

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY LIAISON GROUP

MINUTES OF MEETING

January 20, 2004

Members Present: Mayor Margaret Black, Carl Wierenga, Don Fieldhouse, Hugh Mitchell, Allen Oldham, Gary Johnson, Jim Sellers, Judy Coward

Others Present: Bill Moyer (representing Mayor Susan Sherban)

Staff Present: Bryan Tuckey, Don Eastwood, Catherine Resentera, Ellen Ma

Regrets: Mayor James Young, David Morrison, Eric Elmhirst

The Tenth Meeting of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group commenced at 7:12 p.m.

1. Introduction

The meeting was called to order by Don Fieldhouse, Vice Chair, due to the absence of the Chair, David Morrison.

2. Minutes

It was moved by Jim Sellers, and seconded by Allan Oldham that the Minutes of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group Meeting held on October 27, 2003 be confirmed.

3. Economic Strategy Consultation

Don Eastwood gave a brief presentation on the results of the Phase 1 Consultation.

Discussions followed on how York Region's Economic Strategy could complement the GTA Agricultural Action Plan currently being developed, and whether the GTA Plan was adequate to address the issues in York Region.

Gary Johnson commented that the process in the development of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan was very comprehensive and that it had done its job in terms of information gathering. However, the issue relating to the establishment and effectiveness of the proposed Action Committee in implementing the Plan had to be addressed.

The members agreed that in order for the industry to be competitive, it was necessary to enhance the environment for agriculture to thrive. Land use and development policies should be put in place to protect the agricultural base in the GTA. Marketing initiatives would facilitate farmers tapping into the market.

There was a concern that the farming community might not be aware of the Action Plan and its proposed actions. Local farmers needed to be kept informed and be aware of what was going on, and this could be achieved through organizations such as the Agricultural Advisory Liaison Groups. Local agricultural representatives would be useful to provide a forum for farmers to meet and to influence policies and decisions. Judy Coward advised that the agricultural community could access the information they require through the call centre and the Internet. However, as far as field staff were concerned, there was no field resource to serve York Region, and the nearest field resource centres were located in Lindsay and Fergus. It was agreed that the Provincial Government should be urged to reinstate local agricultural representatives in the field. Due to the unique nature of agriculture in the GTA, a case could be supported for local agricultural representatives to serve the farming community in the area.

Don Fieldhouse reported that the York Federation of Agriculture believed that the Province's Greenbelt legislation was basically designed to protect green space for the urban population, and not a means to protect agriculture. On the other hand, the Agricultural Action Plan had put a focus on agriculture, and although farming was not the place to be now economically, resources needed to be protected for the future.

There was general consensus that in order to support the industry, Development Charges should be waived for farmers, and that financial assistance should be made available for implementation of the Nutrient Management Act and Regulations.

Don Eastwood expressed his appreciation for the valuable input provided by the members, and indicated that their comments would be incorporated into the strategy document. He also confirmed that there would be an opportunity for the Liaison Group to review the draft Economic Strategy before its final adoption by Regional Council.

4. GTA Agricultural Issues

Ellen Ma gave a brief update on the GTA Agricultural Action Plan development process, and advised the members that the final Action Plan should be available at the end of March. Comments on the draft plan were due February 1, and members were encouraged to submit their comments to the Working Group.

5. Nominations

Ellen Ma reported that Harvey Brown had been nominated to replace Don Fieldhouse as a Federation representative for the second term of the Liaison Group. The nomination would be reflected in the Minutes and forwarded to Regional Council for their endorsement.

6. Other Business

Don Fieldhouse gave a brief overview of the Federation's Contract with Consumers initiative. The objective of this project was to get buy-in from consumers in support of the agricultural industry. Phase 1 of the initiative was a survey of commodity groups to see what had been done to promote agriculture. Phase 2 was to get buy-in from different groups and to educate them on the process, and this phase was headed up by Deb Lethbridge of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. She would be available to make presentations to different groups on the initiative. There was consensus that it was important to get the attention of the politicians as well as the consumers, and that Municipal Councils should be involved. It was decided that Deb Lethbridge should be invited to make a presentation at the next meeting.

Carl Wierenga brought to the attention of the members a letter from Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority on the Holland Marsh Water Quality Improvement Project. The purpose of the project was to find ways to filter phosphorus from the Marsh to enable more fresh water going into Lake Simcoe. He advised that he had been appointed to the project committee as a representative of the Holland Marsh. The problem was that this project would attract negative publicity by putting the Marsh on the spot light, and this could be detrimental to the Marsh as a food source. In reality, Holland Marsh only put out about 5% of phosphorus going into Lake Simcoe. It was decided that discussions be held with representatives from the Conservation Authority, and Mayor Black would follow up with Gayle Wood on this matter.

Judy Coward advised the members that she had not heard anything about the Nutrient Management Act and Regulations since the new Provincial Government came into office. Jim Sellers reported that Marilyn Bidgood had advised the Federation that enforcement staff hired under the former Provincial Government had moved from OMAF to MOE. A Nutrient Management training session had been held in East Gwillimbury last November, and more training sessions would be held over the winter. Don Fieldhouse reported that the Federation planned to invite the Nutrient Management Consultant, Peter Doris, to their Board meeting to update them on the implementation of the Nutrient Management Act. Members of the Liaison Group were welcomed to attend.

Mayor Black advised that she would have an opportunity to meet with the Minister of Agriculture in the coming months, and she had planned to raise the following issues with him: local agricultural representative, education and funding for Nutrient

Management Act implementation, the GTA Agricultural Action Plan, and the Oak Ridges Moraine Act. Carl Wierenga suggested that the Minister be invited to meet with the Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group, similar to the meeting held with Helen Johns.

7. Next Meeting

The date of the next Meeting would be subject to the availability of Deb Lethbridge.

There being no other business, the Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m., moved by Jim Sellers, and seconded by Hugh Mitchell.

Minutes confirmed and adopted.

Chair

Date