



Committee Minutes

Agricultural Advisory Committee July 27, 2022 – 9:30 AM

The Agricultural Advisory Committee met electronically on the above date with the following members in attendance:

Present: Chair John Dejong; Councillor Shirley Keaveney; Warden Hicks; and, Members Kathy Eckenswiler, Brenda Hsueh, Lorie Smith, Liz Buckton, RJ Taylor

Regrets: Councillors Paul McQueen, Sue Carleton, Christine Robinson; and, Member Amy Kitchen

Staff

Present: Kim Wingrove, Chief Administrative Officer; Scott Taylor, Director of Planning; Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism & Culture; Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer; Liz Buckton, Senior Planner; Tara Warder, County Clerk; Sarah Goldrup, Deputy Clerk

Call to Order

Chair John Dejong called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM.

Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

There was none.

Delegations

Emily Sousa – Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) - Farmland Preservation & Ministerial Zoning Orders

Emily Sousa of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture presented to the Committee on the use of Minister's Zoning Orders and impacts on farmland preservation. The presenter explained how census data records farmland lost to urban development, highlighting the limitations of the available data, and reported the net loss of farmland in Ontario. Further, the presenter described the cumulative impact of planning decisions and tools

such as Official Plan Amendments, Ministry Zoning Orders, and Community Infrastructure and Housing Orders, which contribute to the loss of farmland across Ontario. The presenter noted research being conducted to provide a more nuanced picture of the factors leading to farmland loss. Emily Sousa shared the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's call on municipalities to support farmers through on-farm diversified uses and to stem urban growth in agricultural areas.

Ben Lefort – Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) - Rising Interest Rates & Impacts to Farmers

Ben LeFort of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture presented to the Committee about the impact of rising inflation, interest rates, and production costs on farm businesses. The presenter described farm debt levels in Ontario and how it is managed during times of flat or declining interest rates. Further, the presenter explained the challenges of rising interest rates that made managing debt difficult for farmers. The presenter spoke about the factors contributing to the significant rise in interest rates and production costs and the impacts on farm businesses, including farmland values, investment decisions, and the cost of borrowing money. Ben LeFort reviewed how municipalities can support farmers in managing debt and recognized Grey County's efforts to lower the farm tax ratio and exempt farm buildings from development charges.

The Committee heard discussions from its members and staff about the disproportionate impact of rising interest rates on farmers, the challenge of increasing production costs and the lack of support for raising output costs, and concerns about the ongoing mental health crisis. The Committee noted the Farm Aid resource hotline for farms, 1-800-327-6243.

Franco Naccarato – Meat and Poultry Ontario - Study to Support Capacity Building and Growth of the Ontario Meat and Poultry Sector

Franco Naccarato of Meat and Poultry Ontario presented to the Committee about efforts to support capacity building and growth in Ontario's meat and poultry sector. The presenter described a review of survey feedback from farmers and abattoirs regarding trends in local food opportunities and demand that resulted in the Centralized Reservation System pilot project, which used existing infrastructure to solve processing challenges and connect farmers and abattoirs. Further, the presenter spoke about opportunities and barriers to growth, such as regulations, technology, labour shortages, training, as well as operations and infrastructure improvements. Franco Naccarato reported on developing a data-informed strategy and future innovation centre to help realize the growth potential of the sector in Ontario.

Cathryn Love – Catapult Grey Bruce - Supports to Agri-Food Businesses

Cathryn Love of Catapult Grey Bruce presented to the Committee about the organization's work and the resources available to small agri-food businesses, including industry-specific mentorship and programming and a recent research study undertaken by graduate students in University of Waterloo's [Conrad School of Business MBET Corporate Innovation](#) program

Reports and Updates

Agriculture and Agri-Food Value Chain Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Update – Verbal Report – Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer

Philly Markowitz presented a verbal update to the Committee about the impact of COVID-19, the review of the previous tri-county three-year workplan, and the preparation of a community survey to inform the new workplan.

Affordable Housing Task Force – Verbal Update – Scott Taylor, Director of Planning

Scott Taylor and Liz Buckton presented to the Committee about the recent meetings of the Affordable Housing Task Force, highlighting the County's supportive housing project on 14th Street in Owen Sound, advocacy at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference, and Official Plan Amendment 11, which proposes changes to aid in the creation of affordable and attainable housing and protection of farmland. Further, staff discussed considerations for the use of surplus municipal land for the creation of affordable housing.

Correspondence

Municipality of Tweed - Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program

The Committee requested staff investigate information about the number of claims to the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program from area municipalities.

AG06-22 Moved by: Brenda Hsueh

Seconded by: Lorie Smith

That the correspondence from the Municipality of Tweed, dated July 4, 2022, regarding the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation

Program be received for information.

Carried

Standing Items

Regional Agricultural Learning and Demonstration Site – Verbal Update – Scott Taylor, Director of Planning

Scott Taylor gave a verbal update on the project, noting collaboration with the school board, the agricultural societies, and Grey Roots. A Niagara Escarpment Plan Amendment application is expected to be submitted in August 2022 for this site.

Roundtable

Challenges, updates and/or opportunities from the different sector representatives

The Committee heard comments from its members highlighting On-Farm Climate Action Fund cost-share funding, Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario's upcoming educational events, and Grey Bruce Farmers' Week from January 4 to 10, 2023. The Committee discussed equipment or cost sharing, land practices and considerations for greenhouse gas emissions and water conservation.

Other Business

Verbal Update on the 2021 Census – Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer

Philly Markowitz gave a verbal update on the 2021 census data, highlighting the ongoing analysis and challenges of the data, including changes to how Statistics Canada counted farmland acreage from previous years.

Adjournment

On motion by Councillor Keaveney, the meeting adjourned at 11:30 pm.

John Dejong, Chair