

Date: 24/02/2021

To: Chair and Directors, Committee of the Whole

And To: John MacLean, Chief Administrative Officer

From: Nigel Whitehead, Manager of Planning Services

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Short Summary:

Agricultural Planning in the CRD – Discussion Paper

Background:

At the January 14, 2021 Committee of the Whole meeting, the Committee heard presentations from a number of presenters regarding agricultural planning in the CRD. As a result of that meeting, the Committee directed staff to produce a discussion paper further outlining agricultural planning options in the CRD.

Work to Date

Existing major agricultural planning projects in the CRD include:

[CRD Agricultural Policy](#) - In September 2016, the CRD Board endorsed the Agricultural Policy which primarily focuses on ensuring development approvals in the CRD minimize negative impacts on agricultural operations in the CRD. Primarily, the Agricultural Policy establishes tools and requirements for new development to mitigate the impacts on agricultural operations through the establishment of residential buffers, fencing, covenants, and minimum lot sizes. Staff view this policy as very successful in achieving its objectives and is one of the principal documents which gave the CRD such a high rating in Dr. David J. Connell's comparison study of local governments and the strength of their agricultural protection (See Jan 14 COW presentation).

[Agricultural Land Use Inventories](#) (ALUI's) – ALUI's provide a valuable baseline of information, providing consistent, credible, and comprehensive data about land use and land cover on agricultural land. In the CRD, ALUI's have been conducted primarily between 2014 to present. They are led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF). In years 2014 and 2015 the CRD partnered with the Ministry and provided some support in conducting ALUI's in the areas to be covered by the Lac La Hache and South Cariboo Area Official Community Plan updates. The MAFF is now working towards complete coverage of the CRD, with Electoral Areas F, I, J and K outstanding.

[Agricultural Water Demand Model](#) - In March 2015, an agricultural water demand model was completed as part of a multi-agency partnership including federal and provincial agencies. The model worked in conjunction with the ALUI data for the Chimney Valley area, as well as the Lac La Hache and South Cariboo OCP areas. The study looked at current agricultural uses and projected future water demand for the study

areas, based on climate change projections. The study also identified areas with the potential for future irrigation. Upon completion of full ALUI's in the CRD, the MAFF has indicated that completing full water demand studies for the corresponding ALUI areas would be a logical next step in preparing for and understanding future impacts of climate change on agriculture.

[North Cariboo Agricultural Development Advisory Committee](#) (NC ADAC) - In 2018, the CRD approved the creation of the North Cariboo Agricultural Development Advisory Committee. This group is primarily focused on economic development support initiatives. Results of this group have been positive, and there is good potential to expand the committee's scope to cover the entire region.

[Official Community Plan \(OCP\) Policies](#) - The Committee is aware of the patchwork of OCP's across the district. Overall, the OCP's reflect the importance of the agricultural sector within the region. As a whole, OCP agricultural policies are broadly supportive of the ALC and ALR, and the preservation of large agricultural parcels. The OCP policies vary somewhat in the strength of language, either encouraging or requiring the preservation of Agricultural designated properties through a minimum lot size of 32 ha. (80 ac).

[Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries \(MAFF\)](#) – The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries provides a large and varying number of supports for the agricultural sector. Among their most notable projects in support of agricultural planning include the continuation of agricultural land use inventories, which could support a future agricultural water demand modelling study.

[Agricultural Sector Groups](#) – There are numerous agricultural sector groups actively working in the region. An incomplete list includes: Kersley Farmer's Institute, Cariboo Cattlemen's Association, BC Forage Council, FARMED, Cariboo Agricultural Research Alliance, Cariboo-Chilcotin Poultry Producers Association, along with Farmers Market associations, and surely other groups. Each of these groups has done extensive work in research, development, and/or marketing of the agriculture sector in the Cariboo.

Agricultural Plan Development

Staff suggest there is value in the development of an overarching plan or strategy document to assist in coordinating, prioritizing, and directing the many actors in the regional agricultural sector. This could assist in ensuring the most strategic and efficient utilization of sectoral capacity in sustaining, expanding, and strengthening agricultural development throughout the CRD.

Recommended Principles

Should the Board wish to move forward with developing an Agricultural Plan in the CRD, staff recommend the following broad principles in undertaking such work. Consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries would occur in refining these principles, should the Board wish to move forward.

Scope

1. Region-wide plan. Developing a plan which is regional in scale would be the most efficient utilization of limited resources required to maintain and implement a planning document.
2. Stand-alone document. As the CRD has multiple Official Community Plans (OCP's) and areas not covered by an OCP, a single region-wide plan would need to be a stand-alone document, rather than appended to individual OCP's. As individual OCP's are updated, they would reference and draw upon the guidance provided by the Agricultural Plan.

Plan Objectives

3. Economic focus. There is significant opportunity to focus on increasing economic diversity of the regional agricultural sector. A diversified sector will also support food security objectives.
4. Climate change adaptation. As agriculture is innately tied to the natural environment and its systems, climate change represents a significant risk to the sector. Developing policy to embed resiliency into the agricultural sector is important.
5. Broad land use objectives. As an overarching region-wide plan, the document could establish broad land-use objectives which would provide guidance to more detailed and specific land use polices contained within existing area level plans (OCPs).
6. Support region-wide ALR boundary study. Inadequacy of current ALR boundaries has been a recurring and consistent challenge in the delivery of effective land use planning in the Cariboo. Developing a strong region-wide document with broad sector support may help to encourage the appropriate provincial agencies (Ministry of Agriculture, Agricultural Land Commission) to undertake a region-wide ALR boundary adjustment study. Strong community support would be required as it would likely result in viable agricultural lands being added to the ALR, as well as unviable lands being excluded.
7. Coordinating agency and non-profit direction. Implementation of the resulting plan will require multiple agency, industry, and not-for-profit sector organizations to lead various aspects of the plan. The plan would provide a coordinating role - collecting information, summarizing work to date across various groups, and helping to prioritize and coordinate future work completed by these supporting groups.

Plan Development

8. Contracted plan development. Development of the plan would be contracted to a third party, with some CRD staff support. This will provide the expertise necessary to conduct such a project.
9. Seek input and involvement from existing groups. There are many interconnected groups and agencies working to support and promote the agricultural sector throughout the Cariboo (and BC as a whole). Stakeholder involvement in the development of the plan will be key to creating a document with tangible value and ownership across the sector.

Financial/Risk Considerations

Staff would seek out funding (or partial funding) through potential grant applications. It is anticipated that there may be Provincial funding opportunities arising this Spring, although that is not yet known at this point.

Balancing Planning Department Priorities

The Planning Services Department presently has a full workload. Current and future high priority department work includes comprehensive updates to the existing suite of OCP's regarding landslide and flood hazards, and a pending update to the Interlakes Area OCP, along with numerous other smaller projects (i.e. shipping container regulations, zoning bylaw updates, digitization of development procedures, etc.). There will be competing resource demands which will need to be considered during 2022 Business Planning in the early Fall of this year. Implementation of an agricultural planning project will be dependent on evolving departmental priorities and funding opportunities.

The Committee will want to further consider that in order to be effective, any planning document requires focused attention on implementation. This inevitably will require ongoing resources. Although much of the document would likely guide actions of community groups and other government agencies, recommendations will nonetheless require CRD staff action. Having a further plan to rely upon and review development applications against would also incrementally increase staff time on a given development proposal. The Committee will want to be cautious in considering the incremental impact on staff workloads. Further work on this project may result in a resource ask.

Attachments:

n/a