

**Mayor and Council, City of Richmond
Public Hearing on Garden City Lands, Richmond,
March 11, 2008. 7:00 p.m.**

Re Council's application for exclusion of 55.2 hectares of agricultural land located in the Agricultural Land Reserve at 5555 No. 4 Road, Richmond.

As long time residents of Richmond, we wish to state our opposition to this application. We ask the Mayor and Council to take note of the following points in their consideration of whether or not to continue with this application:

First, six comments regarding agricultural land:

1) Richmond has already had many areas of the very best agricultural land excluded for other purposes. Some of these are:

- Steveston Highway south to Fraser River between Shell and #5 Road for commercial development.
- south foot of #6 Road for off-loading and parking of automobiles (port development.)
- Southeast corner of #5 Road and Steveston Highway for commercial development
- Knight Street area for commercial development including the Auto Mall
- Hamilton area for highway and residential development.
- the freeway connector bisected Richmond farms and consumed many hectares.
- Terra Nova area for major residential development and a minor natural park area.
- further, areas of the ALR between #5 and #6 Roads, and south of Steveston Highway between #2 Road and Shell Road are undergoing serious degradation as the number and size of religious and educational institutions and private residences increase.

Therefore it is imperative that Richmond retain all its remaining agricultural land as a base for viable agriculture within the community.

2) This is a large block of viable agricultural land, contiguous with the land reserve. The Richmond Agricultural Advisory Committee, which has as members Richmond farmers, describes it as "suitable for cranberries and blueberries . . . a large parcel that could be used as viable farmland." June 9, 2005. It is clearly defined by road boundaries. The City of Richmond would have to provide safe controlled access for farm equipment. Recent reports from agrologists confirm the land is agriculturally viable.

3) The City of Richmond's Agricultural Advisory Committee has considered this application in the past and did not support it "as there are no benefits to agriculture in this application as presented." We agree with the response of the Richmond AAC, June 9, 2005. Further, we do not consider the establishment of an Agricultural Endowment Fund as a benefit to agriculture when it is a condition for destroying the possibility of agriculture

4) We concur with the staff report from the Agricultural Land Commission in 2006 which states that the land is appropriately designated as agricultural land. We particularly concur that the City of Richmond has not actively pursued other locations for a trade centre or major athletic facility. Thirty acres (ten acres public park, twenty on option) of available land immediately to the west across Garden City Road were sold to a developer for high-rise apartments. The site that was suddenly devoted for the Olympic Skating facility is a large open space ideally located for a major athletic facility. Further, the City has had ample opportunities to devote non-agricultural zoning to develop facilities now proposed for the Garden City land within the ALR.

5) In regard to the overall viability of agriculture in Richmond, and to the goals of the Richmond Official Community Plan to support that viability, we do not think that the establishment of an Agricultural Endowment Fund for future "projects" is a benefit when the agricultural land is gone. There should be no loss to agriculture but a benefit from the Commission's decision. The subject land is a large, farmable block, commercially viable for berry production, particularly cranberries and blueberries. However, I wish to stress to the Commission that sustainable models of urban agriculture are changing, and these new models mean much smaller plots of land are agriculturally viable. One example is the CSA or community supported agriculture, where plots of land within the urban landscape are farmed to produce food directly for the residents of that community. The benefits of a local grower providing locally grown food to resident consumers are many, too numerous to mention here. **We believe Richmond has not adequately explored the possibilities for small scale, commercially viable agriculture on the Garden City Lands**

6) In regard to the overall viability of agriculture, preserving local food production, and our ability to feed our own populace, both City Council and the Land Commission should consider the problem of young farmers and new farmers accessing the land base they require. At the public information meeting in Richmond (April 25, 2006), a major farmer from Richmond noted he had just sold a small portion of his farm for \$120,000 an acre and commented that this speculative price put the land beyond the possibility of any new farmer. Almost immediately following a young agricultural graduate spoke about her goal of growing food locally for the community. It is time for the Land Commission to not only preserve the ALR but to establish land banking or other innovative means to assist a future generation of farmers get established on the land, and City Council should address this point for our food sufficiency, in communicating to the Land Commission and in considering Richmond's agricultural future.

Further, now, in 2008, it appears that the University of British Columbia is planning to close the UBC FARM to develop more housing, and may leave

approximately 100 ag students with no farm land on which to learn agricultural practice. This would be an extremely short-sighted move by UBC, but it would leave the Garden City Lands as one of the closest large pieces of land on which to practise urban agriculture. The suggestion that Kwantlen College could have an urban agriculture programme is not far-fetched.

For these reasons we believe the Garden City Lands should remain in the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Next, five points regarding the development proposal

- 1) **Regarding Council's vision to have a vibrant shopping area with pedestrian friendly environment, housing for families and seniors, great access to transit, etc: these are all laudable and desirable but need to be in our existing residential and commercial areas. We do not agree with the concept of developing new housing and shopping in agriculture zoning because we haven't, over the years, addressed these issues fully in the existing city core.**
- 2) **As to the Trade and Exhibition Centre proposal, our understanding is that currently trade and exhibition centres in major cities around the world are not fulfilling expectations, often draw only occasional events, and are often heavily subsidized by the city. A large Trade and Exhibition Centre is currently being built with public money in Vancouver. Is Richmond going to compete with the new facility in Vancouver? We think this is a very questionable project. It is further disturbing to us to hear, in the course of this hearing, that the inclusion of the Trade and Exhibition Centre was a condition required by the Federal Treasury Board at the outset of this three-party project. Is this correct? If so, why is a federal government agency dictating conditions of zoning and development to the City of Richmond?**
- 3) **I have listened with care to the Musqueam presentation. We have the greatest respect for the original people of this place, and believe in their right to aboriginal claim. However, for presenters to suggest that by speaking out for the preservation of food producing land, and for the conservation of wildlife and natural areas, councillors and citizens are breaking faith with the first people of this land is a non-sequitur. In fact, we believe that people who support agriculture and wildlife values tend to be strong supporters of aboriginal people in their just claims. All parties involved, the City, the Canada Lands Corp. and the Musqueam, should be giving the greatest care and consideration to the importance of farmland and of the natural environment, the importance moreso in an urbanscape increasingly dominated by pavement, highrise buildings, and commercial development.**
- 4) **An unfortunate political linkage is occurring in the politics of land use and development, that of settling aboriginal land claims with land in the ALR. We have seen this in the Tsawassen agreement, where a large area of productive land in the ALR has fallen victim to this strategy. A previous**

speaker has pointed out that by entering into the Garden City Lands Agreement, the Council has placed the City between a rock and a hard place. All the terms of benefit to the City are contingent on the City being the tool that is used to remove the land from provincial agricultural protection, to enable development and to settle aboriginal claim. As residents of Richmond we find this manipulation offensive and unacceptable.

If aboriginal claim is to be settled, why are not all federal and provincial properties open to claim? The federal Harbours Board, for example, has significant properties, as does the federal airport. We would prefer to see a full range of properties on the table for negotiation with Chief Campbell and the Musqueam. Agricultural land should not be victimized in this process.

If Richmond wants control of the Garden City lands, it should outright offer to purchase, as has been suggested. If senior governments want benefits to the Musqueam, its agent, the CLC, should handle the transaction and the money should go to the Musqueam. If agricultural land nearby is selling for \$120,000 to \$200,000, that should be the price. The benefit to the Musqueam would be in the range of \$16 to \$27 million. The Canada Lands Corporation, as a crown agency and as stated before this hearing, expects no benefit.

5) In discussing the presentations to this hearing and thinking about the scope of this proposal, we have realized how much our City is growing up around this central natural area. Few cities have a green core opportunity. We believe the vision in this proposal input has not been green and creative, but too much inline with standard development proposals. It was heartening to hear the presentation of the Garden City Lands Coalition. That is a proposal we would support for the City. We would like to see a greener plan, incorporating urban agriculture and conserving natural environment, with some creative green thinking, the land remaining in the ALR, to create a green centre that would really make Richmond the Garden City.

In conclusion, for the above reasons we would ask that the Mayor and Council not proceed with this application to remove the Garden City Lands from the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Respectfully submitted

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