

OFA – Policy Advisory Council (PAC) Meeting

March 16, 2021

Virtual via Zoom

Welcome:

Patrick Verkley, Middlesex PAC representative welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting. He introduced himself as a new member to the PAC steering committee and announced he would be acting as the meetings co-host. He introduced the topic of the PAC meeting and its importance.

Local County Federation and Commodity Updates:

Labour Update

- Ken Forth, President of Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Service (FARMS) and Chair of the Labour Issues Coordinating Committee (LICC); Stefan Larrass, OFVGA Senior Policy Advisor and LICC Policy Advisor
- Ken provided a brief description of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and emphasized the value of this program to the agricultural sector in Ontario. The program has been running since the 60's and brings workers in from Mexico and the Caribbean to work on Canadian farms. The workers are highly valued and fill a chronic labour shortage. Some workers have been coming back for decades.
- While the program is highly valued by farmers and workers alike, labour activists, driven by union interests (United Food and Commercial Workers Union), continue to challenge the program, making false claims about the treatment of workers. Ken mentioned that we support employers, but not those that are found to be flagrantly breaking the rules.
- Stefan further elaborated that the LICC works for the interests of Ontario farm employers – recently gaining intervenor status for a constitutional challenge against the Agricultural Employees Protection Act (AEPA) at the Ontario Agriculture Tribunal. The AEPA provides agricultural workers the right to make representations to employers and allows for unions to represent employees in the workplace but does not provide the exclusivity that unions demand. The LICC hired legal representation to present the agricultural perspective to the Tribunal, and they ultimately ruled against the union challenge and upholding the AEPA as constitutional.

Labour Issues Coordinating Committee

In its role as an advocate for Ontario's farm employers, the OFA works closely with the Labour Issues Coordinating Committee (LICC). LICC is a farmer-driven coalition group representing the interests of Ontario employers in the agriculture and horticulture sector. It was formed in May 1991 in order to develop consensus among the farm employer community on employment and

labour issues, and to represent their collective position to government. The focus of LICC is on policy, legislative, regulatory, and program developments related to labour relations, employment standards, workplace safety and insurance (workers' compensation), occupational health and safety, and other related labour legislation.

Trespassing - Simcoe

John Morrison relayed the frustration of farm trespass issues and snowmobilers.

Peggy commented that OFA has put messaging out to snowmobile clubs, have written a news commentary and have advocated for higher fines.

Marcel Meyer from Middlesex commented that efforts in the Dorchester area to keep ATVs off property have become impossible.

Barclay Nap from Wellington commented that in his area trail cams are being used to catch trespassers.

Leo Blydorp from Dufferin commented that a resolution on the issue has been submitted to the OFA Board for consideration at the March Board meeting.

Issue Updates:

Peggy Brekveld, President updated the PAC on the following issues:

Bill 156 – Security from Trespass & Protecting Food Safety Act

The Bill was enacted at the end of 2020 and since then the number of protests has reduced.

However, could be due to cold weather. Most recent update is the legislation on signage, OFA will be sending messaging to counties regarding when farms may need a sign.

First legal challenge has been filed against the act, the government will refrain from comment at this time.

Line 5

OFA understands the importance of this issue. OFA is continuing its work with Enbridge. A joint letter signed on by commodities and farm organizations was sent to Prime Minister Trudeau in January.

Mental Health

OFA attended a mental health round table on March 11 with MPP Tibollo and Minister Hardeman. OFA is teaming up with CMHC with a project called “In the Know”.

Covid-19

Farm workers are on the list for phase two of the provincial vaccination roll out. Public Health Unit vaccination enactment varies by region, best to check with your local Public Health Unit.

Carbon Tax

The OFA has engaged Agri-Food Economic Systems to conduct a financial assessment and analysis of the cost the federal carbon tax burden will have on Ontario's agriculture industry.

The "Understanding the Cost Burden of the Federal Carbon Tax on Ontario Agriculture" study is currently underway with a targeted completion date of late April 2021. OFA will receive a final report following the completed assessment.

MZO's

OFA believes providing advanced public notice for MZOs, and any amendments to them, is important. OFA does not support the expansion of legislative changes made through Bill 197, the *COVID19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020* with respect to MZOs. OFA feels that enhanced MZO powers should be repealed or at least curtailed in areas where there is already a robust planning process in place to reduce the threat to agricultural land.

Bill 206

Bill C-206 has now been referred to the Federal Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. The Standing Committee is expected to hold public hearings and consider any needed amendments to the Bill. The Bill currently calls for an amendment to the definition of a qualifying farm fuel. OFA believes that a change is also needed to the definition of eligible farming machinery to explicitly allow for natural gas and propane to be used to generate heat for livestock barns and in grain drying. OFA intends to make this recommendation to the Standing Committee.

Grain Famers on Ontario (GFO)

Concerns regarding the relationship between OFA and GFO have been raised to Peggy. She commented that the relationship is currently healthy and that conversations are active between both organizations at the staff and board levels.

OFA Land Use Policy Position

Heather Derks, OFA Farm Policy Analysts overviewed a snapshot of recent instances that point to the reasons that the OFA board is interested to update the Land Use Policy position statement.

See power point presentation.

Breakout Room Discussions – Session 1

Attendees were divided into seven separate breakout rooms with the following topics:

1. Introduction/Provincial Policy Statement
2. Greenbelt
3. Provincial Plans – Northern Ontario Growth Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine, Niagara Escarpment
4. Farmland Preservation
5. Minimum Lot Size/Lot Creation/Distance Separation
6. Natural Heritage
7. Urban Expansion/Non-Ag Use of Land/Municipal Role

Questions that were asked to the groups:

1. Why are we Preserving Farm land?
 - What is the risk to not preserving farm land?
 - What are we not currently protecting that we should?
2. When do we make Exceptions?
 - Aggregate Extraction, Cemeteries, Waste Management/Landfills, Urban Expansion
 - Do the current exemptions make sense?
3. Are the policies in place fostering the kind of agriculture we want to see?
 - Is it protecting farm land for farm land?
 - Is it ensuring a healthy economy such that agricultural products have a market?
4. What are the problematic truths about this issue?
 - Does the policy exclude new farmers from entering the industry
 - Does the policy limit growth of farm operations
 - Does the policy favour one interest over another?

Summary of breakout room discussions attached in separate documents.

'Local Land Use Policy - Why Get Involved?
Presentation by Land Use Planner Kevin Eby
kevineby@rogers.com

Kevin introduced himself as the former Director of Community Planning at the region of Waterloo. He mentioned that when he started in 1990 there was a strong culture that urban and rural should stay separate.

He explained that the Region of Waterloo developed strong relationships and one key relationship was with the Waterloo Federation of Agriculture.

He stressed the importance for rural to support urban projects even if they do not benefit from them because these projects ultimately stop urban expansion. For example, in Waterloo Region financial incentives were used to encourage use of contaminated sites. Intensification was generally opposed but the buildings stopped expansion into rural areas.

Most municipalities are going through plan reviews, your counties can support projects that will stop urban expansion. Counties are a great resource to municipalities.

In conclusion, he stated that COVID-19 has blown up the planning world, not a lot of forward, future thinking by planners. Municipalities are being asked to make decisions that will have dramatic impacts decades from now. They have no answers on how things will settle in five years' time, with things such as transit usage, younger generations financial situations to buy homes, what portion of the population will continue to work from home and will populations flock to smaller, cheaper communities.

"The future is not single use and sprawl; it is a different world. Don't let municipalities tell you that."

Breakout Room Discussions – Session 2

Attendees were divided into the previous breakout rooms and asked to provide input on the following:

1. Does local federation have a land use committee or board or commodity members who are active on an Agricultural Advisory Committee?
2. Does local federation review upper and lower tier planning changes that affect agricultural properties?
3. How involved is the local Federation in reviewing Official Plans?
4. If your local federation was interested in getting more involved in your local Official Plan review, is there any information you can think of that OFA could provide to help you with this?

Summary of breakout room discussions attached in separate document.

Adjournment

Patrick Verkley summarized that the takeaway from today's discussions is the question of ownership. OFA will always be there to support the counties, let's not just tell the OFA Board what we want but take ownership ourselves.