

Roston Comments to Planning Committee – March 20, 2018.

BC Government Update

Laura Gillanders and I met last week in Victoria with the Leader of the Green Party and the Assistant to the Minister of Finance to discuss what measures the BC Government can take to address the current mega mansions on farmland crisis. I subsequently spoke with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Agriculture. The budget speech did not extend the 20% Foreign Buyers Tax to industrial land and farmland due to provisions in international tax treaties. Any provincial legislation beyond what was in the budget speech, including regulation of house and home plate size on farmland, will take a year or more due to the complexities involved, during which time many more mansions will be built. Almost everyone to whom we have spoken in the provincial government pointed out that **Richmond City Council is the only body that can act immediately** to stop this destruction of farmland by non-farmers.

Objectives

At a recent Council meeting, the Mayor asked if the objective of limiting the size of a residence on farmland is to avoid covering up farmland. The answer is that it is one of two objectives. The other objective is to discourage non-farmers from building huge residences on farmland. **Farmers should be able to live on their farm** and they can't do that if the entire farm home plate is taken up by the residence of a non-farmer, a huge residence that they will never be able to afford to buy.

Current House Size Limit

The farmland owners insist that the current house size limit set by Council of 10,764 sq.ft. is not a huge mansion and that the pictures of huge mansions shown in the media are much larger mansions approved before the new limit was passed by Council. Here is a picture of a **huge mansion** at 12791 Blundell **approved under the new rules after the new bylaw was passed**. At 9,504 sq.ft., it already looks more like a hotel than a residence without adding another 1,260 sq.ft. allowed under the new rules.



Variances for Farmers

Richmond has many zoning bylaws and citizens often want to exceed the limits they set. They apply for variances all the time. Farmers who genuinely require larger houses or home plates to support their farming activities can apply for a variance. **We all support farmers in their farming activities, but there is no reason why they can't play by the same rules as everyone else.**

Staff Report

This is an excellent staff report that obviously involved a great deal of work in a very short time frame. It points out the dramatic difference in opinion between 408 non-farmers and 95 farmers. For the most part, the farmers

are speaking as real estate investors who are trying to maximize the value of their farms. They are entitled to do that, but **their motives should be kept in mind**. The non-farmers are speaking as voters who want to preserve farmland for future generations.

The Options

The staff report shows that a 10,764 sq.ft. home plate limit, including septic field, should limit the house size to 6,500 sq.ft. However, this size of house is large enough to attract many non-farmers looking to build a country estate. Not specifying a house size limit invites developers to seek out loopholes that result in an even larger house, much like their recent attempt to use non-rectilinear home plates.

Richmond FarmWatch has proposed a 3,229 sq.ft. house size limit and 10,764 sq.ft. home plate limit, including septic field, for all farms. Other citizen groups have proposed a 5,382 sq.ft. house size limit, the BC Government guideline, which is listed in the staff report as Option 1. They are both considerably larger than the average Richmond house. **Anything larger will allow the current crisis to continue.**

