

Jim Wright to parks committee, July 18, 2013.

In their own quiet way, the Garden City Lands are one of the world's great urban parks. I'll review that quickly and then get to the relevance.

It's a great urban park because of natural legacies such as the natural viewsapes and restorable sphagnum bog, unique for a city centre. It's also great because of the community, not just nature. When our lands were under threat, Councillor Steves led the way, and the response came especially from the protectors of the poorest among us. Along with Kwantlen University, they set out to show how marginally fertile land can enable food security. They are a reason IESCO chose us as a model city for the world and a reason the park is the perfect place to celebrate Richmond's agricultural legacy and British Columbia's ALR legacy. The lands embody the best of the Garden City.

With those great natural and human legacies, we mostly need to gratefully respect what we have, to do no harm and to take careful enabling action. For example, that includes adding needed farm roads where they can also serve as trails, borders, hydrology aids, and (at wider parts) places for gathering and interpretive features.

When the park-enhancement plan was presented here last September, I saw a plan for respecting, enhancing and not harming the park, starting with a biophysical inventory and analysis to build on existing knowledge.

Ten months later, I still support the project. However, the update report reminds us the project hasn't quite delivered on the initial steps. Troubleshooting is someone else's role, but I think the problems come from higher up in the city hierarchy.

Step 1 was Inventory and Analysis. The results were to be shared *before* the open houses. They're still not on the web or in the agenda package, even in an early form. Also, the Ideas Fair boards showed little that's new and sometimes even regressed. For instance, they understated the peat depth, which averages a metre in the relevant area in the only available test results. That happens to be crucial for sphagnum regeneration. The info also says the lands are 136.5 acres, but that's only the area of *the No. 4 Road lot*. Either the unpaved parts of the other two lots bring the area to over 140 acres or parts of the lands will be amputated. We need to know which.

Step 2 was Opportunities and Constraints. The page of “key findings” in their place is unremarkable except for the last one: “Expressing creativity through art pieces, engaging events, festivals, and performances are key to evolution of a 'great place' destination.” That seems to go beyond ALR uses.

Step 3 was Guiding Principles. That looks mostly okay to me. However, I'm concerned to see art projects, which can fine, being emphasized at the expense of a vision of a beautiful park, which is what people want. It's a key reason why saving the Lands got such wide support.

The guiding principles are surprisingly good under the circumstances imposed on the team. Evidently, some City of Richmond higher-ups decided the Garden City Lands are an empty lot with no legacies, only Timbits of history, and limitless uses. That's different from the sound approach of *clarifying* realities such as the nature of the lands, the legacies from the past, the results of the vast consultation that already occurred, and the fact that the ALR values of the lands are confirmed and legally protected. That would have enabled focused studies and productive consultation. As it is, we see well-meaning citizens coming up with plans that are non-uses, which is a waste of time.

A positive is that the Ideas Fair brought citizens onto the Lands, and I much appreciate that the Garden City Conservation Society was welcomed there and set up with a table, which optimized our usefulness. However, the project still needs a foundation from Steps 1 and 2. *Large* gaps still need to be filled.

The wealth of citizen expertise also remains largely untapped, probably because it was incompatible with the non-ALR uses the team had to entertain. In any case, there's no obstacle to tapping it now.

I'm especially speaking for the Garden City Conservation Society. Our community service group is informed and open to all uses of the lands, since non-ALR uses are NON-uses. We are well disposed toward the project team, and we remain willing to help in ways that use our time well.

Let's succeed together.