

Schedule 94 to the Minutes of the Public Hearing meeting of Richmond City Council held on Monday, December 17, 2018.



December 14, 2018

To: Mayor and Councillors  
To: John Hopkins, Planning & Development

**RE: DEC. 17<sup>TH</sup> PUBLIC MEETING SUBMISSION**  
**Richmond Zoning Bylaw 8500 and Amendment Bylaws 9965, 9966, 9967 & 9968**

We write to you as 3<sup>rd</sup> generation farmers and life-long residents of Richmond. We feel this whole issue of house size is getting out of hand and some common sense is needed.

If you vote for this new proposal, you're sending the farming community a clear message that you only support small scale farmers and one type of farming, and that you're willing to throw your established farmers under the bus. The reality is, if you don't support your larger farms who produce most of the food, then you're not looking towards "food security".

The rules apply to lots that are .5 acre and up. There is a huge difference in what a .5 acre lot looks like compared to one that is 50+ acres. Why should a house on a 50 acre lot have the same restrictions as one on .5 acre?

Blanket resolutions placed on farmland may look good on paper, but they don't work in real life. Current building rules are now forcing the new home into a corner, moving onto farmable land, and crowding existing neighbours. Old building sites are better sites for a new home. Each large lot is unique and should be assessed separately.

We live in a modest 3000 sq.ft. rancher. Our home plate is .75 acre and includes the septic field. Our house is busy – sometimes we have just enough room, sometimes not enough. We hold meetings, gatherings and out-of-town friends stay with us. Our elderly mother is moving in with us soon. We will be tight for space.

Numbers have been thrown out there to restrict housing on farmland, but our question is "What about us?" If we had to rebuild in the future, we assume we need to comply with the new rules. At our age and looking to the future, now is NOT the time in our life to be adding stairs. Our preference would still be a one level rancher.

**The new ALR rules** would allow a maximum house size of 5382 sq.ft. Since Richmond has a 60% house footprint rule, we would only be allowed a rancher of 3229 sq.ft. which is a little bigger than what we have now. The ALC does not specify how many levels the house must have, nor do they deal with septic system placement.

**The proposed only-in-Richmond rules** would restrict house size to a maximum of 4305 sq.ft, which would only allow us a rancher of 2583 sq.ft., which is quite a bit smaller than what we have. Not only that, but the new proposals restrict our home plate to .247 acre which would include the septic field. This effectively makes our entire yard a septic field. Not acceptable.

**We find the proposed rules to be OVERLY HARSH AND PUNISHING!** And why are WE being punished in the first place? Ever get the feeling that you stayed too long at the party?

IF farmers are actually important to Richmond, why are you not taking us into account when you put up restrictions that stifle our growth? More stock should be taken in what the volunteer members of the AAC and Farmers Institute recommend.

Shouldn't the bylaws be written to first and foremost, protect the farming community, and all others have to be the ones to apply for the variances, instead of the other way around? It was stated at a prior meeting that the variance process costs about \$15,000 with no guarantee of outcome. When you create bylaws to stop other people from taking advantage, we are the ones that have to live with the consequences.

**There are other issues that need to be addressed:**

One is that the price of farmland needs to be reduced to the point where a new farmer can afford to purchase it. Another is that to attain food security we must save every square foot of farmland. Another is that we need to grow more fruits and vegetables to feed ourselves. We feel these issues are getting blown out of proportion.

**Common sense tells me that IF you reduce the price of farmland, more non-farmers would buy up the land.** An acre of farmland still costs less than a residential lot and you get more for your money. Real estate is a legitimate investment and no city bylaws can change that. Leasing land makes more sense as a farm business needs cash flow.

In Richmond, we have no shortage of food security. With our plethora of grocery stores, year round produce markets, and during harvest, seasonal markets, fruit/veg stands, farmers markets, we have overabundance. We easily import food that we can't grow here. This idea of growing everything to feed ourselves is not realistic, and not possible due to our climate.

During the harvest season, we already have so much waste. Growing more vegetables now as suggested will only add to the waste, and will take sales away from other farmers. When supply exceeds demand, it means that all farmers will receive a lower price. We need to save the land for the future, but overcropping it now is not the key. We need fresh crops during the winter, but that can't be accomplished in Richmond by soil based farming. In our climate, winter farming can only happen in greenhouses or soil-free indoor farming.

**Full time farmers** farm the majority of acreage in Richmond and collectively put millions of dollars back into the economy each year. We supply markets with local produce and our marketing systems ensure we have access to a variety of food. **Small scale farmers** farm a small acreage in Richmond but grow niche products and create different ways of direct marketing. They interact directly with the public and can be seen as ambassadors of farming. **To be a viable agricultural community, Richmond needs both.** We should be able to co-exist and work together, however too many non-farming groups got involved and have caused a rift.

**It appears that the City is choosing to support one type of farmer over another.** I believe this is happening because there is so much media misinformation. Farmers rarely seek out media attention. Activists use the media to further their causes. Due to this imbalance, the information that the people get is one-sided.

These activists need to take some responsibility for the rash of building that is happening now – this constant threat to keep reducing house/yard sizes has made landowners jump to build now or forever lose the ability to do so. As soon as land-owning-farmers speak out to protect our assets we are portrayed as “greedy”. This is offensive. Yes, we have some expectation that our main asset will increase in value, but that’s no different than anyone buying a house and hoping that it will increase in value. Farmers use their land values as collateral, the same as other homeowners can.

#### **Possible Solution?**

**We are arguing over privately held land. If the public wants to control it, then the City needs to buy the larger tracts of land that come up for sale as farmers retire. Set up a fund now with all the money spent on permits on AG1 land, including property taxes. Ask the people of Richmond who petition to “save our farmland” to contribute their own money towards the fund. Buy the open land, seed it with grass, no pathways, no buildings. Just mow the grass and call it parkland or future farmland.**

**In this way, you can ensure that non-farmers will never own the land. It will not create more perishable crop waste from farming it. It will give the people much needed green space. It will ensure the land is there in the future when we need it. And it can be accomplished without putting the entire financial burden on the farmers. Of course there are hurdles to clear, like working with BC Assessments and the ALC.**

The ALC was asked to set the house size limit at 5,382 sq.ft and that has been set in motion. Even before that becomes the regulation, this number is no longer good enough for some people who keep pushing for smaller and tighter. This new proposal takes a very heavy handed approach and discounts everything the farming community has spoken out about. Richmond does NOT need to set more restrictive rules than the ALC.

When voting, please be fair to your farmers who have to live with the results.

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