer it to the AgAC, if staff did not already do so earlier in the process. That being so, staff would take a conservative approach whereby

referral to the AgAC is the default presumption, unless it is determined that the application is either sufficiently inconsequential or has no realistic prospect of moving forward in its current form, in which case it would likely be determined that there is little merit in forwarding to the AgAC.

Item 4.3 Resolution 3

This resolution follows on from item (4) of the AgAC Terms of Reference in which the committee is encouraged to proactively bring issues forward to Council's attention. The specific reference to partnership arrangements for leasing municipal land is somewhat problematic in that discussions about municipal land dispositions are firmly within the purview of Council and generally held in closed session. In the absence of a Council direction on the potential availability of identified pieces of municipal land there is no mandate for the committee to solicit partnerships, except in the most general sense.

Staff recommend the wording below, splitting the request into two separate workplan items. Item E2 would provide a placeholder for the Committee to connect with people to identify potential interest, explore needs and report to Council with more information. However, explicit direction is required from Council before moving ahead with this item as it would be premature to solicit interest from prospective tenants ahead of having identified specific opportunities. Council direction may follow from strategic review of North Cowichan's land inventory (which is currently underway), which may identify suitable land parcels for this use.

- *E1: Defining opportunities for short-term agricultural actions.*
- *E2: Identifying interested individuals and relevant organizations for potential partnership in the use or lease of municipally-owned land for agricultural purposes.*

These have been added to the recommended workplan as per Option 1 below.

OPTIONS

(1) **(Recommended Option)** THAT Council:

1. Receive the minutes of the June 27, 2024 Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting;
2. Endorse the Committee's workplan as attached to the Planning Manager's August 21, 2024 report; and,
3. Endorse the recommended edits to the draft Climate Adaptation Strategy as outlined in the Planning Manager's August 21, 2024 report.

- This option would add residential non-adherence applications to the AgAC's review function but retain staff discretion to avoid forwarding trivial or fruitless applications prior to file closure.
- Including proactive/short-term measures on the workplan with a separate "placeholder" item regarding identifying potential agricultural tenants responds to the Committee's wish without prematurely advancing too far in the absence of a Council-approved site.

(2) THAT Council

1. Receive the minutes of the June 27, 2024 Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting as attached to the Planning Manager's August 21, 2024 report;
2. Amend the Committee's workplan attached to the Planning Manager's August 21, 2024 report

to include all non-farm use applications and all residential non-adhering applications to be reviewed by the Agricultural Advisory Committee, as per the Committee’s recommendations outlined in item 4.3 (1) and (2) of the June 27, 2024 minutes;

3. Endorse the Committee’s workplan as amended; and,
 4. Endorse the recommended edits to the draft Climate Adaptation Strategy as outlined in the Planning Manager’s August 21, 2024 report.
- This option reflects the committee’s resolutions and would result in all specified ALR applications being referred to the Committee.

(3) THAT Council

1. Receive the minutes of the June 27, 2024 Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting as attached to the Planning Manager’s August 21, 2024 report;
 2. Amend the Committee’s workplan as attached to the attached to the Planning Manager’s August 21, 2024 report by [*amendments to be identified by Council*];
 3. Endorse the Committee’s workplan as amended; and
 4. Endorse the recommended edits to the draft Climate Adaptation Strategy as outlined in the Planning Manager’s August 21, 2024 report.
- Council may amend the workplan in a manner of its choosing.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications	Concerns or Impacts to North Cowichan
Social	• No significant impacts or concerns
Environmental	• No significant impacts or concerns
Financial	• No significant impacts or concerns
Policy/Legislation	• No significant impacts or concerns
Strategic Priority	• Aligns with the typical role of an Agricultural Advisory Committee
Communication	• No significant impacts or concerns
Staffing Implications	• Referral of ALR applications to the AgAC has a minor impact on staff time in adding an extra step; however, such applications are sufficiently infrequent that this is not anticipated to be problematic.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council:

1. Receive the minutes of the June 27, 2024 Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting;
2. Endorse the Committee’s workplan as attached to the Planning Manager’s August 21, 2024 report; and,
3. Endorse the recommended edits to the draft Climate Adaptation Strategy as outlined in the Planning Manager’s August 21, 2024 report.

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Attachments:

- (1) Recommended AgAC Workplan
- (2) 27 June 2024 AgAC Minutes