



Making a difference...together

MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE Water Advisory Committee, held Tuesday, June 22, 2021 at 12 p.m., Goldstream Meeting Room, 479 Island Highway, Victoria, BC, Victoria, BC

PRESENT: E. Cote (Chair) (EP); G. Baird; J. Caradonna (EP); C. Davis (EP); M. Doehnel; J. Rogers (EP); K. Sander (EP); W. Scheuer; H. Thompson (EP); M. Turner (EP)
Staff: T. Robbins, General Manager; D. Dionne, Administrative Coordinator (Recorder)

REGRETS: T. Krawczyk; C. Nowakowski; D. Timothy; J. Todd

EP = Electronic Participation

The meeting was called to order at 12:04 p.m.

1. TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chair Cote provided the Territorial Acknowledgement.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOVED by G. Baird, **SECONDED** by W. Scheuer,
That the agenda be approved as circulated.

CARRIED

3. CHAIR'S REMARKS

The Chair thanked the agricultural water rate working group for its work on the presentation to the Committee. She also thanked the Committee and staff for making time for a second meeting this month.

4. PRESENTATIONS/DELEGATIONS

There were none.

5. SPECIAL MEETING BUSINESS

5.1. Agriculture Water Rate Review – Working Group Presentation

Presentation attached.

J. Caradonna presented the findings of the agricultural water rate review working group.

Discussion ensued and the working group and staff responded to questions regarding:

- Farm uses and farm eligibility
- Urban food production currently not benefitting from lower water rates
- Other community garden uses
- Guiding principles and criteria
- Rebate or incentive versus rate reduction
- Process for applying for the agricultural water rate

- Assessing current practices of municipalities for applying for a lower water rate
- How to apply funds from possible financial benefits related to a revised water rate structure
- Simplifying types of farming activities allowed
- Aligning farming activity classifications with what other levels of government already have in place
- Subsidize regionally to keep food prices low
- Importance of clarity and transparency

MOVED by G. Baird, **SECONDED** by J. Caradonna,
That the Water Advisory Committee receive the presentation for information and that staff include the information presented in the agricultural water rate review request for proposals.

CARRIED

6. ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by G. Baird, **SECONDED** by W. Scheuer,
That the June 22, 2021 meeting be adjourned at 1:02 p.m.

CARRIED

CHAIR

SECRETARY

RETHINKING AGRICULTURAL WATER RATES IN THE CRD

AGRICULTURAL WATER RATE SUBCOMMITTEE, WAC

JUNE, 2021



WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO SOLVE?

- Growing sense that the discount is **not being fairly applied** across the CRD
 - Some jurisdictions are not rolling the water-rate savings back into agricultural infrastructure
 - Some recipients of discounted water rates are not using the water to produce food and feed
- In terms of wholesale pricing, recipients of the discounted agricultural water rate currently pay around 70% less than non-agricultural customers.
- Strong **support** remains within the WAC to **retain rate discounts** for agricultural producers and urban farmers producing food and feed

INPUT

The agricultural subcommittee wishes to provide all of the following input to the full WAC, to staff of the Water Supply Commission (WSC), and to prospective consultants.

INPUT

- I. That the WSC adopt new, clearly stated, and publicly accessible **principles** to guide the creation and/or recalibration of agricultural water rates. These principles might include all of the following:
 - Food security in the CRD and the desire to support a local food supply
 - Agroecology
 - Climate change and adaptation
 - Healthy and restorative land-use practices
 - The prioritization of agricultural practices that produce food and feed
 - Potentially other qualitative or quantitative factors (e.g. percentage of a property that is under cultivation and/or water conservation practices)
- This clarification of principles would increase transparency in local government, support food security, and create incentives to encourage increased local/regional food production.

INPUT

- **2.** That the WSC consider new **criteria** for determining who receives the discounted agricultural water rate. Currently, the discount is tied to BC Assessments' categorization of a property as agriculturally zoned ("farm status").
 - Farm status is too broad, simplistic, and limited as the sole criteria for discounted ag rates
 - The new criteria should avoid excessive complexity that creates added costs, bureaucratic barriers, or potential to game the system.
 - Not all properties with farm status are producing food or feed for the benefit of the CRD. For example, there are numerous farms in Saanich and Central Saanich that produce one crop of hay per year, which is not used as feed in recreational equestrianism.
 - Many functioning farms that do not have farm status are producing food or feed, including urban and peri-urban farms. Examples include Mason Street Farm and Topsoil -- urban, commercial farms in Victoria that pay full water rates, and yet support the local food economy.

INPUT

- **3.** That the WSC consider a tiered or graduated water rate structure
 - There is strong commitments to retaining the full discounted rates currently given to farm operations producing food and feed.
 - A tiered system would continue to provide a fully discounted rate to farms that are producing food and feed over a certain threshold (either by volume of product or volume of sales). Lesser discounts could still be offered to agricultural activities that are less directly supportive of the local food economy.

INPUT

- 4. That the WSC develop a new approach to agricultural water rates that is constructive and supportive of a sustainable food system.
 - Avoid creating a system that is perceived as punitive for certain agricultural producers
 - Create a system that is clearly intended to incentivize shifts in agricultural production towards production that supports food, feed, and the local food system – i.e. that one can continue to receive the fully discounted rate if XYZ changes occur on the farm.
 - Broadcast the eventual changes in a way that supports positive, transformational change

INPUT

- **5.** That the WSC take an evidenced-based approach to changing agricultural water rates
 - The decision to make changes to the rate structure should be based on evidence and properly modelled
 - A tiered system would likely add new producers to the list of operations receiving discounted rates (e.g. urban farms in Victoria). But it is more likely to reduce the total number of operations receiving the full discount.
 - If this assumption is correct, it would mean increased water revenues for local governments. How would these public-sector savings be handled? To what end would they be put? The WSC should be clear about the intended uses of any additional revenue from agricultural operations, which ideally should be used to support local agriculture.