

Presentation to March 8, 2010, special meeting of Richmond council

Jim Wright

Richmond

Mayor and councillors,

I wish to address the staff recommendation "That the Council-approved 2010 Capital Budget be amended to increase the land acquisitions by \$28.17 million to \$59.17 million to accommodate the purchase of the Garden City Lands, funded from the Community Legacy and Land Replacement Reserve."

I'm the president of the Garden City Lands Coalition Society, and our board of directors unanimously supports the recommendation *in principle*, with at least two reservations.

1. With the previous Garden City Lands agreements, the detailed agreements turned out to be worse for Richmond than what the citizens expected. Although the legacy land replacement funding needs to be approved today, we ask that any hidden problems be resolved before the money is actually spent.
2. The price for the Garden City Lands is moderate only because of the Agricultural Land Commission decisions to keep the property in the ALR. It is troubling that council has *not yet* shown its commitment to using the property for ALR-permissible purposes by designating the property as Agricultural in Metro Vancouver's Regional Growth Strategy. We ask council to commit to ALR-permissible uses for the Garden City Lands before *completing* the purchase as a community legacy.

We realize that the proposed expenditure is for a higher price than the assessed value of the property. At this stage, the causes are water under the bridge. One example occurred in the December 8, 2008, council meeting that turned down the draconian proposal that might have extended the old purchase agreement. A couple of council members suggested, with Musqueam and Canada Lands Company CLC leaders and lawyers nearby, that a Richmond offer to buy the Garden City Lands would need to be at the land value of the Walmart property at Alderbridge and Garden City Road. In effect, they suggested a Garden City Lands value of over \$400 million. The obvious effect was to inflate the speculative value of the property.

On the basis of legal advice to the Garden City Lands Coalition Society, I can also say that there are *some* legal risk factors that justify a price above the assessed value, although the bigger factors are political. In any case, the reality is that the agreed-upon price is no more than one-tenth of the going rate in Richmond's city centre. The parkland is needed to retain the City's livability standards for the large Richmond population that is projected in the OCP. Getting it all in one parcel in the City Centre, like Central Park in New York City, is a unique opportunity for Richmond.

Furthermore, the legacy fund for land replacement is already in place, and this is exactly what it's there for. It is the legacy from the Richmond Council that bought the Brighthouse Estates in 1962, largely in order to provide green space. A *bit* of the proceeds from the sale of the last remnants of that vision of Bob McMath and his fellow council members will buy a very large green space that carries on their legacy. There could be no more fitting use of the legacy fund.

I think you will find and eliminate any kinks in the agreement. I think you will strengthen the commitment to ALR uses of the lands. In that context, we ask you to use a bit of the land replacement fund. In doing so, you will celebrate and invigorate one of our city's greatest legacies.