



Committee Minutes

Agricultural Advisory Committee October 21, 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, RJ Taylor and Kathy Eckenswiller

Staff

Present: Kim Wingrove, Chief Administrative Officer; Randy Scherzer, Deputy CAO; Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Culture; Philly Markowitz, Economic Development Officer; Scott Taylor, Manager of Planning Services; Becky Hillyer, Planner; Linda Swanston, Manager Climate Change Initiatives; Olivia Yale, Communications Officer and Tara Warder, 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.

Living Snow Fence Initiative

Jim Nicoll presented the report. Committee of the Whole has endorsed a Natural Snow Fence Policy and staff will be reaching out to farmers and landowners and gauge interest in joining the program. The goal is to use available corn crops left unharvested throughout the winter to prevent drifting snow on roadways. Another option is a tree snow fence. The County would compensate landowners for the crops left unharvested.

Brenda Hsueh noted that there may be possibility this could be included in the ALUS programming as well. She suggested staff speak with Keith Reid at Grey Agricultural Services.

Questions were addressed regarding support for trees that die after the 3-year warranty period. Mr. Nicoll noted the Conservation Authority provides the original warranty and the County will provide a warranty following that.

Lorie Smith noted that strategically placed hay bales and silage tubes are another option to prevent drifting.

He suggested that the County will want to have a timeline that the fence is left up. There are some other alternatives, such as sorghum-sudan which is getting used more. He noted that tree planting can be a long commitment, and with land values increasing, what happens when a farm property sells after the original owner has committed to the planting agreement. Mr. Nicoll noted that this will be covered under the agreement.

Mr. Nicoll sought feedback on whether the compensation and a date of April 15th for the crop to stand is sufficient from the Committee's point of view.

It was noted that the compensation sounds reasonable and has had success in neighbouring counties, however it may not be enough in some instances. No concerns were expressed with a date of April 15th.

If any farmers would like to participate in the program, they can contact Jim Nicoll at the Grey County office.

Transportation staff also wanted to let the Committee know Grey County is considering putting a traffic calming island in at the south end of Ravenna and if there are any comments, to contact Director of Transportation Pat Hoy.

Staff will be approaching farmers who have corn parallel to the road and looking at areas of drifting on county roads.

Staff will give an update in the spring on the success of the program.

Dianne Booker, the Emily Project

Dianne Booker of Grey County Federation of Agriculture addressed the Committee on Farm 911/the Emily Project. The mission is to improve emergency services in our rural communities by ensuring landowners can request a civic address from their municipality for entrances to their farm fields.

She noted other municipalities that are involved in the project including the lower tiers in Grey County.

There are rebates available to OFA members who install a sign on their secondary properties on a first come first served basis. They are requesting Grey County continue promoting the program. County staff have promoted this initiative through the County

Map Book and are willing to work with OFA and member municipalities to further support these efforts.

Philly Markowitz explained that the “what three words” application is an extra layer that helps with emergency response as well. Locations are divided into 3 m squares and identified by a unique combination of three words.

AG04-21 Moved by: Councillor Robinson Seconded by: Lorie Smith

That Grey County support the Emily Project initiative; and

That a communication strategy be developed in conjunction with the Grey County Federation of Agriculture to promote the Emily Project.

Agri-food Education

Philly Markowitz spoke to the success of recent events and outlined upcoming courses, including the Farm to Retail course starting on October 28th. Grey County had 11 applicants for the 7 available spaces and were able to send additional participants due to extra spaces in the other counties.

Staff are planning for the next Ag 4.0 event taking place at the end of March and are working on confirming presenters. Topics centre around the theme of climate change mitigation through on farm innovation such as net zero packaging, regenerative agriculture, alternative power sources, and Indigenous foodways.

The approach will either be virtual or hybrid and staff are hoping for some level of in-person presence.

Climate Change Action Plan Update

Linda Swanston noted that she has been working to take the draft plan that was prepared with ICLEI Canada and finalize it. It is important to ensure the agricultural strategies are appropriate and ensure the support of the agricultural community in the best way possible.

She outlined the vision statement of the Plan, noting that Grey County would like to be a leader in this field. There is emphasis that climate change action in itself presents other opportunities, including support for both urban and rural lifestyles, increasing equity as well as job creation.

Ms. Swanston outlined the objectives of the Plan including understanding current and projected greenhouse gas emissions, develop a reduction target and set of goals, identify strategies and actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, prepare the

Climate Change Action Plan and partner with municipalities and stakeholders to implement strategies and work together towards the targets.

One of the core pieces is to deliver benefits to the community, including job creation, energy sector innovation, healthy communities, energy cost savings, preserved green space, vibrant local food system etc.

She outlined past Agri-sector engagement. An agricultural survey was distributed in 2020, and meetings with agricultural sector stakeholders have taken place as well.

She highlighted the survey results, noting that the agricultural sector cares deeply about this issue and were interested in how the Plan can support them. Agriculture is an essential community service, and this sector will be key stakeholders to work with both in finalizing and implementing the Plan. She spoke to community greenhouse gas emission levels from various contributors.

Upcoming virtual engagement sessions are being held on the following dates:

October 26th 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm

October 27th 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

October 28th 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm

She asked the Committee to provide feedback on the agricultural portion of the Plan and invite County staff to join any association meetings to speak to it. Any further communication committee members can do to promote the public engagement sessions is appreciated.

Feedback from Committee on the Climate Change Action Plan

The Committee provided feedback.

Brenda Hsueh noted that there are solutions that are not technology or capital intensive that can be used. She noted that Farmers for Climate Solutions have three climate mitigation actions they promote, being nitrogen management and the 4Rs, cover cropping and regenerative grazing.

Lorie Smith noted that Grey Ag Services and the Ontario Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) have provided comments to staff and thanked Ms. Swanston for her work. Ms. Smith also noted some actions already being taken by the farm community that are supportive of this Plan.

The Committee noted that a report showing statistics about contributors to greenhouse gas emissions can be damaging without context, as people don't understand agriculture. There needs to be more context and explanation so as not to contribute to an image problem. Farmers will be less apt to get on board with new technologies.

The Committee noted the lack of bodies to fill current jobs, let alone ones to fill new job creation.

Councillor Soever spoke to the energy consuming products that go into building and development and lifestyle choices. When calculating statistics, are all the other energy inputs being considered? He noted that people can do a lot with lifestyle choices to reduce their carbon footprint. Municipalities often have the most influence over what happens in the community. More and more jurisdictions are looking at the emissions created in building materials.

Ms. Swanston then spoke to the Global Protocol on Community Greenhouse Gas Emissions which provides a list of what emissions are being counted and which are not.

It was noted that emissions levels should also be viewed as an area of opportunity to make an impact. Agriculture is part of the solution. We need to understand what Grey County farmers are already doing. There are a lot of great things that are happening here in this regard.

Integrating Barn Preservation Policies into the Official Plan

Becky Hillyer addressed the Committee on how Grey County is incorporating barn preservation policies into the Official Plan.

Barn Preservation Ontario presented to the Committee about concerns over the loss of historic barns throughout rural Ontario and wanted to understand why this was happening. From a cultural perspective, they have an important role and should be maintained to some extent.

Planning staff were asked to investigate if there are any practices from a planning perspective that are unknowingly contributing to the loss of these structures.

She outlined extracts from the Official Plan and proposed changes to wording around surplus farm dwelling severances. For example, including a barn in a separated parcel in order to prevent a Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) conflict with the existing house could be a possible solution. Alternatively, a barn not being used for agricultural purposes could be rezoned to be a decommissioned livestock facility.

Further improvements including possible heritage designation policies were also suggested.

Staff plan to do outreach with heritage committees and public engagement. Further exploration of what the Province has been undertaken as well.

Scott Taylor noted that the proposed policy changes are draft and staff plan to bring a report to Committee of the Whole to outline all the housekeeping amendments.

Staff noted that there may be grants available in some areas to assist with the cost of maintaining barns, as the cost can be high.

Forest Management By-law Update

Scott Taylor gave an update to the Committee on the forest management by-law revisions. It is anticipated that there will be a draft by-law to share in the first quarter of 2022. At that time there will be public engagement on the proposed changes.

Councillor Soever noted that the Town of the Blue Mountains continues to work on its by-law alongside the County. The Town's by-law will be looking to include exemptions for agriculture. There is an education piece that also needs to be fulfilled, as people have been undertaking tree cutting because they didn't realize they needed a permit.

Age Friendly Community Plan

Stephanie Lacey-Avon noted that staff are pleased with the engagement throughout the process. Despite the bulk of the information being provided virtually, significant feedback was still received. An in-person audit was undertaken in a number of communities throughout the County.

She outlined next steps. A draft action plan is being created which is anticipated to be completed by the end of the year. Public engagement is expected on this draft action plan early in 2022. Staff will be reconnecting with the Committee in the future.

Brenda Hsueh noted that if we want to have the next generation stay in Grey County, we need to promote agriculture as a career. It is a highly skilled and interesting field. This needs to start at the elementary school level.

Standing Items

Agricultural Specialist High Skills Major partnership project update –

Stephanie Lacey Avon provided an update on the Agriculture Specialist High Skills Major partnership project. Staff have had discussions with Bluewater District School

Board in conjunction with the agricultural societies and Grey Roots. Further discussions are needed before proceeding with the Niagara Escarpment Plan amendment application for the Regional Agriculture Learning and Demonstration Site (RALDS) lands. The high school program would be utilizing the facilities at Grey Roots and the RALDS which is designated in the Niagara Escarpment Plan. The proposed uses don't currently conform to the Niagara Escarpment Plan, so it has to go through an amendment process to be able to use those lands as they propose.

Other Business

If members have any items that they would like to bring forward for discussion, they can contact staff leads on the Committee and it can be added to an upcoming meeting.

Lorie Smith provided an update on Grey Bruce Farmers Week, still going strong after 56 years of continuous producer education. This is the second year in a row they are going virtual. There will be 7 days of education with speakers from across Canada and the United States. The event will take place from January 4-11. She is asking the Committee to assist with promotion of the event. Registration is free through the 4H Council website.

She also provided an update on Grey Ag Courses. There will be 25 courses offered over multiple days.

Next Meeting Dates

To be determined.

On motion by Lorie Smith and Warden Hicks, the meeting adjourned at 11:33 AM.

John Dejong, Chair