

March 11, 2008

To mayor and Council:

My name is Jason O'Brien and I OPPOSE the application to exclude the Garden City Lands from the ALR.

I am currently the Coordinator for the Richmond Food Security Task Force. The RFSTF is an organization that encourages the development of community meals, community gardens, healthy food education and food security programs to families and individuals within Richmond. The RFSTF is composed of Richmond residents and many representatives from government agencies and non-profit societies who deal with public health, food access and poverty issues. It is from the perspectives of these people, who are dealing daily with healthy food access issues in Richmond, along with environmentalists and City Planners from around the world that the demand for renovation to current agri-business practices must begin. We have an incredible opportunity to look at every possible option to create a more sustainable local food production model for Richmond, right here on the Garden City Lands. The preservation of the ALR status on the Garden City Lands will ensure that all land is used for Agriculture and related purposes and is the best option we have to ensure a healthy food future for Richmond residents.

My career in the food security industry began 5 years ago in Vancouver, when I wrote a proposal to create a community garden in one of Vancouver's most urban centres at Broadway Street and Commercial Drive, directly behind the Broadway Skytrain Station. The proposal was met with great enthusiasm and the newly-founded My Own Back Yard (MOBY) Community Assn. was awarded over \$200,000 to develop the much-needed community amenity. Our proposal includes community gardens, playground, green-space and an educational outreach component to local residents about the value of locally-grown food.

MOBY was the first community garden organization to work directly with Vancouver Social and City Planning Staff to develop policy around community gardens and urban agriculture. In February, 2006 Councillor Peter Ladner, put forward a motion calling for the City to work with the Vancouver Food Policy Council to encourage the creation of 2010 new garden plots in the city by January 1, 2010, as an Olympic legacy. Councillor Ladner has also issued a challenge to other municipalities in the GVRD to do the same. The motion was passed unanimously.

Community gardens and other forms of urban agriculture are recognized as important neighbourhood gathering places that promote sustainability, neighbourhood livability, urban greening, community building, intergenerational activity, social interaction, crime reduction, exercise and food production. The 2010 initiative will allow Vancouver and other municipalities to use urban agriculture as a powerful tool to achieve multiple social, environmental and economic benefits. The demand for community gardens in Vancouver has never been greater and Social Planning and Engineering staff, along with residents, have created almost 300 new garden spaces in the last two years. People are raising the bar on their food standards and local, organic food consciousness is growing rapidly.

In June, 2006, policy makers, researchers and professionals met in Vancouver for the World Urban Forum, All agriculture seminars and dialogue highlighted the need for municipal governments to create policy and more opportunity for residents to either grow their own food or have access to local growers. This local food system, exemplified by Cuba out of necessity, is the most sustainable and environmentally conscious model in the world, decreasing the need for long distance transportation and related fuel costs and environmental damage. While reducing harmful emissions, stronger community is created through the inherent health and food knowledge that is passed from local farmers selling directly to local consumers.

Most recently, in a meeting with Richmond's Agriculture community On March 7th, BC's Agriculture Minister, Pat Bell, outlined the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands 2008 Agriculture plan. He stated that the Provincial Government has a strong commitment to the ALR and will hold their position as a message to development groups and development initiatives. He also said that the Provincial Government wants to restructure the agriculture industry in BC to be more self-sufficient, relying less on importing and exporting to other countries and creating an efficient system, starting with agriculture education in classrooms, building more community gardens, supporting Circle Farm Tours and promoting the local agri-tourism industry.

In closing, progressive social and city planners from all over the world to right next door see that localizing the food system is an inevitable action we must take. I encourage you to listen to these growing global and local perspectives and allow the possibility for an amazing urban agriculture example to be made of the entire Garden City Lands by leaving them in the Agriculture Land Reserve.