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DATE: November 5, 2012

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FILE: 0360 20 AAC

SUBJECT: Agricultural Area Plan Action Plan

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an Agricultural Area Plan Action Plan for the Board's consideration.

BACKGROUND

This report follows the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Board's adoption of the Agricultural Area Plan on October 23, 2012 and the Board's direction that staff develop an AAP Action Plan for the Board's consideration within the 2013 budget process.

The 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). The AAP goals and recommendations were reviewed extensively by the Steering Committee, staff, external agencies, provincial ministries, Agriculture Land Commission (ALC), 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.

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.

The objectives of the AAP were to provide clear and implementable recommended actions towards the goal of enhancing local food production in the RDN. For each of the eight goals, the Plan identifies specific objectives and recommended actions to be taken with an indication of the priority, timeframe, key players, and level of resources required to achieve each objective.

It was identified through development of the AAP that the most common reason that AAPs fail to progress is due to a lack of a strong and coordinated implementation and evaluation strategy. As such, in order to ensure the success of the AAP it is important that an AAP Action Plan be developed shortly following the adoption of the AAP.

DISCUSSION

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. 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;
- Vancouver Island Exhibition (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.

As an alternative to the above AAP recommended approach to implementation, 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. Staff would anticipate that the Board will provide direction on the structure and function of an AAP implementation body through consideration of a Terms of Reference for the implementation body at a later date as proposed in the AAP Action Plan below. For the purpose of this report, the implementation body will be referred to as the Implementation Steering Committee.

Following the establishment of an Implementation Steering Committee, 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.

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 (Attachment 1). These items and/or other implementation actions could be included in the Implementation Steering Committee's work plan for the Board's consideration of approval. In order to move forward with implementation of the AAP, while allowing the Board full control in relation to consideration of resource allocations and budgetary impacts in light of competing priorities, Staff propose the following AAP Action Plan.

1. Include for the Board’s consideration an item in the 2013 budget for establishment of an AAP Implementation Steering Committee, including a limited allowance for implementation actions in 2013.
2. Prepare a Terms of Reference for the AAP Implementation Steering Committee for the Board’s consideration.
3. Establish the AAP Implementation Steering Committee as per Board approved Terms of Reference.
4. Work with the AAP Implementation Steering Committee to develop a three-year Implementation Work Plan for the Board’s consideration.
5. Take action on items on the Implementation Steering Committee Work Plan within the limited initial AAP Implementation budget established for 2013.

ALTERNATIVES

1. To receive this report for information and direct staff to proceed with the Agricultural Area Plan Action Plan as outlined in this report.
2. To receive this report for information and provide additional direction to staff.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As discussed in this report, the Agricultural Area Plan includes a variety of recommendations and implementation actions for consideration by the Board. The resource implications of these recommendations will need to be reviewed by the Board as part of the Board’s decision on implementation of the Plan. 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.

With the exception of staff time commitments and minor expenses related to administration of the Committee, the proposed AAP Action Plan as outlined above will have minimal budgetary impact for 2013 from the establishment of the Implementation Steering Committee through to development of a work plan for the Board's consideration of approval. Any substantial budgetary commitments can be considered by the Board through approval of the Implementation Steering Committee's work plan and would require further Board approval through the annual budget review process.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

Along with the adoption of the Agricultural Area Plan on October 23, 2012 the RDN Board provided direction to develop an AAP Action Plan for the Board's consideration within the 2013 budget review process. Staff propose an AAP Action Plan that will have minimal budgetary impact in 2013, while allowing the implementation of the AAP to move forward with the establishment of an Implementation Steering Committee and subsequently the development of a Committee work plan for the Board's consideration. Going forward the Board will be able to consider budgetary impacts and resource allocations among competing priorities through review and approval of the Committee's work plan along with broader consideration through the annual budget review process. Depending on the items identified in the Committee's work plan and the Board's decisions on other priorities, implementation action could be undertaken on a limited number of items within the 2013 budget.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the report on the proposed AAP Action Plan be received.
2. That staff be directed to proceed with Actions 1 through 5 of the AAP Action Plan.

Report Writer

General Manager Concurrence

CAO Concurrence

Attachment 1

Suggested priority actions for first year implementation based on high priority and short term goals.

Action Number	Synopsis of Action	Key Players	Resource Requirements & Sources
1.1 - A	Consider updating the AAC Terms of Reference to allow the AAC to make comments on every application (exclusion, non-farm use, subdivision) that is forwarded to the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC). Precedence for the Terms of Reference and protocols exist in many other jurisdictions.	Lead: RDN Supporting: AGRI	Requirements: Low – Moderate Source: RDN
1.2 - A	Create a webpage for agricultural information and related issues that extends from the RDN website or expands the existing AAP website www.growingourfuture.ca .	Leads: Farmers Institutes, BCAFM Supporting: Economic Development Corporation (EDC), RDN	Requirements: Moderate Sources: RDN, member municipalities, Farmers Institutes, possible summer student position.
2.1 - D	Establish an Agricultural Development Committee (ADC), possibly as an extension of the City of Nanaimo's Economic Development Corporation (EDC). As first order of business, have the ADC pursue an Economic Development Strategy for agriculture in the region.	Leads: EDC, Farmers Institutes, member municipalities, Tourism BC. Supporting: RDN, City of Nanaimo	Requirements: Significant Sources: IAF, RDN and member municipalities, chamber of commerce, Tourism BC
2.2 - A	Create and distribute a local food guide or directory, similar to what is produced in the Comox Valley and Southern Vancouver Island, and include aquaculture. Ensure that it is available online.	Leads: Farmers Institutes, RDN, BCAFM Supporting: Nanaimo Foodshare, Mid-island Sustainability Stewardship Initiative, Tourism BC, VIU	Requirements: Low to Moderate Sources: Advertisers, Vancity, Real Estate Foundation (REF)

Action Number	Synopsis of Action	Key Players	Resource Requirements & Sources
6.1 - G	<p>Partner with School Districts to add agriculture and aquaculture into the District school curriculum and extend this up to the University and College level.</p> <p><i>Example: Ag in the Classroom; VIU.</i></p>	<p>Leads: AGRI, Farmers Institutes, Commodity groups, school districts, school boards</p> <p>Supporting: RDN, Nanaimo FoodShare and other NGOs, Min of Education, ActNowBC, BCAF, CSR, 4-H Clubs, VIHA</p>	<p>Requirements: Low to Significant</p> <p>Sources: School Districts (in-kind), Farm 2 School program, ActNowBC, commodity groups, NGO grants.</p>
7.2 - B	<p>Consider adopting the ALC recommendation of rejecting ALR exclusion and non-farm use applications if they do not align with Electoral Area OCP land use designations and/or zoning, rather than forwarding applications directly to the ALC for decision-making.; or consider adopting a policy to comment on ALR applications, perhaps in combination with a revised Terms of Reference for the AAC (see Recommendation 1.1 A in this Plan).</p>	<p>Lead: RDN</p>	<p>Requirements: Moderate – Significant</p> <p>Sources: RDN</p>
7.3 - F	<p>Update regional and local sign bylaw(s) to better meet the needs of farmers.</p>	<p>Leads: RDN, MOTI, member municipalities</p> <p>Supporting: BC Tourism, AGRI</p>	<p>Requirements: Moderate</p> <p>Sources: RDN, IAF, AGRI, commodity groups, Farmers Institutes (in-kind), other grant agencies.</p>