

The Garden City Lands – Possible uses

After the presentations on the evening of March 11 to City Council, it became apparent to me that some members of the general public did not appreciate the uncertainty regarding the future of the Garden City Lands. Chief Campbell of the Musqueam made it quite clear that the lands had never been farmed and that he, as band chief, was not interested in selling the land at farmland prices. The Musqueam stand to gain far more for their people by selling their remaining 34 acres at current market value (they would already be selling 34 acres to the City for \$2,385,000, as would Canada Land Co., which is \$70,147 per acre, less than 3 per cent of current market value – as the representative of Canada Land Co. said, this is a smoking hot deal) – farm land was valued last night at \$100,000 per acre, and land which can developed for housing and/or commercial purposes is generally valued at \$3,000,000 or more per acre. The Musqueam would receive \$3,400,000 at farm land prices, or \$102,000,000 at commercial rates; Chief Campbell has a duty to his band members to get the best deal for them, so that they can improve their housing, streets, cultural and educational services for the betterment of all band members. A difference of almost \$100,000,000 in sale value would be unacceptable to the Musqueam. They hold aboriginal title to the lands, so farming, parks or any other use of the lands depends on their agreement.

The parties involved in this ongoing debate over the future of the Garden City Lands seem to take an either/or attitude: either farm the land, or develop the land for residential, commercial and public uses. There is an increasing tone of cynicism by the farming proponents towards council and its intentions. This meeting is an example of democracy at work, and I would like to remind everyone that elections are coming. My wife and I are a microcosm of the disparate views of Richmond residents: she wants the lands left as they are – completely untouched, while I prefer the concept of green space coupled with housing. I should mention that she also was called for the telephone survey and was frustrated by the lack of non-development options in the survey. In true

Canadian spirit, we agreed to disagree. I feel that instead of viewing the Garden City Lands in a two dimensional way, why couldn't the objectives of both groups be met by broadening our perspectives to include truly "green" buildings- ones with gardens on their roofs and balconies and rainwater catchment systems? I was at a United Way ceremony in January where an award was given to "The Biggest Little Garden in Town". I quote: "...a container garden project in New Westminster that teaches and encourages residents to grow vegetables and fruit in small areas. The project provides containers, soil, seeds, instruction and support free of charge to any individual or community group with space. Participants sign an agreement promising that no food will be wasted. They are to share any extra food with friends or neighbours. People gain an opportunity to socialize with others in their community. Many low-income families now have access to healthy food. Seniors are less isolated when they participate in the project. The program has increased food production, improved neighbourhood livability and demonstrated that personal responsibility can play a role in addressing community issues."

The United Way is an organization devoted to building stronger communities and families, and I believe that by taking the Garden City Lands out of the Agricultural Land Reserve and placing it all under the jurisdiction of the City of Richmond, the objectives of all parties can be met. Developing the Garden City Lands would expand the core of Richmond beyond just #3 Road, to become a more inclusive and sustainable city centre with amenities for all our residents. By using the Garden City Lands in a broad-based, long-range planned development, it would become a model for how to create an integrated, vibrant, and environmentally viable community and serve as an inspiration to other cities in B.C. and elsewhere.

If the Garden City Lands stay in the ALR, the Memorandum of Understanding will collapse, there will be years of litigation, and a good possibility that we will all die of old age before the lands grow anything other than their traditional crop: wild flowers, grass and weeds.

Submitted by: Glen Petrie, 9231 Odlin Road, Richmond
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