

## Report PDR-PCD-17-14

**To:** Chair Wright and Members of the Planning and Community Development Committee  
**From:** Scott Taylor, Senior Planner  
**Meeting Date:** May 20, 2014  
**Subject:** Agricultural Advisory Committee Report  
**Status:** Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution PCD61-14 May 20, 2014; Endorsed by County Council June 3, 2014 per Resolution CC74-14;

### Recommendation(s)

**WHEREAS** County staff were directed to prepare a report regarding consideration of the establishment of an Agricultural Advisory Committee;

**AND WHEREAS** the County already has a defined role in agriculture, including financial support for Grey Agricultural Services Centre, and an Economic Development Officer – Local Food;

**AND WHEREAS** the farm community is already broadly served by a diverse range of existing agricultural organizations, including Grey Agricultural Services;

**AND WHEREAS** the County has a desire to better communicate with the farm community, to better serve their needs;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that staff be directed to implement Option 2, as outlined in report PDR-PCD-17-14, to establish better communication between the County and existing agricultural organizations through Grey Agricultural Services, with the aim of getting more feedback from the farm community on County services and programs.

### Background

At the January 21, 2014 Planning and Community Development Committee meeting Committee passed motion PCD29-14 (see below), which was later adopted by Council.

*“THAT staff prepare a report for the Planning and Community Development Committee’s consideration regarding the establishment of an Agricultural Advisory Committee.”*

As per Committee’s direction County Planning staff have prepared some research on Agricultural Advisory Committees (hereafter referred to as AAC’s), other agricultural organizations and services within the County, as well as a summary of the County’s existing role in agriculture.

The contents of this report have also been shared and discussed with the County Clerk’s department, who up until recently was the County department which had the portfolio for agriculture. The report has also been reviewed by Tourism and Economic Development staff with respect to their roles in serving the farm community. The idea of a County AAC has also briefly been discussed by the Senior Management Team for further direction. County Planning staff are appreciative of the input and expertise received on this subject matter from the aforementioned people.

## **Agricultural Advisory Committees**

County Planning Staff have researched other municipal and public agency approaches towards AAC’s. Some jurisdictions have also used the term ‘Agricultural Ad-hoc Committee’, which for the purposes of this report has been used synonymously with the term AAC.

Existing examples of AAC’s which staff reviewed include;

1. Town of The Blue Mountains (TOTBM),
2. Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (NVCA),
3. Region of Halton (ROH),
4. County of Lambton (COL),

Background information on each of the above-referenced AAC’s can be found at the below links:

1. [Town of The Blue Mountains Agricultural Advisory Committee Terms of Reference](#)
2. [NVCA Agricultural Advisory Committee Terms of Reference](#)
3. [Halton Region Agricultural Advisory Committee Terms of Reference](#)
4. [County of Lambton Agriculture Advisory Committee Terms of Reference](#)

Generally the above AAC’s are made up of stakeholders from various agricultural sectors within their respective jurisdictions, as well as representatives from Council or the Board of Directors, all of which are supported by agency or municipal staff. Membership on the AAC’s is based on appointments from farm organizations (e.g. National Farm Union) or based on open public advertisements for the recruitment of

members. Generally membership on AAC's is on a voluntary basis, with the exception of staff assisting the AAC, or Provincial/Agency (e.g. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food or Conservation Authority) staff selected to sit on the AAC.

Based on the above-noted terms of reference, the AAC's generally meet between 4 – 12 times per year, or at the call of the chair.

The purpose and mandate of an AAC, has been summarized concisely by the NVCA as follows:

*“The purpose of the ad-hoc committee is to;*

- *Improve communications with a diverse agricultural representation group,*
- *To identify areas of common interest with respect to NVCA related programs as they relate to the agricultural community.*
- *Act as a discussion group to bring forward communication and recommendations to the NVCA Board of Directors.*

*The mandate of the Agricultural Ad-Hoc Committee shall be to act as an information sharing body to:*

1. *Increase communications with a diverse agricultural committee, representing a broad range of agricultural interests within the NVCA watershed.*
2. *Provide input/recommendations on matters referred to it by the agricultural community regarding areas of interest to the community that are relevant to NVCA programs including but not limited to; NVCA Stewardship programs, NVCA Regulations and Plan Review policies and Lands management programs.”*

Reporting from AAC's is generally done through staff, or through direct reporting to an existing standing committee back to council.

County staff have had some direct involvement with the TOTBM AAC, including participation in AAC Familiarization Tours, and receiving input on draft official plan policy and mapping. In both cases County staff were impressed with the outcomes and feedback received from the agricultural community.

## **Other Agricultural Organizations and Services**

The farm community is generally well served by a diverse range of agricultural organizations with both diverse and specialized focuses. The mandate of these agricultural organizations varies and can include lobbying, advocacy, marketing, research and design, and education. While many of the groups are national or provincial in nature, there are often local chapters within Grey, Bruce or Simcoe

Counties. A non-exhaustive listing of some agricultural organizations which serve the Grey County farm community is as follows:

- Grey County Federation of Agriculture,
- Christian Farmers Association,
- National Farmers Union,
- Grey Cattlemen's Association,
- Grey Bruce Agricultural and Culinary Association,
- Ontario Plowman's Associations (multiple associations within Grey),
- Grey County Soil and Crop Improvement Association,
- Grey County Chefs Forum,
- Georgian Bay Fruit Growers Association, and
- Junior Farmers.

## **Existing County Role within Agriculture**

A brief summary of the County's role in agriculture can be found on the County's website at; [Grey County - Agriculture](#). On the County website there is also a link to a 2004/2005 discussion paper prepared by the County Clerk's department with respect to the County's role in Agriculture. The report can be accessed at: [Discussion Paper on Agriculture](#)

Currently the County has a role in agriculture with respect to coyote predation on livestock and nuisance beaver removal. The County also offers warnings and information on invasive or noxious species such as the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug and Wild Chervil. In the past the County has also played a role in the International Plowing Matches held within the County.

From a direct funding perspective the County also supports Grey Agricultural Services with an annual donation of \$25,000.00, along with providing the facilities within Grey Gables at a cost of \$20,700.00. The mandate of Grey Agricultural Services is;

- *"To serve as a central contact for the local farming community to access up- to- date federal, provincial, regional and local information.*
- *To promote the sharing of agricultural information through the coordination of educational events, newsletters and a Grey County Agricultural website.*
- *To coordinate and provide administrative services to local organizations.*
- *To provide facilities and equipment for meetings and events for local agricultural and rural organizations"* (Source: Grey Agricultural Services Website)

Grey Agricultural Services is unique to Grey County, and staff are not aware of a similar service within other counties or regions. Excellent feedback has been received from the farm community on Grey Agricultural Services, in addition to the benefit realized by County staff from this service.

The County also provides some funding to the Grey County 4-H, which was provided \$4,000.00 based on the 2014 Agriculture operating budget.

In recent years, County Tourism and Economic Development staff have expanded their role in the farm sector, with local food projects, support to the Grey County Chefs' Forum hub, and most recently the partnership with Georgian College to develop a food safety regulation training course.

### *Evaluation of Options*

In response to the direction provided by the Planning and Community Development Committee, staff have developed three options, which will be further explored in detail within this section. Options one and two are predicated on the basis that the County would continue its current role in agriculture, and both of these options would simply look at increasing customer service in this regard.

## **Option 1: Establish a County of Grey Agricultural Advisory Committee**

There could certainly be benefit to the County establishing an AAC, with respect to better aligning County policy and programming to the changing needs of the agricultural community. From a land use planning perspective, there would be times when it would be beneficial to be able to explore official plan policy options with a group representing the diverse farm sectors found within Grey. Other County functions such as the Transportation Services, Economic Development, Tourism, and Information Technology (broadband) could likely also see some benefit from an AAC on a project by project basis. Familiarization tours, similar to those organized by the TOTBM AAC for County staff and Council would likely also be beneficial.

It should however be noted that some of these projects and County departments already communicate with the farm sector, and have gotten feedback from farm groups without the need for an AAC. From a planning perspective, under the five year review, the County targeted a number of farm groups via circulation, and received some feedback from them. Within the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) project, targeted materials have also been sent to some larger farmers. There was also direct consultation, including interviews and feedback, with farmers as part of the County's broadband initiative. The Economic Development and Tourism staff also have a good working relationship with farmers through local food, marketing and other projects. The Economic Development Strategic Plan is currently at the Request for Proposal (RFP) stage. The proposal is to have representatives from the agriculture and food community on the steering committee; in addition to having agricultural representatives participate in our community engagement stakeholder sessions.

The County also has a history of consultation and involvement from the farm community on subcommittees, including past reviews of the County's Forest Management Plan and Forest Management By-law.

One of the difficulties with establishing an AAC would be populating the committee, and finding meeting times which work for committee members and staff. In general farmers are very busy people, and in some seasons work long hours where scheduling is dependent on factors such as the weather, wherein it may be difficult to pre-schedule committee meetings. County staff are further concerned that the County may not have enough regular agenda items to fill such meetings, and make it worthwhile for those busy farmers who are donating their time. If the County expects people to volunteer to sit on an AAC, then we would need to ensure that their time is being spent in a mutually beneficial fashion. Alternatively, in order to have more fulsome agendas, the County could opt to simply meet less frequently; however the concern here would be that the group does not gain any momentum, and the group loses interest or becomes marginalized.

Should Committee or Council direct staff to establish an AAC, staff could bring forth a further report recommending the make-up and governance of the committee, as well as outlining a draft terms of reference.

County staff are not recommending moving forward with Option 1.

## **Option 2: Establish Better Communication with Existing Agricultural Organizations and Grey Agricultural Services**

In discussing the possibility of an AAC with various County staff and staff from Grey Agricultural Services, it was suggested that the County could work towards better utilizing the existing farm services and agricultural organizations. Rather than trying to attract farmers to sit on a new committee with monthly or quarterly meetings, why not use existing farm services to better communicate with them. In short, instead of making farmers come to us, let's try going out to them. In this manner, the County may be able to provide better customer service to the farm community.

Recently there has been a shift in thinking within land use planning, and municipal governance in general, with respect to public consultation. Hosting a meeting and expecting the public or specialized sector representatives to 'come out' and donate their time and ideas, has become increasingly less effective in recent years. Some municipal governments have worked on alternative consultation strategies which utilize a multi-modal approach involving on-line communications, social media, digital surveys and meeting the public at a time and location which is convenient for them, rather than making them come to us.

From the perspective of the farm community there are already a number of agricultural organizations which already host meetings and distribute literature or surveys. As such, if the County desires feedback on a policy or programming issue, perhaps County staff could arrange to attend some of these meetings, or send a survey out to their members, rather than forming a devoted County AAC. In speaking with Ray Robertson at Grey Agricultural Services he has noted that he could be of assistance in reaching out to farm organizations, as his group already has a relationship with most of these associations. Should the County wish to hold 'one-off' targeted sessions on a particular issue, then Grey Agricultural Services could also assist with pulling together such an event. Should the County wish to organize a Familiarization Tour, beyond those already organized by our Tourism staff, then Ray has also offered assistance in pulling together such an event, and noted he has done so in the past. In many cases consultation with the agricultural community may be on a case-by-case or issue-by-issue basis. In approaching the situation in this manner, the County may be able to offer better customer service and get better feedback from the farm community, without demanding more farmer or staff time.

County staff recommend Option 2 as the best option for moving forward.

### **Option 3: Continue with the Status Quo regarding the County's Role in Agriculture.**

Continuing on with the status quo is certainly an option; however with the minimal additional effort and resources required to implement Option 2 (as outlined above), there would appear to be no benefit to simply maintaining the status quo.

County staff are not recommending moving forward with Option 3.

## Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology

### Considerations

At this stage County staff do not foresee any additional staffing, financial, legal or information technology needs for this project.

Should Committee and Council decide to move forward with the establishment of an Agricultural Advisory Committee (Option 1), then staff could bring forward a further report with some estimates on the associated costs (e.g. facility or mileage costs) and staffing needs (minimal staff overtime, depending on the timing of Committee meetings).

Should staff be directed to proceed with Option 2, then there may be some additional costs on a case-by-case basis, but such costs would be minimal. There are no further staffing needs required utilizing this option.

Option 3 would keep the status quo, and as such would not require any additional financial or staffing needs.

## Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

Establishing an Agricultural Advisory Committee, or simply establishing better communications with the farm community has the ability to touch on many of the goals from the County's Strategic Plan. Specifically goals; 1: Expanding the Prosperity Base, 2: Enabling Healthy and Resilient Communities, 4: Making Connections, and 5: Listening and Working Together, would all be applicable to the subject matter contained within this report.

Respectfully submitted by,

Scott Taylor  
Senior Planner

Director Sign Off: *Randy Scherzer*