



Committee Minutes

Agricultural Advisory Committee June 17, 2021 – 9:30 AM

The Agricultural Advisory Committee met on the above date through electronic means with the following members in attendance:

Present: Councillors Soever, Keaveney, Robinson and Woodbury; Warden Selwyn Hicks; Brenda Hsueh, John Dejong, Lorie Smith, RJ Taylor, and Kathy Eckenswiller

Regrets: Amy Kitchen

Staff

Present: Kim Wingrove, Chief Administrative Officer; Heather Morrison, Clerk; Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer; Scott Taylor, Senior Planner; Bryan Plumstead, Tourism Manager; Olivia Yale, Communications Officer and Kathie Nunno, Deputy Clerk / Legislative Coordinator

Call to Order

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

Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Forest Management By-law

Scott Taylor provided an update on input received in connection with the updating Grey County's forest management plan and forest management by-law.

- The by-law needs to align with other regulations such as provincial regulations, zoning by-laws, and official plans at both county and municipal levels
- Request to place emphasis on protecting tree lines and fence rows and that the features should not be exempt from the updated by-law as they are in the current by-law

- When considering new development applications, look to preserve as many trees as possible as opposed to clearing the site
- Need for increased fines when there is an infraction against the by-law to discourage infractions, and be sure that people can't just cut and pay the fines as a 'cost of doing business'
- Consider whether the role of forest management oversight should be by Planning department staff, or if this is a conflict of interest
- Consider adjusting the size of woodlots to be considered for protection, as currently the by-law only covers one hectare of woodlot and greater
- Woodlots and forests play a key role in mitigating against climate change
- Set aside no harvesting zones, particularly where there are sensitive environmental features such as wetlands
- Abandoned orchards should not be exempt from the by-law unless they pose a threat of disease to surrounding trees
- Woodlots on agricultural land should be treated differently than woodlots in towns or cities
- Guidance should be provided requiring native tree species to be used when replacement trees are to be planted
- Circumference cutting should not be permitted
- Concerns over private property rights
- Provincial legislation, Bill 68, which contained policies about counties and municipalities enacting tree canopy policies, should be updated in the by-law. Mr. Taylor noted that Grey County in compliance with the legislative changes made through Bill 68.

Mr. Taylor noted the following next steps for the by-law review.

- County staff are working with legal services to prepare a draft by-law
- Staff are in regular communications with member municipalities to align with any municipal by-laws
- Release a draft by-law and get feedback from the public, municipalities and the Agricultural Advisory Committee on the updated draft by-law

Questions and comments included protecting against tree cutting prior to seeking approval of development applications and working with Niagara Escarpment Commission and Conservation Authorities as it pertains to their related mandates. The Town of The Blue Mountains is also working through issues and concerns related to

updating its Town by-law. As part of that process the Town does not want to negatively impact farmers.

Presentations

Ontario Barn Preservation: Surplus Dwelling and Protection of Heritage Barns

Wesley Wilson attended to explain the planning policies that impact the preservation of Ontario barns and possible solutions to encourage barn preservation.

Questions and comments followed including what the Ontario Barn Preservation (“OBP”) group can offer in terms of support to landowners. OBP is in the process of developing a contractor and trade database to connect people who need to do restoration on a timber structure or heritage barn with experts in the field. The OBP Board members are mainly architects and engineers across the province who have expertise in timber structure and barn preservation.

Planning staff will connect with Mr. Wilson and colleagues from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and will look at policy updates in an upcoming County official plan amendment.

Other comments and suggestions included:

- older barns that remain on a farm can continue to be used for farm uses
- considerations for renovating or changing the purpose of old barns
- allowing for larger surplus farm dwelling lots with a barn to encourage small scale farming or community supported agriculture initiatives
- as hay and livestock are removed from old barns, building deterioration accelerates
- insurance companies frown on hay storage in barns
- preservation of attached silos
- repurposing silos to cell or internet tower

AG03-21 Moved by: Councillor Robinson Seconded by: Councillor Soever

That the Grey County Agricultural Advisory Committee endorses the mandate of the Ontario Barn Preservation which advocates for change to the surplus farm dwelling severance policy to avoid unnecessary demolition; advocates for heritage barns; and does not advocate for mandatory preservation, but encourages voluntary preservation, reuse, and restoration where possible and provide

resources to support those; and

That the Grey County Agricultural Advisory Committee recommends to Grey County Council that Staff reports take into consideration barn preservation, when appropriate; and

That as these reports are presented to Grey County Council, that these reports be provided to the Grey County Agricultural Advisory Committee for comment, engagement, and education.

Carried

Climate Change Action Plan Update

Scott Taylor advised that two recent reports were endorsed by Grey County Council relating to climate change.

The first report authorized entering into a two-year contract to hire a climate change coordinator to support County operations, member municipalities, and the communities across Grey County. This individual is tasked with working with staff and council to finalize the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) and work across the community on implementation of the plan.

The second report addressed the area's ability to support electric vehicles, through assessing charging network infrastructure in the region. The County is a part of a regional group seeking funding on a network assessment for electric vehicle charging stations.

The current draft CCAP has been reviewed by County staff and shared with staff from our nine member municipalities. Next steps include presenting the draft plan to the Climate Change Task Force and then getting public and stakeholder feedback on the draft plan.

Age Friendly Community Strategy and Action Plan

Scott Taylor reported that Grey County was successful in getting Inclusive Community Grant funding by the Government of Ontario to undertake an Age-Friendly Community Strategy and Action Plan.

The World Health Organization has eight domains for age friendly: community and health care, transportation, housing, social participation, outdoor spaces and buildings, respect and social inclusion, civic participation, employment and communication and information.

Ongoing consultations will be occurring through the summer to answer questions such

as:

- What are the age-friendly actions needed for people living across Grey County, in its settlement areas and agricultural areas?
- Does the County have the employment, housing, public spaces, and transportation needed to support all age groups?
- What can we do so the youth see our location as a viable location to live, work, and grow up?

Questions and comments then followed including what farming will look like for the next generation, what supports and barriers to youth becoming involved in farming, transitioning to multi-generational homes, including allowing for garden suites or secondary apartments on-farm, improving affordable housing options for all ages, mental health, community building, and farming internships.

The Committee supported keeping the Age-Friendly Community Strategy and Action Plan as a standing agenda item.

Cycling & Trails Master Plan Update

Bryan Plumstead spoke about Grey County's Cycling & Trails Master Plan which was passed by County Council in October.

Implementing the plan includes:

- Sourcing senior-level government funding for trail signage
- Forming working groups for on-road cycling and working group for trails
- Mapping cycling routes and deciding sign priority
- Creating a robust network across the county for cycling
- Seeking members to sit on working groups.
- Exploring liability, safety, and maintenance implications
 - Host webinar with municipal partners
- Promoting safety for alternate road users including agricultural/farm equipment.

Abattoir Research Update

Philly Markowitz reported that staff are monitoring what's happening regionally, provincially, and nationally and are waiting for a final report from Meat and Poultry Ontario and the findings from their province-wide survey on farmers needs and what abattoirs and processors are experiencing. Huron County developed a business case for abattoir development looking at private sectors and is waiting to see if anyone is interested in investing there. Dufferin County did a feasibility study for post-kill processing facilities. These can have impacts on what happens in Grey County.

Comments followed regarding consideration of zoning requirements for abattoirs.

Councillor Soever then left the meeting.

Standing Items

Agricultural Specialist High Skills Major Partnership Project

There is an upcoming onsite meeting at Grey Roots with the Bluewater District School Board and County staff to look at opportunities for relocating the program to Grey Roots in partnership with the potential agricultural demonstration site project next door. Following the onsite meeting there will be a larger group meeting with community partners and including people involved in the agricultural demonstration site. Those elements of the program that do not fit with the historical parameters of Grey Roots could be located on the agricultural demonstration site.

Comments then followed including transportation of the students, promoting agricultural opportunities to students, and maximizing program participation.

Other Business

Potential actionable items listed in the March meeting will continue to be presented at upcoming committee meetings as updates and/or reports.

Ontario Federation of Agriculture clarified that Bill C156 has passed and is now a trespass law that is enforceable, and police are receiving training.

Councillor Robinson extended congratulations to Lorie Smith who received the 2021 Tommy Cooper Award for a person who has contributed to the betterment of agriculture and rural living in both Grey and Bruce counties.

Grey County's summer tourism campaign, Rediscover Responsibly, includes COVID safety parameters, travel, and respectful behaviour when visiting. There are two messages specific to respecting farms and farm properties.

Next Meeting Dates

To be determined.

On motion by Brenda Hsueh and seconded by RJ Taylor, the meeting adjourned at 11:47 AM.

John Dejong, Chair