

Agricultural Advisory Committees: A link to your farm community



Starting a Successful Agricultural Advisory Committee

First steps

- Make contact with Ministry of Agriculture staff to discuss AAC formation.
- Speak to other jurisdictions with AACs about their experience.
- Identify agricultural groups in the area.
- Assign specific staff to provide on-going support and ensure the AAC functions smoothly. Many communities assign a planner and secretarial support. These staff can help distribute information to AAC members, book meeting rooms, and record and forward minutes and decisions to the council or board.
- Develop a clear “terms of reference” for the AAC, while providing a degree of flexibility so that it can meet local needs. See <http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf/aac/package.htm> for a model terms of reference.

Appointing members

- To gain the best advice on agricultural issues, at least two-thirds of the AAC members should be farmers. Appointments should represent a cross-section of commodity types that are important within the community the AAC serves. Where relevant, include a representative from the agricultural processing or distribution sector.
- Contact agricultural groups for advice on possible AAC appointments and discuss the relationship that the AAC will have with each group. Ideally, a broad-based agricultural group will nominate AAC members from its membership. If not, local agricultural groups could nominate most members and elected officials could appoint a few members.
- Discuss possible appointments with Ministry of Agriculture staff.
- Ensure that a strong, committed Chair person is available to lead the AAC. Consider designating a member of the agricultural community as Chair to encourage fruitful discussion and effective decision-making.
- To establish a solid link between the AAC and the council or regional board, appoint a council or board member to be responsible for staying updated on the AAC’s activities and reporting back to the council or board.
- Consider appointing a university representative involved with agricultural courses or research.
- If the agricultural area includes other major land uses such as rural residential, forestry or recreation, consider including people that represent these interests, but ensure that farmers remain the majority of the membership.
- Where there are inter-related issues and a local government has several committees, consider having joint meetings or “cross-over” committee members. For example, there is often a strong relationship between agriculture and economic development. Members could be appointed to sit on both the AAC and economic development committees or commissions. Other examples include environment, planning advisory, parks and recreation, transportation, or healthy community committees.
- Non-voting AAC members could include municipal or regional district planning staff and secretarial staff, Ministry of Agriculture staff and Agricultural Land Commission staff and council or board members.
- Set term limits for AAC appointments and indicate the number of times an individual can be renewed. Jurisdictions with few farmers may want to choose longer term limits.
- Specifically, consider limiting the term of office for the Chair to keep things fresh and build leadership capacity.

Once the AAC is formed

- Put the best interests of agriculture forward and be a credible source of agriculture-related information for the council or board.
- Have patience, as it often takes time for new AACs to “find their feet” and for the council or board to feel comfortable with its new committee. Don’t get discouraged!

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Best Practices for Agricultural Advisory Committees

- Plan meeting times with daily and seasonal farming schedules in mind. It may make sense to have less frequent meetings during planting and harvest, or evening meetings.
- Establish and follow conflict of interest guidelines so that members understand when they should leave the discussion. Where applicable, the *Community Charter* conflict of interest guidelines should be followed (http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/03026_04).
- Make sure the local government staff liaison contacts the AAC members regularly, especially when meetings are infrequent. One way to do so is through monthly emails.
- Encourage the AAC to tackle day-to-day issues as well as broader initiatives. Note: If the AAC is an official Advisory Planning Committee under section 898 of the *Local Government Act*, the AAC’s activities need to be outlined in a bylaw. Any additional activities need to be directed by the council or board.
- Maintain a clear, effective relationship between the AAC and council or regional board and provide frequent updates on AAC activities. When possible, connect with council or regional board members informally through lunches and other social engagements.
- For other key committees or commissions, appoint an AAC member to act as liaison.
- Connect with the farm community beyond AAC members (see below for ideas).



Additional Ways for Local Governments to Link to the Farm Community



- Appoint farm representatives to advisory planning commissions and other committees.
- Seek the advice of farmers' institutes and commodity groups.
- Maintain contact with staff at the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Land Commission.
- Appoint a council or board member as the farm/ranch liaison.
- Designate a specific staff person to focus on agricultural issues.
- Coordinate farm tours and on-farm workshops for local government staff, politicians and/or the public.

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Provincial Support for Agricultural Advisory Committees

The Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission support AACs by making knowledgeable personnel available and by sharing information.

- Staff can be available to attend AAC meetings as non-voting technical resource members.
- The Strengthening Farming website (<http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf/aac/index.htm>) has a number of resources including a model terms of reference, a sample volunteer's contract and "The AAC Information Exchange" where AACs can post resources to share with one another.
- The Ministry of Agriculture hosts biennial AAC workshops. Information about previous workshops is available at: <http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf/aac/wrkshps.htm>.

**For more information on Agricultural Advisory Committees,
contact the Strengthening Farming Program at the Ministry of Agriculture!**

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AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES



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What is an Agricultural Advisory Committee?

Agricultural Advisory Committees (AACs) are an effective way for local governments to link with their farm and ranch communities. An AAC is appointed and functions similarly to other advisory committees of councils or regional boards. A key asset is that the AAC members are predominantly drawn from the farm and ranching community and the committee focuses on agricultural issues. Over 40 local governments have appointed AACs to work with councils and regional boards and their staff. For a current list of AACs, see: <http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf/aac/list.htm>.

Agricultural Advisory Committee Activities

Local governments with AACs have access to the advice of knowledgeable members of the farm community in a timely manner, on any issue that might affect agriculture. Although each AAC functions slightly differently, most advise local governments in two broad areas: day-to-day issues and broader initiatives.

Day-to-Day Issues:

- review proposed bylaws and official plans and rezoning applications
- advise on applications under the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*
- share insight on water supply and drainage issues
- give feedback on the effectiveness of insect and weed control programs
- provide input on parks and recreation, transportation, growth management plans and other land use proposals that impact agriculture

Broader Initiatives:

- steer agricultural studies, economic plans, and agricultural area plans to completion
- assist with implementation of the plans for the agriculture and food sectors
- assist with the development of agricultural edge policies to enhance land use compatibility
- advise on the need for and appropriateness of farm bylaws
- steer studies and reports on farm infrastructure needs
- propose local government policies related to farming
- advise on opportunities for joint funding of drainage or irrigation works
- steer studies on the impacts of transportation corridors and park and recreation proposals
- raise agricultural awareness
- assist with farm tours and on-farm visits
- contribute to Agriculture in the Classroom initiatives