

Agricultural Advisory Committee Minutes

April 4, 2013

7:00 PM

Canada Room

Members Present: Regional Councillor Gord Landon, Chair Jay Reesor, Vice Chair Ruth Brock Kim Empringham Guy Farintosh Bryant Hulshaf Lynne Koss Richard Reesor Agency Representatives: Candice Einstoss, York Region Public Health Jason Ezer, York Region Maria Gatti, Transport Canada Gary Wilkins, TRCA	Staff Present: Katie Burns, Sustainability Coordinator Lilli Duoba, Senior Project Coordinator Ruth Rendon, Senior Environmental Planner Elizabeth Wimmer, Senior Environmental Planner Laura Gold, Council/Committee Coordinator Regrets: Councillor Don Hamilton Mike Bender, Rouge Park Alliance Phil Fung, Environmental Advisory Committee Doug Lindeblom, York Region Maria Papoulias, Rouge Park Alliance Paul Reesor Harriet Friedmann
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The Agricultural Advisory Committee convened at 7:04 p.m. with Regional Councillor Gordon Landon presiding as Chair.

1. REVIEW OF MARCH 7, 2013 MINUTES

There was a brief discussion on whether this Committee wanted to take further action in regards to the discussion held at the last meeting on the balance of agricultural and natural heritage lands located within the proposed Rouge Urban National Park. It was decided that no further action would be taken at this time, as Parks Canada will be making the decision regarding the status of the agricultural lands.

Moved by Ruth Brock

Seconded by Kim Empringham

That the minutes from the March 7, 2013 Agricultural Advisory Committee be approved as presented.

CARRIED

2. PRESENTATION ON SOIL PRESERVATION

Liz Wimmer, Senior Environmental Planner provided a presentation entitled “Markham Topsoil Policy”. The presentation included the following: Background information on municipal engineering standards pertaining to top soil management; highlights of Markham’s Site Alteration By-Law 211-232 ; the Urban Design Groups “Trees for Tomorrow Streetscape Manual” practices pertaining to soil preservation; and an overview of applicable legal agreements .

Brian Lee, Senior Manager of Development Engineering and Transportation was in attendance to help answer questions on soil preservation.

It was reported that subdivisions are governed by the planning process through a subdivision agreement rather than the site alteration by-law. It was noted that other factors which may affect the soil quality within a subdivision include: (1) the year the subdivision was built, as the thickness of topsoil required in a subdivisions was recently increased from 100 mm to 200 mm; and (2) enforcement and monitoring of subdivision agreement requirements.

Summary of Questions from Presentation

Questions Related to The Site Alteration By-Law 2011-232:

- 1) How does the current By-Law regulate the mixing of subsoil and topsoil through development or agriculture related activities?
- 2) How does Markham monitor the illegal dumping of soil?
- 3) How does Markham implement Section 2.9 of the By-Law? It states that, *“no site alteration permit will be permitted on agricultural lands unless the owner provides a certificate, signed by a professional engineer/soil scientist, confirming that the site alteration will result in maintaining or improving the overall fertility of the agricultural lands.”* How is soil quality confirmed?
- 4) Can Markham review the following definitions within the by-law to ensure that they are consistent?
 - i) “Fill”
 - ii) “Soil”
 - iii) “Topsoil”

The Committee thought that the definitions in the by-law may not be applied consistently.

- 5) Does Markham require topsoil testing to screen for contaminants and organic content prior to placement? How is this done?

Questions Related to the Subdivision Process:

- 1) What can be done to ensure that stored topsoil being placed in subdivisions is adequate to sustain plant life?
- 2) Can we increase the depth of topsoil for new development lands?
- 3) How can we monitor topsoil placement to ensure required depths are achieved?

- 4) Can we minimize the amount of topsoil to be removed from a development site through regulation?
- 5) Can we provide improved standards for topsoil storage? (ensuring height, temperature and duration of pile does not exceed by-law standard)
- 6) Is the standard for topsoil piles adequate? What do other municipalities do?
- 7) Can we develop specific standards for the composition of topsoil?

Moved by Guy Farintosh

Seconded by Ruth Brock

That the presentation entitled "Markham Topsoil Policy" be received.

CARRIED

3. FOOD CHARTER

Katie Burns, Sustainability Coordinator, provided an update on the York Region Food Charter. A revised more condensed version of the policy was included in the agenda package.

Discussion

It was clarified that in proposed York Region Food Charter under the heading "Equity and Social Justice" that "*dignified access for food for all*" refers to making it a pleasant experience for anyone who needs to go to a food bank to obtain food.

It was recommended that under the heading Education and Skills in the proposed York Region Food Charter that the last sentence be revised as follows:

*"Understanding the connections between food, farming, health, **the economy** and the environment."*

It was agreed that the minutes from the York Food Charter Working Group will be included in future agenda packages for information purposes.

Moved by Jay Reesor

Seconded by Richard Reesor

That the Agricultural Advisory Committee endorse the Food Charter as amended; and,

That it be brought forward to the General Committee for its endorsement.

CARRIED

4. SUB-COMMITTEE PLANNING FOR SUMMER

a. Agricultural Tour

The Committee discussed the fall agricultural tour. It was agreed that the Committee Member with the most expertise should research and speak to the various topics to be included in the tour. The following committee assignments for the fall agricultural tour were made:

Drainage

Guy Farintosh

Soil Standards

Jay Reesor

Share the Roads

Kim Empringham

Community Gardens

Lynne Koss

Rouge Park

Maria Papoulas, Rouge Park Alliance

Local Food Procurement

Communications Sub-Committee (note: the sub-committee will consider discussing this topic on the bus)

5. SEED LIBRARY

Katie Burns advised that Markham will be starting a Markham Grow Seed Library as part of a pilot project. The project will be promoted by Markham Public Libraries. The program will allow residents to take home seeds to grow in their garden. The resident will then return the seed to the Seed Library in the fall. There will be no penalty at this time if the seed is not returned. The purpose of the project is to encourage residents to start gardens in their homes.

6. TAX RATE

Kim Empringham provided an update on York Region farmland values. An overview of MPACs method for determining the property assessment value for farmlands was provided. The average assessment increase for York Region farmland in 2012 was from 15% to 30%. Some municipalities are looking at putting measures in place to protect the tax rate of farmers. Durham Region was the first municipality to reduce the tax rate for farmland.

It was clarified that the Committee's interest is in protecting the tax rate of farmers, not in protecting the tax rate of developers or corporations that own farmland.

Moved by Ruth Brock

Seconded by Bryant Hulshaf

That the Agricultural Advisory Committee request that Markham's Finance Department review the presentation entitled "2012 Farmland Values Update" and report back to this committee.

CARRIED

7. ADJOURNMENT

The Agricultural Advisory Committee adjourned at 8:46 p.m.