

Presentation by Gordon Kibble, to City Council
Re: The Garden city Lands, March 11, 2007

In these days when everyone is concerned about obtaining the freshest, organic and most local food as possible, communities should be working to preserve all available and viable farmland. Indeed community governments should be leading the way and Richmond's city council should be no exception.

Sadly I wonder if this isn't the case here, as you come to the public hearing table, wanting to remove the Garden City Lands (GCL) from the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR), not to preserve it.

I feel we are moving too fast here and I feel that this hearing should have been held after spring break. Putting on another hat for the moment I want to state, that as an ACE member I have yet to hear your thoughts on our comments. We have real concerns on the wildlife there as well as the natural landscape. We also have concerns as to why the city is ignoring the viability of this land as agricultural and educational agricultural. This is a significant opportunity that the city could be a leader in, but you choose to go in an opposite direction.

Having reviewed the ACE comments I'd like to state at this time that # 2 is not something I agree with at all and was stated by only a couple of members, not the committee at large. Taking the GCL out of the ALR simply means that the land is one stop closer to being developed, not preserved.

Why do I feel that this land needed for farming you ask? Ask yourselves why it isn't needed for farming, when the need for farmland is greater than ever.

How about the need for allotment garden plots and here's an example from Vancouver. Take a look at the people who formed an organization called "MY Own Backyard" (MOBY). They saw an area that no one was using and turned it into a thriving community garden.

MOBY community garden is located on 11th Ave, East of Commercial Drive (a few blocks from Broadway skytrain station). The attached sheet will explain more, or you can www.myownbackyard.ca and see for yourself.

Allotment gardens are everywhere and the demand is increasing to find land that can be used for this purpose. THE GC lands are good for this and should be used to help fill the demand our community has.

People from far and wide are also embracing the 100-mile diet and any environmentally friendly agricultural activity that naturally improves our food. The city itself is promoting a farmer's market for Steveston and yet I ask myself why promote a farmer's market, when you won't try to preserve as much farmland as possible; land that local farmers need and could use.

From an environmental standpoint the area is teeming with wildlife from small birds to coyotes. As well it is a unique bog landscape and a one of a kind area in the community. Its proximity to the downtown core makes it even more unique to the area, as most of the downtown core is commercial buildings, condos and townhouses and created parks. Here is the opportunity for a natural area that all can enjoy. An opportunity to show what the community was like before development became God.

What happened to the "Garden City," the "Child of the Fraser," the "Island City by Nature?" Taking GC Lands out of the ALR is not being "Better in every way."

Money for the farmers is one thing but land is far more important, as once you develop farmland into something else it's gone. Our city should be adopting a sustainable approach in every area and in every way, but with these lands you choose to be as unsustainable as possible.

How can you claim to be interested in sustainability Agricultural education, food security and urban agriculture, when you're making a block application to have the GC Lands removed from the ALR. This isn't rocket science and it doesn't make sense. Taking it out of the ALR may make dollars, but it doesn't make sense.

I can almost compare you to the Provincial and Federal Governments, who ignore the commercial fishermen and their wild salmon, in favour of the salmon farms, which are anything but natural and environmentally friendly.

And lets be clear here, when you remove it from the ALR, it's anything goes with the land now. And the trade and exhibition centre people could say, oh we just need one more acre for the centre. Well it could be just one more acre here and one more acre there and pretty soon there isn't enough land left for even one allotment plot. Well that don't sit well with us and that's why we want to keep it in the ALR and use it for urban agriculture.

This land must be preserved; it must be kept in the ALR and used for the purposes that it is best suited for. And seeing as blueberries grew there many decades ago, then the land should be returned to its natural agricultural state.

These days we should not be trusting in foreign produce to even partly serve our needs. Our country MUST be as sustainable as possible. And if land can be used for growing food then that must be the priority.

California is rapidly running out of water and farms there are desperate for any form of irrigation. They will soon not be even able to provide for their own state and country, let alone export anywhere else.

I vehemently believe that farmland MUST be classified as red zone and that a hands-off policy MUST be in place to permanently ward off development of these lands for other purposes. I stated this, at a "**Metro Vancouver - The Sustainable Region Initiative - Regional Dialogue,**" and my thoughts and suggestion were warmly received by all.

ACE comments on Metro Vancouver's Growth Management Strategy booklet Discussion held on Wednesday February 20, 2008 were as follows.

Protection of the region's farmlands

- Ace members expressed their concern that existing mechanisms for protection of farmland were not strong enough. Protecting farm land and enhancing the viability of farming is a key issue.
- The concept of designating farmland as "red", "green" and "yellow" areas (similar to FREMP designations) was put forward. These lands should be "no touch zones". Clear, region-wide designations of farmland is a much more superior method of protecting farmland on a long-term basis than making decisions on a property-by-property basis. Using a narrow focus results in smaller farm properties being "frittered" away over time.
- From the perspective of protecting farmland in east Richmond, there are too many loopholes to exploit under the present system. Manage the agricultural lands like FREMP.

In regard to Ace's views on the "Protection of the region's ecologically important lands, " I refer you to item 5.

- Given that environment issues are so global, the goals and objectives are narrowly focussed the directions and strategies-don't chart a clear path.
- Due to Richmond's location in the region, ACE is particularly concerned with issues pertaining to fish and wildlife habitat (e.g. salmon and bird migration). Ace is also concerned with transportation issues.
- The GMS should recommend better ecological protection by providing more information on how the implementation tools would work and pros and cons of different approaches.
- Support the above concept of certainty
- Need to provide alternative habitat, when we take something away, you need to give something back

You have taken far more out of the downtown core and area than you have given back and keeping the GC Lands in the ALR for agricultural uses would be a direct start in putting something back.

We in Richmond, surrounding communities and indeed the Fraser Valley have the ideal climate and land to grow a wide range of produce and this we should be prioritizing to do. For once again, once we lose farmland we can't get it back.

It does make sense to take a step forward and save farmland then to take two steps back and not save it. Or is the city more interested in Dollars than sense.

Look at the agricultural and educational plans being offered by Kwantlen College and the Richmond poverty Response committee. Plans for teaching farms, which can promote organic gardening practices, more yield in smaller garden footprints and larger yields in balcony gardens. Is this not a sustainable step forward?

Look at the space allotted for community farms and gardens and see where the need for more allotment gardens is being met. Is this not a sustainable step forward?

Look at the area set aside for land for lease, which will help pay for some of the operating costs of the whole operation. Is this not a sustainable step forward?

Here is an opportunity to put the community on the agricultural map for the twenty first century. But are you listening, are you looking, are you considering? With your wanting to have the lands taken out of the ALR, it seems the doors to city hall are closed to Kwantlen and the Poverty Response Committee.

Again here is an opportunity to put the community on the agricultural map for the twenty first century by preserving these lands period and creating something unique.

Now you say you're interested in this, but to me this whole thing sounds like BC Packers; a lot of promises and nothing in the end. We in Steveston wanted parkland on the BCP site and we didn't get it. We were promised a heritage waterfront to be proud of, but all we got was a waterfront walking strip, with a few artefacts, that only a few aged ex BC Packers employees know what they are and few historic pictures. We wanted a community economy... we didn't get it.

You also keep telling me that you're negotiating with the Federal Government to preserve the Eastern end of Steveston Island as a natural area, rather than seeing a marina on it. Well I've stopped asking, as I know from your point of view, preservation on your part isn't going to happen.

Now you're telling us that you believe in urban agriculture and all that goes with it. Well if this is so, I'd like you all to put it in writing and sign it.

We're not here just to see this land is kept in the ALR, we're here to see that project such as the above collage and committee one comes to fruition. It's a project the whole community can get involved in and reap rewards from. The people from MOBY have been doing that ever since they started theirs.

It was Margeret Mead who said, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has." Well we're that group of thoughtful committed citizens and we're here to stay and make it work. What about you?