

Richmond City Centre and Garden City Lands Introduction

Richmond is an area of rich cultural and ethnic diversity.

It is also becoming a city of significant construction and lifestyle diversity. There is an old fishing community, old farming areas, vast tracts of suburban developments built at a time when land wasn't understood to be rare and precious, and now a developing densified City Centre urban core.

Richmond's City Centre has just 1/20th of Richmond's land area but almost 1/4 of the City population.

City Centre is the City's transit hub and will also soon be connected by Skytrain, and connected directly to the Airport and the Vancouver downtown too. It is in the process of evolving into a walkable downtown and a car free commute to similar downtown's anywhere in the world. It is also attempting to refocus itself on its waterfront and to continue adding to the parks that ring its periphery and define its boundaries.

City Centre has the City's most shopping malls, its live theatres, museum, main library, its only dedicated seniors centre, and many other facilities. It also contains the City's most occupied schools. Yet provision of facilities has lagged the population growth in this part of the city, and recreation, arena, and aquatic facilities here haven't been increased in decades. The City downtown has half the park space per capita of other city areas and while some park space has been added recently it hasn't kept pace with population and hasn't included any additional playing fields. Park land and facilities cost twice as much to acquire downtown and the City is now reducing the requirement here by half to reflect the cost differences. Thus in City Centre converting fields to artificial turf is actually much cheaper than adding extra fields or park space, but this conversion hasn't kept up with demand either. A recent public opening to discuss a Minoru turf conversion attracted support letters from hundreds.

While most of Richmond is only two storeys tall and has parking at grade in City Centre high land prices prompt a different model. In central Richmond areas within walking distance of Skytrain are developing vertically oriented housing or business or shopping or recreation and entertainment, and areas slightly further afield should be part of the City's new ring of parkland. It is economically and environmentally sound to build with parking under developments, and buildings up to 17 storeys tall, and "green" parking podium rooftops are becoming common.

The land use appropriate in Steveston or suburban or rural Richmond or places as far afield as Bowen Island is not the appropriate land use in City Centre where land costs two to twenty times as much as suburban or rural land elsewhere in this city or elsewhere further afield.

Rather than copying onto Richmond City Centre the experiences and desires of people from elsewhere in Richmond or the region, the Garden City Lands planning should address the distinctly different needs of Richmond City Centre.

Rather than consuming a large amount of ground level land for hobby gardening, the Garden City Lands can accommodate the recreational gardening desire in waist high rooftop planter box areas while providing point form midrise construction within walking distance of the Richmond Skytrain line thus reducing traffic congestion, fuel consumption, and pollution and environmental damage. At the same time half the lands can become park space, and playing fields.

Garden City Lands

The Memorandum of Use for the Garden City Lands are Richmond's best opportunity for large downtown park creation since the Brighthouse Lands and Minoru Park over 40 years ago.

Unsuccessful attempts to obtain the Garden City Lands began over 40 years ago at the same time efforts commenced to use Brighthouse land for Minoru Park. The 2005 Memorandum of Agreement between Richmond and Canada Lands and the Musqueam, is the only current potential agreement for use of the lands, and other proposals currently being touted are unsupported by the lands principals and can only frustrate this opportunity. The Musqueam 2004 injunction on the Garden City Lands and the recent decision on the Bridgeport casino lands have shown that any settlement must consider the Musqueam.

This agreement provides half the Garden City Lands for Richmond community use - a land area the size of Minoru Park! Like at Minoru Park the Garden City Land portion Richmond would receive is large enough for an appealing lake providing irrigation and drainage and a walking area passive park, large public greenspaces, community sports playing fields, and supporting recreation buildings. Some portion of the land could also be used for community gardens to teach urban agriculture, as in a few other local parks. More appropriately, rooftop agriculture would also be desirable in this urbanizing part of town. Resident polling has shown that each of these alternatives has a high level of support within the community.

The Musqueam are due a settlement for their past territory which includes Richmond, and so the Garden City Lands Memorandum of Agreement also provides for half the land to be developed by Canada Lands and the Musqueam, a process that would occur according to Richmond zoning requirements.

As required by Richmond current planning regulations 5% of the housing would be social housing that would benefit seniors and other groups, and Canada Lands /Musqueam would also have to provide additional small park spaces within their portion of the lands as they developed them. Other provisions such as "green" roofs and parkade podiums are current Richmond planning practice and can therefore be required of the developed portion of the Garden City Lands.

Though the memorandum doesn't specify which portions would be developed and which become park space, the west area at Lansdowne Road is within walking distance of the Canada Line so west and southwest areas nearest rapid transit would be developed, and the eastern half would become parkland.

70% of energy consumed in BC is used for transportation or space heating, so reducing auto transportation and building heating are the two ways to most greatly benefit our environment. Since the Garden City Lands are within 1 Km of the Canada Line many residents would walk to it. Multi-residential building envelopes require much less heat per unit. Buildings with "green" roofs are quieter, more energy efficient and provide additional opportunities for resident use. Building multi-residential and commercial buildings on the west portion of the Garden City Lands within walking distance of the Canada Line and heating them geothermally would provide the best environmental practice currently available. It also provides opportunities for rooftop horticulture.

The eastern third of the Lands could remain within the ALR as a buffer to further development without affecting Richmond use as long as permission for community park and sports fields use of this portion was obtained. The \$10 million provision for agricultural improvements contained within the proposal could be used for farming improvements elsewhere in Richmond. City funds could be used to purchase some under farmed small land holdings further south on the east side of #4 Road from retiring "farmers" for additional community gardening thus spreading the Garden City Lands benefits there too.

The proposed Trade and Exhibition Centre seems unlikely to proceed at present. However land should be reserved for it as public greenspace now, with the requirement that when a Tradex is built in future its

parking be located beneath the building and that a publicly accessible "green" roof be provided above it so a Tradex results in no loss of greenspace for public use. It could also co-locate with a Musqueam /Richmond Museum and surrounding hotel complex providing culture and Musqueam employment.

Thus the Garden City Lands could become a leading example of how to build an urban rural interface, with as much "land" available for use after development. Half the lands would be available for public use as greenspace, passive parks, playing fields, and community gardens on site, and there could also be provision for more community gardens or agricultural benefit funded off site. The other half would be developed into modern energy efficient point density housing and complementary commercial space with "green" roofs and a continuous podium level for resident horticulture and recreational use. This area would provide 5% assisted housing, be geothermally heated and be within walking distance of the Canada Line reducing auto use.

The Garden City Lands can be an example of how to efficiently, equitably, and environmentally sustainably build a neighbourhood, provide additional park space and a school for all neighbouring it, good transit and traffic flow, and provide additional community agriculture benefits on and off site.

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Garden City Lands removal from ALR recommendations:

- 1) The eastern 1/3 of the Garden City Lands should remain within ALR, but with permission for parks and pastoral spaces, community horticulture, grass playing fields fringed with trees, associated fieldhouses, spectator seating, lighting and parking, and some demonstration gardening. Alternatively, fieldhouses could be in the bases of buildings adjoining the western edge of the park area.
- 2) The eastern half of the Lands should therefore feature somewhat the same sort of composition as at Minoru Park, created using current best practices.
- 3) A small right-of-way strip of land would be reserved along the lands south edge for future LRT connection between Garden City Road to City Hall Skytrain and the Shell Road rail corridor.
- 4) The minimum of roads should be built as necessary to improve connections north and south to west existing adjoining roads and new housing. Bicycle and pedestrian paths must also be included. This area will help interconnect northeast and central Richmond, and to the south of Richmond.
- 5) Affordable social housing is to be 5% of total housing and it should be allocated in ~1/5 the buildings at a rate of ~25%. Given 4000+ units for 10,000 total this would be approximately 250 - 300 units.
- 6) Housing must be placed at the west and southwest end of the GCLands, be point form construction and match midrises on the west side of Garden City Road in height, and be buffered with a few lower height buildings further east matching the decreasing density required in the West Cambie Lands.
- 7) Buildings will have suitable associated commercial opportunities, and housing will have reduced parking requirements and focus on transit and local walking initiatives and ride sharing.
- 8) An elementary school can be located in the base level of a building and use adjacent sports fields.
- 9) Buildings MUST have "green" roofs AND share a "green" podium level. Buildings will use these areas for recreation and horticulture, and the horticulture area must be accessible to residents /Kwantlen horticulture programs. This area will have suitable local congregation spaces in keeping with current best practices. This will include a common area for selling produce grown on the site and locally.
- 10) Space should be reserved as greenspace in public use now for a future Tradex centre. When built the Tradex must also have parking located beneath, and a public use "green" roof so public benefit survives.
- 11) Musqueam/Richmond museums could be built with the Tradex, as could a few hotels. These and other commercial component in the base of buildings could provide employment opportunities for Musqueam.
- 12) Use a portion of agricultural benefit funding, or City funds, to buy some land southeast of #4 Rd and Westminster Hwy from some under utilizing land there. Build a community garden area there.
- 13) Buildings must be designed using LEED and CEPTED principles and use geothermal heating. The site will therefore be an efficient, equitable, environmentally sustainable showcase urban rural interface.

Reply Comments

Council members who voted to hear from all the caring people of Richmond and elsewhere, and are here patiently listening to their opinions about the future of the Garden City Lands, should be thanked. Speakers from Musqueam and Canada Lands and the City of Richmond provided informative presentations. Additionally, the comments of all public speakers have been interesting and many have contributed comments useful to the final result. Some of the comments made and statistics provided merit reply:

--Richmond is blessed with a vibrant fishing and tourist village, vast areas of farms, many suburbs built decades ago, and now it is building a downtown core City. People should understand that different people lead different lives and not everyone wishes to live in a fishing village, or farm or suburb.

--Yet some of the people of downtown City Centre do wish to garden, and there is a need for rooftop gardening education and demonstration, and some rooftop gardening research by Kwantlen may be helpful.

--Young speakers asked us to look to their future. School area for gardening education should be present at all elementary schools across Richmond. Vancouver has over 2 dozen schools with gardens.

--Rather than addressing the viability of the proposal in this part of town, most speakers who have spoken against the GCL proposal have suggested a community garden. Some have suggested a farm. The Musqueam say the land is not for sale, but even if it were for sale for \$1 M /acre how much would each potato or carrot grown cost to produce considering such a land purchase price?

Another speaker suggested the site remain as is. This is incompatible with the Musqueam goal, and almost every gardener's proposal, and the perhaps even the farming preservation goal of the ALR.

--A newspaper letter writer last week discussed the community gardening for profit of City Farm Boy that they learned about at a recent local conference. I talked with the same individual and his next small commercial garden is not a back yard one – it is a rooftop one! www.cityfarmboy.com

--There are over 600 green roofs /podiums in the lower mainland. The largest are sports field size.

--Some green roofs like Sedgewick Library at UBC which opened in 1973 have been around 35 years, are as old as the average resident in this town, have outlasted the leaky condo crises, and have been walked on by almost every student who attended UBC in the past 3 decades – over ¼ million!

--Burnaby has only 10% more people than Richmond but has twice as many green systems, because they have almost as many green roofs as green parking podiums, while Richmond has few green roofs. Change that here!

--If the Garden City Lands were to have green roofs and a common green podium for the buildings and on the Tradex, and sports fieldhouses within the buildings footprint, total green coverage can be as high as 90%, with well over 45% publicly accessible (with the other 10% of area being roads, bikeways and public paths).

--Some have suggested that Richmond is not food secure. Vegetables are much more efficient to grow than animals. If local ALR land were focused on vegetable rather than animal production or other uses Richmond could be self sufficient in production of the vegetables which will grow locally.

--The real food problem is not food production it is one of food inequity – Some who are rich drive hybrid ethanol Hummers while the poor can't outbid for their food needs others using grain for fuel.

--250 to 300 units of assisted housing required in a project the size of the Garden City Lands would provide much more significant assistance to those facing challenges, than would some cheap food.

--The west side of our city has dozens of suburbs the size of the GCLands, and each typical yard is half lawn. These lawns will revert to a food production area a dozen times the GCLands area if/when warranted.

--Beyond this future source of land for growing food, Richmond currently has 38% of its land in the ALR vs. 16% average in the area. We are not an area that need consider itself that it is food insecure.

--The GCLands plan specifies 10-12000. 3 large elementary schools serve 35,000 at south City Centre.

--A speaker stated that Manhattan Island has 17% parkland, and Burnaby much more parkland than Richmond too. Manhattan has 8x Richmond's population sharing that use, and neither Manhattan or Burnaby have anything close to the amount of agricultural land in Richmond.

--Housing built on the GCLand would generate property and school taxes. These millions of dollars annually can help buy school, park, and community garden land on site and elsewhere.