

## Agricultural Advisory Committee March 18, 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 and Warden Selwyn Hicks; Amy Kitchen, Brenda Hsueh, John Dejong, Lorie Smith, and Kathy Eckenswiller

Regrets: RJ Taylor

### Staff

Present: Kim Wingrove, Chief Administrative Officer; Heather Morrison, Clerk; Savannah Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Culture; Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer; Scott Taylor, Senior Planner; Katrina Peredun, 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.

## ConnectON Verbal Update

Philly Markowitz spoke about Connect ON, a provincial program that has been in existence for approximately five years mapping agri-food value chain and manufacturing sectors across Ontario. Founding member Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance partnered with OMAFRA and Western Ontario Warden's Caucus for this initiative. Municipalities are now participating.

The objective is for economic developers and planning staff, under the terms of the data sharing agreement, to use the data to build connections, identify gaps and opportunities, and measure economic impacts.

## Chesley Ag Program

Philly Markowitz provided an update on the specialist high skills major program, often referred to as the Chesley Ag Program. It is a high school program for grades 11 and 12 where students learn everything related to agriculture: livestock, veterinary, marketing crops, soil sciences, agricultural business planning, etc. The program has been offered for the last 16 years with the demonstration farm located in Chesley. Students from any school in the Bluewater District School Boards can participate.

Grey County economic development, culture and planning staff met recently with school board and agricultural representatives to discuss the possibility of a future program re-location to Grey Roots and proposed Regional Agriculture Demonstration Site. There are no timelines for this project currently, as it is currently in early stages of research and data collection.

This initiative supports retention of youth in agriculture.

Members discussed past and present participation in the program and tracking what happens post-secondary.

Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association supports this program through scholarships.

There is opportunity to contribute to this initiative and the program is welcoming input.

The Committee agreed to keep the Chesley Ag Program as a standing agenda item to gather comments and prepare a future report for consideration of the initiative by County Council.

## Upcoming Agri-food Workshop Partnerships

Philly Markowitz spoke about online workshops during the pandemic and provided a list of both upcoming and previously held workshops.

## Notice of Open House for Forest Management by-law Update

Scott Taylor advised that Grey County is reviewing the forest management by-law which was passed in 2006 looking specifically at woodlands that are one hectare in size or greater. The objective is to integrate with provincial and other legislation and Grey County and local municipal by-laws.

The public process starts with a virtual open house on March 24, 2021 from 5:00 – 6:30 PM. This open house will be a joint open house with the Town of The Blue Mountains.

More information, including registration details for the open house can be found on the County website. There will be other opportunities for feedback and other approaches such as phone interviews if virtual participation is a challenge.

The draft by-law will be included on a future agenda for feedback from the Committee.

## Other Business

### Sector Representatives – Information Sharing on Important issues/Challenges or Opportunities

- Legislation
  - Bill C156
    - Concern that animal rights organizations are challenging this legislation
    - Benefits include family privacy, security, animal welfare, commodity group regulations
    - Education opportunity to share the benefits
    - There are resources available on the Federation of Agriculture website including universal signage
  - Pesticide
    - Pesticide regulation changes – producers will have to get licensed to buy the products that were previously available with professional designation or an OFA card.
    - There are courses available through the Ontario Pesticide Education Program website
- Livestock Health
  - There is a highly contagious respiratory illness in chickens that is new to this area. Risk is increased with people attending farms
  - Philly Markowitz will present a report on this to this Committee at a future meeting
- Climate Change
  - What can we do in agriculture to address climate change?
  - Removals of hedgerows/wind breaks on farms
    - Landscape doesn't look as nice
    - Clear cutting turns land to sand dunes
    - Blowing snow is terrible on winter roadways near open farm fields
    - Affected by land prices (environment and agriculture)
    - Drainage, flooding, erosion, run-off, loss of nutrients on fields
    - Resilient landscape

- Local Meat Processing
  - There is a need for more local abattoirs/local processing capacity
  - Find ways for new abattoir start-up, help existing to continue, create succession strategies, and provide apprenticeships for abattoir and butchering
  - How do we have mobile and safe local abattoirs (safer than transporting the animals)
  - Legally have animals slaughtered on farm (by choice).
  - Regulation is a barrier
  - Meat & Poultry Ontario has circulated a survey about needs of across-province abattoirs
  - Grey County staff are working with an abattoir interested in doing business here.
  
- Development and Real Estate
  - How many applications are being received for new farm buildings/on-farm stores?
  - How many farming development applications are municipalities receiving?
  - What are the various tax rates?
  - Increase in farmland value: how are new farmers going to be able to afford land and how are existing farmers going to be able to expand their farm base?
  - Farmland rental is also increasing and more expensive
  - Inputs into the community are tight and could lead to higher prices and reduced availability
  - Real estate affordability to support the community is becoming a challenge for people living in town and farming offsite – housing affordability
  - People buying homes close to farms are finding privacy issues with machinery coming close to property
  - New farm businesses
    - Unique and small scale for this area
    - Impact of land pricing
    - Tracking change data
    - More start-up inquiries throughout the Province
    - How can we support new farm start-ups?
    - Networking supports
    - Impact of new farmers who buy farms and then decide not to continue farming
  
- Education and Awareness
  - Agri Industry
    - Webinars instead of in-person courses

- Resources for those new to farming
- Seed saving practices to reduce vulnerability of local producers
- Public
  - How can we work to help property owners understand Bill C156?
  - New people dabbling in farming may have expertise issues – lack of adequate fencing, learning about animal welfare,
  - Real estate market is booming and new people moving to area.
  - People new to farming don't always understand what it takes to be a farmer.
  - People new to the area are unfamiliar with farming smells or farming implements on the road.
  - Farmers are challenged with people not having patience on the road.
  - Option for education materials to be included in new homeowner package
  - Share the same information on all municipal websites
  - Real estate agents can help with information sharing
- Marketing
  - COVID prompted producers to move to direct market/on-line sales platform
    - Demand and boom in local food
    - On-line sales fronts available for farmers have done well
    - There is a skill set involved with selling online. Not all farms are well positioned to take advantage of that
    - Work with promoting online business setup
  - Importance of reliable internet
    - Connection, mental health, online businesses
    - Building capacity in rural internet continues to be a challenge
- Supply
  - Seeds:
    - sourcing seeds for vegetable farms is a challenge
    - producers are three months behind in packaging seeds
  - Meat processing:
    - due to, boom and demand for product, unable to book additional processing so unable to take advantage of the demand to produce more products
    - Wide range of quality in processing available on a small-scale level. Consumers are demanding a high-quality product. Example: sausages – lack of consistency across the board for processing is a challenge for consumer confidence
  - Winter storage:

- Grocery stores clear-out throughout the pandemic and food supplies
  - Grey County is zone 4 and 5 for growing, but have capacity to grow and store a lot of our own food through the winter, but there aren't a lot of farms doing that.
  - Winter storage capacity and winter infrastructure
- Mental Health
    - Suicide rate among farmers is high compared to other occupations
    - University of Guelph is conducting a survey which is open until May 8 for all farmers across Canada. It takes 20 minutes and has comparative questions for current mental health versus pre-pandemic
    - Canadian Mental Health Grey Bruce is offering a new program called "In the Know" this April focused on understanding and managing stressors - <https://ontario.cmha.ca/intheknow>
  - Research
    - Funding cuts of research dollars within federal and provincial agricultural organizations.

This Committee can help with awareness and education on these topics. Those with expertise can attend committee and speak as a delegation to issues such as mobile abattoirs. Work at this Committee dovetails with work of other Grey County committees such as the Climate Change Task Force.

## Next Meeting Dates

To be determined.

On motion by Councillor Woodbury and Lorie Smith, the meeting adjourned at 11:04 AM.

John Dejong, Chair