

Clause 18 in Report No.5 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on March 26, 2015.

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York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group
2015 Terms of Reference

Committee of the Whole recommends adoption of the following recommendation contained in the report dated February 24, 2015 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner:

1. Council approve a revised Terms of Reference for the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group (Attachment 1).

1. Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. Council approve a revised Terms of Reference for the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group (Attachment 1).

2. Purpose

This report updates Council on the activities of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group and seeks Council approval of a revised Terms of Reference to guide this group's mandate for the next four years (see Attachment 1).

3. Background

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group was established by Regional Council in 2001 to provide advice on the protection and promotion of agriculture and farming in the Region

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group is a volunteer advisory committee that was created by Regional Council in 2001 as a means to support the agricultural industry and promote healthy rural communities. The group is similar to agricultural advisory committees that have been established in the Regions of Halton, Peel and Durham.

The goals of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group are to:

- Assist The Regional Municipality of York in its efforts to protect agricultural lands as a natural resource of importance to the economic viability of the Region
- Recognize and promote York Region's farmers and agricultural organizations as valuable contributors to the community and the economy of the Region
- Promote healthy rural communities that contain living, working and recreational opportunities, and that respect the natural environment and resources

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group plays an important role in overseeing initiatives that connect residents to local farmers and markets, creating opportunities for engaging the agricultural community in addressing regulatory challenges, and assisting farmers with issues that affect their ability to successfully operate their businesses.

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group is governed by a Terms of Reference approved by Regional Council

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group's Terms of Reference determine its composition and operational guidelines. The group is required to meet quarterly, at a minimum, and individuals, interest groups or organizations may be invited to appear at any meeting as a delegation, or to submit/present information that will assist the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group in fulfilling its mandate. Meetings are typically held at the Regional Administrative Centre.

A need to revise the Terms of Reference to allow more functionality and flexibility has been identified

The original Terms of Reference for the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group were drafted during its formation in 2001 and were last updated in 2011. Those revisions addressed the need to:

- Reduce required membership numbers from specific groups
- Diversify the membership and mandate to include local food and urban agriculture
- Make minor refinements that reflect current practices and procedures that seek to minimize process requirements

The current York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group membership has determined that now is an ideal time, at the start of a new term of Council, to suggest further revisions to the Terms of Reference that will ensure the work of the group remains current and to assist in the effective operation of the committee.

4. Analysis and Options

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group has been helping to promote agriculture and local food

Over the past several years, the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group has been involved in numerous activities that are important in the promotion and protection of agriculture in York Region. It is instrumental in the development, oversight and promotion of the York Region Farm Fresh initiatives, which include the design and development of Farm Fresh maps and the annual York Region Pumpkin Pie Trail event. Plans are to continue with promotions and actively pursue revitalizing York Region Farm Fresh with York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group assistance.

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group also played a major role in the development and distribution of York Region's Farm Business Survey and led the planning and development of the 2014 York Region Agri-business Tour - which raised awareness of the regulatory challenges faced by the many farmers and food-processing operators located in York Region.

The Group has also been collaboratively involved in addressing broader agriculture policy issues

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group also works in collaboration with the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA), which includes the:

- Niagara Agricultural Policy and Action Committee
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
- Friends of the Greenbelt
- Ontario Ministry of Food and Agriculture
- Regions of Durham, Halton, Niagara, Peel, York and Cities of Hamilton and Toronto, and
- local representatives from the food and farming industry

In 2012, the GHFFA released the *Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021*, which identifies pathways for a more integrated and coordinated approach to food and farming viability in the area to ensure that the Golden Horseshoe retains, enhances and expands its role as a leading food and farming cluster. Through the GHFFA, the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group has contributed to the development of broader farm-supportive policies and initiatives.

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group will assist in the reviews of the Provincial *Greenbelt Plan*, the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* and the Regional Official Plan Update

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group will be engaged in the reviews of the Ontario *Greenbelt Plan*, the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* and the Regional Official Plan Update; to take place in 2015. It will act as a commenting group, providing advice to assist York Region in understanding the directions and implications of proposed policy changes on the local agricultural industry.

It is clear that the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group plays an important role within York Region and it is imperative that their work continue.

The evolving and expanding role of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group and the resulting need for more frequent meetings has prompted a review of the Terms of Reference

Over the past two years the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group has met more frequently and taken on more initiatives and action items than in the past. This has placed greater time demands on the volunteer membership, resulting in many meetings proceeding without quorum, due to time constraints

or scheduling conflicts. Also, as the group has become more active, there is an increased need to expedite the adoption of meeting minutes and decisions and actions contained within. However, there is presently no process in the Terms of Reference which allow for this to take place. As a result, the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group is concerned it is unable to effectively provide timely support due to limitations around membership and appointments.

Members have endorsed proposed changes to the Terms of Reference

Regional Planning and Economic Development staff reviewed the current Terms of Reference with Regional Clerks staff to discuss the allowable range of revisions that can be made. These discussions resulted in the creation of a proposed amended Terms of Reference, which was then vetted and endorsed by the current York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group members during a meeting on January 27, 2015.

The proposed Terms of Reference include four (4) revisions and one (1) addition as listed below:

Revisions:

1. Goals – add a new goal to the current list that addresses the need to strengthen the public’s understanding of the connections between food, local agriculture and sustainability
2. Membership structure – allow alternates to represent the appointed members in various categories to facilitate quorum when members are not available to attend meetings
3. Voting rules for motions and adoption of minutes – allow voting on motions, adopting meeting minutes and passing resolutions via teleconference
4. Terms of Appointees – increase member appointment term from three (3) years to four (4) years to align with terms of Council and, if necessary, allow appointees to extend their term until a successor is appointed

Addition:

1. Terms of Reference review timelines – add a provision requiring a review of the Terms of Reference every four years to align with terms of Council

Attachment 2 provides further detail on the proposed changes to the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group’s Terms of Reference.

Link to key Council-approved plans

The mandate and activities of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group support the 'Manage Environmentally Sustainable Growth' strategic priority area of the *2015 to 2019 Strategic Plan*, and directly contribute to success measures around maintaining lands subject to environmental protection and increasing environmental lands secured through Regional Greening Strategy programs.

They also support the policies identified in 'Chapter 6 – Agricultural and Rural Areas' of the *York Region Official Plan - 2010*, and are key to achieving the *Vision 2051* goal area of 'A Resilient Natural Environment and Agricultural System'.

5. Financial Implications

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group is supported by two York Region staff in the Planning and Economic Development Branch of the Corporate Services Department – one each from Long Range Planning and Economic Strategy. Staff and administrative support costs are absorbed into the departmental budget. Therefore there are no financial implications arising from this report.

6. Local Municipal Impact

The mandate of the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group supports and complements the goals and interests of all the Region's municipal partners. Given these shared interests, staff from the Region's municipal partners have been, and will continue to be, engaged in the activities initiatives undertaken by the group.

7. Conclusion

Agriculture has played an important role in the local economy since the first towns and villages were established in York Region and will continue to do so well into the future. The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group was formed by Council in 2001 as a means to support the agricultural industry and promote healthy rural communities. Through the group, input and ideas are gathered and actioned to help the Region and its municipal partners support the rural economy.

York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group 2015 Terms of Reference

Through a range of initiatives that include connecting residents to local farmers, assisting farmers with business supports, and engaging the agricultural community in addressing regulatory challenges, the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group strives to help raise awareness about and support a thriving agricultural economy in York Region.

Revising the group's Terms of Reference to allow a more efficient process for adopting actions will enhance this advisory liaison group's ability to fulfil its mandate.

For more information on this report, please contact Charles Banfield, Policy and Project Development Specialist at ext. 71520, or Doug Lindeblom, Director, Economic Strategy at ext. 71503.

Attachments (2)

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Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request

York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group Terms of Reference

Description

The York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group (AALG) is an advisory committee established by Regional Council in accordance with these Terms of Reference. AALG members are bound by these Terms of Reference and are ultimately responsible to Regional Council. The AALG will report to Regional Council through the Planning and Economic Development Committee.

Goals

The goals of the AALG are:

- To assist The Regional Municipality of York in its efforts to protect agricultural lands as a natural resource of major importance to the economic viability of the Region.
- To recognize and promote York Region's farmers and agricultural organizations as valuable contributors to the community and the economy of the Region.
- To promote healthy rural communities that contain living, working, and recreational opportunities, and that respect the natural environment and resources.
- To strengthen the public's understanding of the connections between food, local agriculture and sustainability.

Mandate

The mandate of the AALG is to provide advice and expertise to Council and staff regarding agriculture, food and rural issues in York Region.

This mandate will be fulfilled by:

- a) Soliciting issues and concerns of York Region's farming industry, agricultural organizations, community groups and rural citizenry and making recommendations to Regional Council, as necessary.

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- b) Providing input on how agricultural and rural issues can be incorporated into goals, objectives and policies in the review of Official Plans.
- c) Advising or assisting Regional Council on implementation of Regional and local municipal Official Plan policies and programs.
- d) Providing a forum for the exchange of information on agricultural and rural issues and initiatives and advising Regional Council and staff on potential concerns.
- e) Encouraging public awareness and education regarding agricultural and rural issues, including urban agriculture practices.
- f) Providing recommendations for tools to ensure agricultural land is available for growing and producing local food and other agricultural products that are accessible to York Region residents and neighbouring communities.
- g) Reviewing studies, plans and proposals referred by Regional Council or staff and providing comments on agricultural and rural impacts.
- h) Providing comments and recommendations on legislation, programs and funding from Provincial departments and other agencies that affect agricultural and rural issues in York Region.

Membership

1. Composition

The AALG will consist of seven (7) members who are appointed for a term of four (4) years to coincide with the term of Regional Council.

The members shall be appointed as follows:

- Regional Council: one (1) appointee, plus one (1) alternate
- York Federation of Agriculture: one (1) appointee, plus one (1) alternate
- Other agricultural groups in York Region: three (3) appointees, plus three (3) alternates
- York Region Food Network: one (1) appointee, plus one (1) alternate
- Citizens at large: one (1) appointee, plus one (1) alternate

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2. Qualifications

The representatives of these organizations or agencies should have qualifications, interests, abilities that will support delivery of the AALG's mandate and must also be willing to devote the necessary time to the AALG. The members-at-large should possess expertise, experience and willingness to liaise with the range of agencies, organizations and interest groups represented on the AALG and represent the interests of the broader community rather than a specific interest group. Additional individuals and agencies are encouraged to attend the meetings and participate in discussions; however, only the membership will carry voting privileges.

3. Terms of Office

All members shall be limited to a maximum of two (2) terms. However, if a successor is not available at the end of a member's maximum allowable term, his or her term may be extended until a successor is appointed. Members-at-large will be limited to residents of York Region; however, organization representatives are not required to be residents of York Region.

4. Recruitment

All citizens and any nominated representatives of organizations involved in agricultural and rural issues are invited to apply. Applicants will submit their application to The Regional Municipality of York Planning and Economic Development Branch of the Corporate Services Department.

5. Appointment of Chair

The AALG Chair shall be appointed by the membership at the first meeting of the Liaison Group each year, and shall serve for the remainder of the calendar year. A member may hold the Chair position for a maximum of four (4) years.

6. Resignations

Any resignation of a member during the term of the AALG must be given in writing to the AALG Chair, who will advise Regional Council through the Planning and Economic Development Committee.

In order to maintain a high level of commitment, members may be required to resign if they or their alternate have been absent for more than two (2) consecutive meetings without good cause.

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The AALG Chair shall submit requests to appoint new or additional members of the AALG in the middle of a term to Regional Council.

Meetings

A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum. In instances where quorum has not been achieved or when timely adoption of meeting minutes is required, this can be accomplished via teleconference.

The AALG shall meet on a quarterly basis, with additional meetings as required. AALG meeting agendas will be made available online a week in advance. Meetings may be held in various locations throughout York Region, however, meetings will generally be held at the Regional Administrative Centre in Newmarket.

Meetings shall be open to the public.

The AALG, by resolution or through its Chair, may invite any individual, interest group, agency or consultant to appear at a meeting as a delegation or to submit or present information, which will assist the AALG in carrying out its mandate.

Staff Support

Staff of the York Region Planning and Economic Development Branch of the Corporate Services Department will be designated to provide administrative, procedural or technical assistance for the AALG. Regional staff will co-ordinate involvement of other Regional Departments and agencies as necessary, and prepare reports as required by the work of the AALG.

Expenses for the normal ongoing work of the AALG shall be provided as part of the Regional Municipality of York operating budget.

Local municipal and senior government staff may be invited to participate in an advisory non-voting capacity.

Conduct and Procedures

1. General

Where not specified in these Terms of Reference, conduct and procedures of the AALG will be governed by the relevant sections of York Region Procedure By-Law 2014-81 (as revised).

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2. Conflict of Interest

For the purposes of the AALG, the principals of the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* regarding the existence and declaration of a conflict of interest shall apply to all members. Any member who has a direct or indirect pecuniary interest in a matter before the AALG is required, prior to consideration of the matter at the meeting, to declare the interest and disclose the general nature of the interest. The member shall abstain from the decision-making process by not participating in discussion or voting with respect to the matter at issue, and shall not attempt in any way, whether before, during, or after the meeting, to influence the voting on the matter. The onus for declaring a conflict of interest rests solely with the individual member.

3. Delegations

Requests by any person wishing to appear before the AALG as a delegation must be forwarded to the Planning and Economic Development Branch of Regional Corporate Services Department, advising staff of the topic or item to which they wish to speak. It is preferable that this should be completed at least five (5) days prior to the meeting in order that the delegation may be included in the Agenda.

Any persons wishing to address the AALG as a delegation, and who are not listed as a delegation in the Agenda, may be granted permission to do so by majority vote of the AALG Membership.

4. Meeting Minutes and Resolutions

Minutes of AALG meetings will be forwarded as part of regular Planning and Economic Development Committee agendas.

All AALG resolutions addressed to Regional Council shall be submitted to the next scheduled Planning and Economic Development Committee in a staff report or memo. The official record of the resolution shall be as it appears in the AALG meeting minutes.

5. Amendments to the Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference are to be reviewed at the start of each term of Regional Council, unless otherwise deemed necessary. Amendments to these Terms of Reference must be approved by Regional Council.

**Table 1: Proposed York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group
Terms of Reference Changes**

Goals		
Current	Proposed Addition	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assist in efforts to protect agricultural lands 2. Recognize and promote the economic contributions of local agriculture 3. Promote healthy rural communities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Strengthen public understanding of the connection between food, local agriculture and sustainability 	
Membership Structure		
Member Category	Current Number of Members	Proposed Number of Members
Regional Council	one (1) appointee	one (1) appointee, plus one (1) alternate
York Federation of Agriculture	one (1) appointee	one (1) appointee, plus one (1) alternate
Other agricultural groups in York Region	two (2) appointees	three (3) appointees, plus three (3) alternates
York Region Food Network	one (1) appointee	one (1) appointee, plus one (1) alternate
Citizens at Large	one (1) appointee	one (1) appointee, plus one (1) alternate
Voting Rules for Motions and Adoption of Minutes		
Current	Proposed	
“Only resolutions as they appear in the amended and adopted minutes may be considered as officially representing the positions of the Committee.”	Allow the option of voting on motions, adopting meeting minutes and passing resolutions via teleconference in instances where quorum has not been achieved and/or a timely decision is required	
Terms of Appointees		
Current	Proposed	
All York Region Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group members are appointed for a term of three (3) years and that all members are limited to a maximum of two (2) terms	<p>York Region Agriculture Advisory Liaison Group members are appointed for a term of four (4) years, to match the current term length of Regional Council</p> <p>Appointees be allowed, if necessary, to extend their term until a successor is appointed</p>	
Terms of Reference Review Timelines		
Current	Proposed	
No guidelines	These Terms of Reference be henceforth reviewed, amended as necessary, and approved by Regional Council every four (4) years, to coincide with terms of Regional Council	