

Farm Plan Implementation - Referral to GPA from Denman Local Trust Committee

February 2017

A meeting was held by a subcommittee of the GPA on Feb 15 at the Community School Library (5:45-6:45pm) to discuss this Referral.

Attending:

Emily Anderson
Erika Bland (chair/note-taker)
Naomi Elliot
Dylan Gale
Pat Jones
Selwyn Jones

Regrets:

Doug Wright (comments provided by email)

Meeting Focus Questions and GPA Responses

1) What does the GPA think of the chosen priorities (#s 5, 11, 13, 14) of the IT Staff/Denman LTC for implementing the Farm Plan (FP)?

#5— Establish facilities to support processing and storage of farm products

- GPA would like to see LTC support facilities to support processing and storage of farm products if a project proposal related to these activities is brought forward.
- Therefore, we agree that this should be prioritized as part of FP implementation.

#11— Undertake a review of farm worker housing and agritourism accommodation

- GPA hasn't had much activity in this arena, but members have explored it previous to or alongside GPA activities. A report and proposal made by V. Timmons a number of years ago was received with mixed reviews by islanders.
- GPA recommends that LTC consider ways to alter LUB and OCP to support farm worker housing and agritourism on Denman. Corlan vineyard proprietors had a past experience in which the comments of the LTC were overridden by IT planning staff who negatively commented on a proposal for land to be put into ALR without the input of the LTC. Gabriola staff comments were "a stopper" for Corlan's first and second proposals. If policy is created that supports farm worker housing and agritourism on Denman, it was felt that this kind of experience is less likely to occur again in future, because LTC will have a point of reference for supporting similar proposals made by islanders to have their land added to the ALR.
- GPA questions whether it is a 'review' of the policies outlined in Recommendation #11 that is needed. Rather it was suggested that an overall policy should be created that generally supports the retention of land in ALR (through, perhaps, exploring a policy of no net loss, *and* consideration by LTC of proposals to add land to ALR). We question what actual changes might/could be made through a 'review'.

- Also we note that farm worker housing need not be isolated as solely a “farming issue” on Denman, as housing is generally an issue in our OCP and Land use. Adding farm worker housing and agritourism as sub-issues of wider tourism, and housing concerns on Denman makes sense, as well as looking at these as farm planning issues.

#13— *Implement zoning updates through the Land Use Bylaw*

- More information is needed about what implementing this recommendation would entail.
- GPA is overall supportive of the LTC/Staff considerations to update zoning as part of Farm Plan Implementation, and may have more input when deciding which of the 10 FP actions within this recommendation are the focus of implementation. Many of these actions are of interest to GPA members.
- Question: what is the duration of a Temporary Use Permit and how might this be relevant for farming operations seeking this kind of permit?
- GPA agrees that pursuing a market in the W2 zone would be difficult and had no further relevant comments at this point.

#14— Amend the Official Community Plan

- GPA Directors believe that carrying out this recommendation could instigate beneficial opportunities for the farming community, and is generally supportive of LTC/Staff prioritizing it.

Other Issues GPA feels need to be considered in this process:

- Regarding no net loss—GPA requests that a policy be developed that LTCs support applications to add land to the ALR and that we should consider the creation of a no net loss policy regarding ALR land.
- GPA feels that the following is an issue for priority consideration in the OCP: ‘minimum lot sizes’. We suggest the provision that LTC consider these on a case by case basis and weigh in agricultural uses when determining actions around subdivisions both within and out of the ALR.
- GPA members suggest that policies be created to allow for farm processing in the Light Industrial Zone, even despite the fact that only one property currently exists under this zoning. It was felt that providing for this may prompt zoning change proposals to create more farm processing operations on the island, which could increase the viability of farming enterprises here, and thereby directly or peripherally support other recommendations of the FP.
- Development Permit Areas – a review of DPAs and how these affect farming operations should be considered in the FP implementation. The consideration of new DPAs related to farming activities would be forward-thinking. If considered now as part of this larger FP review and process, this could save hassle later and also could help to resolve unanticipated future conflicts. It was suggested that DPAs need to be enacted and enforced in a uniform way across the island.

Farm Plan Recommendations overlooked by LTC/IT staff, but GPA feels should be prioritized:

#4—Lobby BC Ferries to Support Farmers

- Island communities are integral to BC economy and require unique planning processes relating to the means of travel (Ferry) that serves the Islands Trust Area.
- Denman growers often serve off-island markets, and of the prohibitive cost of travel and transport makes the cost of ferries a key issue.
- Provincial slaughter (class D&E) licensing opportunities are impacted by ferries. Opportunities for licenses are limited on Denman Island by the fact that Ferry travel increases travel times to slaughter facilities off-island, but this extra time is not taken into account in overall eligibility requirements for these licenses which are based on distance of a producer from the nearest slaughter facility.
- Priority loading of ferries is a farming issue – livestock or produce in transit should have priority on ferries

#8— Educate and support new and current farmers

- Educate, and financial support (through favourable taxation, permitting etc.) for new and current farmers should be a priority.
- New ways of allocating finances to support farm enterprises would benefit the island residents and economy.

Which of the 14 recommendations is GPA already advancing? How?

Many of the recommendations identified in the Farm Plan have been advanced by the GPA (7 of the 14). Some of these are listed here:

1. Enhance cooperation amongst farmers for marketing

- GPA supports and recently took on management and oversight of the farmer's market
- Provided off-island opportunities for marketing produce in 2016

2. Consider agritourism initiatives

- Applefest, Farm Tours

3. Make farm products more accessible to the Denman Island Community

- Farmer's market
- Support local community through scholarships which may increase local farming activity and products available
- Provide affordable rentals of equipment needed for value-added processing of farm goods
- Provide a farmer and local food directory and a website for sharing of information about local growers and producers
- Provide and help maintain a cooler (in collaboration with the general store) for the storage and sale of local produce

5. Establish facilities to support processing and storage of farm products

- GPA carried out a farmer survey on Denman in 2015-16 to assess the need for on-island storage and processing facilities to support local growers.

6. Increase the availability of farming-related workshops and courses

- GPA has worked with DICES to organized farming-related workshops on Denman Island

- GPA provides two annual bursaries to support island residents to pursue farm-related education

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9. Promote the active use of farmland

- GPA's network and events support the increased communications between local growers and producers, creating new learning and other opportunities for actively using farmland on the island
- GPA Directors engage with public agencies such as the Islands Trust on issues related to farming on Denman that may have implications for local policy and planning, such as this referral by the Local Trust Committee and IT Staff for input on Farm Plan Implementation.

In general:

- GPA would like to see more collaboration between LTC/IT staff, and the GPA and its constituents. It was generally felt that more support from IT for GPA activities would be beneficial for advancing farming and food security initiatives on the island.
- GPA implores the LTC and IT staff to create policies which prevent the hindrance of agricultural activities.
- GPA recognizes that the Farm Plan has many ideas that could benefit the island population and community, but we may only just be starting to build the capacity to carry out some of these ideas in any meaningful way. By creating policies that are favourable to and supportive of agricultural activities, especially practices which support and enhance, rather than degrade or deplete natural ecosystems on the island, we can allow and provide for the continued growth of this community and sector in a sustainable way.
- Many things mentioned in the FP are already happening on Denman. Information sharing around these initiatives to generate wider participation would be beneficial.
- Promoting the FP during its implementation phase would draw more attention in the community to some of the issues addressed in the Plan.
- The GPA would be willing to consider engaging our membership in further discussions on the items proposed for implementation, as well as the additional items outlined below. The Denman GPA could offer a valuable communications link between the LTC and island farmers during the Implementation process.
- It was felt overall that a key issue not encompassed in the 14 recommendations of the FP, but that is widespread in our region, is land access. Long-term secure tenure for farmers is crucial for generating agricultural activity and creating sustainable farming operations. The Denman LTC could consider the development of supportive policies or legislation, including an agricultural land registry, in collaboration with other organizations already undertaking this (Young Agrarians), to help pair unused farmland with prospective farmers.
- Basically we are hoping Islands Trust can undertake a "can do" approach to farming on Denman within reason.

- We see young farmers as being an important part of our local economy and school system.
- For Bonafide Farm or Farmer, we suggest the definition be Bonafide Farm income greater or planned to be greater than \$10,000 per year.
- For Bonafide new and old farmers there needs to be an expedited process that ensures a response from Islands Trust to agricultural issues within a six-month period. We know of people wanting to farm that have had issues drag on for years until interest is lost and those people go elsewhere.
- Farm accommodation as reported in the staff report is not broad enough. For Bonafide farmers or farms needing additional housing, said houses should be limited in area (1800 square feet?) such that a young family can occupy and comfortably raise children.
- Agritourism accommodation needs to be evaluated on a case by case basis. However, campsites might be a good start, subject to no loss of agricultural production on Bonafide farms.
- Alternative land tenure agreements need to be supported to bring land into production.
- Some GPA members are not in favour of agricultural clustering. For example, if family members should want to come and farm on a family property, they should not be expected to build houses in the same area—space and privacy issues are important considerations. We suggest that an alternative to clustering should be to allow building on lower class farmland in such a way that minimizes overall loss of good farmland.
- The farm plan insufficiently addresses water issues. Issues that come up relating to Seasonally flooded fields, RAR mapping, and Development Permit Area 4 should be considered in terms of their relationship to agriculture. Watercourse mapping needs to be accurate and there needs to be a workable method to update mapping when issues are raised by landowners. Drainage issues (watercourse maintenance) need to be addressed. Some of Denman's best farmlands are in swamps. Especially in historic farmlands, drainage ditches were constructed that now cannot be cleared in some mapped watercourses. GPA suggests the work should be allowed subject to following environmental guidelines to preserve water quality and availability. Also, the new Water Sustainability Act will have impacts on agriculture on Denman, and IT could assist farmers with local interpretation of and responses to these impacts.