



Administrative Report

Office of the Director of Council & Community Services/Clerk

To: Warden McNamara and Members of Essex County Council

From: Mary Birch
Director of Council & Community Services/Clerk

Date: Wednesday, October 20, 2021

Subject: Agricultural Community Liaison

Report #: 2021-1006-CCS-R09-MB

Purpose

To recommend opportunities for the agricultural community to communicate concerns and liaison with municipalities within the County.

Background

The Warden was contacted by the Essex County Federation of Agriculture (ECFA), seeking a forum to discuss ongoing concerns and challenges the local agriculture community face, as a result of municipal decisions being made without adequate consultation with agriculture representatives.

Warden McNamara and the Director of Council and Community Services/Clerk met with members of the Executive of the Essex County Federation of Agriculture on September 15, 2021.

A brief history of a previous Agricultural Liaison Committee was provided. That Committee was formed in 2006, comprised of a political representative from each of the local municipalities, as well as a representative from the ECFA, Essex County Christian Farmer Federation and the local branch of the National Farmers Union. The Committee was not successful due to difficulty in getting a quorum and it was found that most of the items brought up for discussion were not within the jurisdiction of the County. Matters of

drainage and pesticide by-laws were examples of areas of concern at that time.

The ECFA members explained that they were seeking the opportunity to participate in the planning stages of matters that municipalities make decisions on, which can impact the agriculture community significantly. Involvement in the early consultation stages of matters related to road infrastructure and land use planning were noted to be of the utmost importance.

Examples such as road and bridge infrastructure being constructed which will not accommodate the size of modern farm equipment; construction related road closures of routes necessary to access farms and grain elevators during harvest; and long term planning decisions which allow urban sprawl, loss of farm land and incompatible land uses were all cited as areas which the ECFA members would like to develop an avenue for better communication and consultation.

Discussion

Recognizing of the importance of the agricultural industry within the region, Administration understands the need to improve communications with the ECFA and to ensure they are given opportunities to provide input into municipal decisions impacting that sector.

Within the region, there are a number of established Committees, comprised of administrative professionals from the various municipal service areas who meet quite regularly. Meetings of the municipal Planners, Treasurers, Tax Collectors, Clerks, Infrastructure Services, CWATS, etc. are already meeting to discuss sector specific common issues. In addition, whether it be a legislative requirement or not, it is common practice within the municipal sector to provide opportunities for public consultation and feedback on proposed new initiatives.

County Administration recommends utilizing the existing administrative municipal committees to provide the ECFA with the opportunity to be more involved at the planning level of municipal initiatives which impact their sector.

In order to accomplish this, it is recommended that the organizers of the regional administrative committees dealing with land use planning, road infrastructure, active transportation, drainage and any other Committee which may be dealing with an issue impacting the agriculture sector, be

requested to extend an invitation to the ECFA to attend meetings which contain items of potential impact to agriculture. Recognizing that not all these committees have a need to meet on a regular basis, it would be recommended that the ECFA be invited to at least two meetings per year, to be given the opportunity to raise any concerns from the agriculture community.

Additionally, to ensure that the ECFA is aware of all scheduled public open houses, public information sessions, public surveys, etc. which are scheduled by municipalities within Essex County for the purpose of public consultation, it is recommended that a copy of this report and a request be made to the communications departments of each municipality, requesting that they advise the ECFA of best practices for ensuring they receive notification of such events within their municipality. Many municipalities provide the option of subscribing to receive automatic notifications or utilize social media to reach interested individuals and organizations.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications to be noted.

Recommendation

That Essex County Council support improved communication and engagement of the agriculture sector within the region;

And further that, County Administration be directed to circulate a copy of report number 2021-1006-CCS-R09-MB to the local municipalities within the region, requesting cooperation in ensuring the Essex County Federation of Agriculture be given the opportunity to consult with administrative committees and notified of opportunities for public consultation on matters affecting the agriculture sector, as recommended in the said Report.

Respectfully Submitted

Mary Birch

Mary Birch Director of Council & Community Services/Clerk

Concurred With,

Mike Galloway

Mike Galloway, Chief Administrative Officer