



Agricultural Area Plan Implementation - Bylaw and Policy Update Project  
*Meeting Summary- Coombs Farmer's Institute*  
*December 16, 2014*

**Overview**

As part of the Bylaw and Policy Updates Project, RDN staff met with the Coombs Farmer's Institute. The purpose of attending the meeting was to introduce the project, provide a summary of the draft obstacles, and to discuss the project in general. Although the RDN has been in contact with individuals from the group in regard to the project in the past, this was the first time the RDN met with the group as a whole.

**Participants**

There were 6 participants in attendance.

**Process**

Following introductions and a project overview, the RDN presented each obstacle included in the draft discussion paper. Following a brief overview of each obstacle there was opportunity for questions, comments, and discussion.

**Discussion Summary**

The following is a summary of the discussion.

**Obstacle 1: RDN Zoning is not consistent with the Provincial Agricultural Land Reserve Use, Subdivision, and Procedure Regulation (ALR Regulation).**

- Need to do all we can to get young people into farming.
- There should be flexibility in zoning; blanket zones don't work for all areas.
- For the bylaw review the main question to answer is does it help a farmers be more productive?
- Need to have more input from farmers on permitted uses.
- Need to keep agriculture as a permitted use on non ALR lands.
- What are the guiding principles for the RDN when it comes to Agriculture? Need to have guiding principles – support for agriculture, support for farming.
- Need to do more to support the growing of food.
- Conflict is going to happen and should be looked at as an opportunity; need to consider all sides.
- Need to think about the big picture – all types of farming in all areas.
- Agricultural productivity is generally low on bigger farms.
- Smaller scale farmers are more productive.
- Zoning should not be discouraging small scale farming.
- Promote creation of productive land.

- You can't preclude farming on unproductive land as land can be improved.
- Need to have a way to allow multiple farmers to farm on the same large parcel of land.
- Need to get local people involved and supportive by allowing farm markets, agritourism, tours, and festivals.
- Need to have more partnering.
- District A Farmers Association has a Strategic Plan.

**Obstacle 2: The definition of structure may be too restrictive for agricultural fencing.**

- There should be no height limit if fence is transparent.
- There should be no permit required for wildlife exclusion fence.

**Obstacle 3: Potential loss of larger parcels that have the greatest likelihood of having farm status and the most opportunity to support a broad range of agricultural uses.**

- Need a way to ensure that smaller lots are used for farming.
- Should be opportunities to use long-term lease.
- Could consider only allowing small parcels to be used for farming.
- Access to land is a barrier.
- There is a cooperative model near Sumas in the Fraser Valley that has direct sales, equipment sharing and joint processing.
- Policy can affect land use and land value.
- Need to get ahead of the curve in terms of land value; the RDN could help influence land value of farms through policy and regulation.
- Currently, new farmers are pushed to unproductive land as this the only land that is affordable.
- There are too many restrictions on what people can live in; there should be some flexibility to live at least temporarily in alternative accommodations such as RVs and yurts.
- Need to restrict residential use to keep land values down.
- Need to have a greater integration of land use and subdivision layout; alternative forms of rural development.
- Need to be able to tie tenure to farming.
- Need to have regulations that discourage non-farm use in ALR.
- UN report concludes that 6.5 acre farm is most productive size of farm.
- Many ALC rules do not support farming.
- Smaller parcels need to be preserved for farming.
- Key is how development occurs.
- Provincial and federal government focus more on the size of the farm rather than productivity.
- Average farm size in this region is five acres.
- Need to provide opportunities for people to start farming and encourage people to do some kind of farming.
- Soil building is necessary on most farmland.
- Education is needed for everyone in the food production network including sale of food in grocery stores; need to change people's mindsets about locally produced food.
- There are lost opportunities for people to interact with farming as farms close to urban areas are lost to development.

- There does not seem to be any way to change development practices that affect farming; how do you protect farming from the impacts of adjacent development? There are no bylaws to protect farmers from the impacts of development on adjacent properties.
- Small farms are important.

**Obstacle 4: There are no bylaw provisions that apply at the time of subdivision to ensure that parcels that are zoned for agriculture have adequate dimensions to allow the siting of a building for housing livestock or storing manure which meets minimum setback requirements.**

- Setbacks can be an impediment if a lot is too narrow.
- Should be addressed at the time of subdivision.
- There should be a policy to support certain kinds of variances.

**Obstacle 5: The maximum height of buildings and structures in the Water 1 zone may be too restrictive.**

- Need to contact aquaculture industry.

**Obstacle 6: The minimum setback requirements for agricultural buildings do not take into consideration the scale or type of operation.**

- One size does not fit all.
- Current setbacks are too restrictive.
- More flexibility is needed.

**Obstacle 7: Farmer's market is not permitted in any zone where agriculture is a permitted use.**

- Farmers markets could be allowed in all zones except for a few zones.
- The TUP fee should be waived for societies.
- TUPS are a good approach to see if a market fits in a particular place.
- Support for TUPS.
- There are only so many farmers markets that can be supported?
- Should not be on good agricultural land.

**Obstacle 8: The maximum parcel coverage for farm buildings is too low.**

- Local governments can only regulate land use and not farm practises.
- Parcel coverage should be increased but it should not be too prescriptive.
- Should allow for variances.
- Need more flexibility in zoning regulations.
- Medical marijuana is not a farm use.

**Obstacle 9: Farmers are unable to have signs directing customers to their farms.**

- Would like to see anything that supports people finding farms.
- More signs and third party signs could be supported if they benefit farming.

**Obstacle 10: The potential impacts of estate residential and non-farm use threaten agricultural viability and productivity.**

- Shouldn't allow excessive residential and non-farm uses.
- Support restrictions to residential use.

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**Obstacle 11: Farmland Protection Development Permit Areas may not provide an adequate level of protection and are not consistent across all electoral areas.**

- Not likely to be effective on existing lots.
- More effective at time of subdivision.
- Consider vegetative buffers to serve as pollinator pathways; eg San Francisco.
- Alternative Forms of Rural Development – buffers that serve as habitat protection.

**Obstacle 12: The impacts of non-farm use and development adjacent to the ALR is not contemplated by RDN OCPs or Zoning Bylaws.**

- Consider the use of a nuisance covenant.
- More consideration of adjacent development.
- Separation may not always be the best approach.
- Need to be more thoughtful about the integration of urban and rural.
- Segregation is not the only answer.
- Want to have residential close to farms in a way that does not result in impacts on the other
- Best way to get people more acceptable of farms is to have them be part of the food production experience; eg. direct sales, tours.
- Education and awareness is key.
- Need to think differently about development near farms.

**Obstacle 13: RDN animal control bylaws do not appear to be adequately addressing concerns regarding the impacts that dangerous dogs and dogs at large are having on livestock**

- Recent changes to provincial legislation does not help farmers.
- There is no easy answer.
- Livestock owners should be allowed to protect their animals and be legally protected from prosecution if they have to kill a marauding dog.
- Efforts to reduce dog livestock incidents should be focussed on the dog owners and the onus to prevent dog livestock incidents should be on the dog owner.
- It is very difficult to address the actions of the irresponsible dog owner.
- Farmer has to file an official complaint.
- A problem with the current bylaw is legal identification.
- Is there a way to identify a person who has a history of owning dangerous dogs and have them be banned from owning a dog?
- Education and awareness is important.

**Other**

- Is the Waste Stream Management Bylaw preventing farmers from receiving vegetation from off farm for composting?
- The term waste should not be used as all materials can be recycled, reused or used in some way.
- Can there be a notice required for building permit applications for land in the ALR?
- The RDN should be in control of the ALR.
- The RDN has a big opportunity to assist agriculture – need to look at what could be.
- Need to do more on water conservation.