

Our Stanley Park

By Jim Wright

Abridged from a column published in the *Richmond Review*, April 26, 2008, and on the Garden City Lands blog at <http://gardencitylands.wordpress.com/12-our-stanley-park/>

Back on Dec. 17, council unanimously agreed on three Richmond uses of the Garden City lands, and all are park uses: urban agriculture, community wellness and healthy lifestyles, and showcasing environmental sustainability.

Those uses could occur within or outside the ALR. However, if the lands are removed from the ALR, the parkland will be just the leftovers after 68 acres go to high-density residential and 22.4 acres go to a trade centre. (As the mayor explained, the city is forced to include the trade centre.)

What's left for park uses is 47.6 acres. That's just enough to meet the City Centre standard (3.25 acres within the City Centre per thousand City Centre residents) for a Garden City lands population of about 14,650.

Coincidentally, the best estimate for the proposed development is about 14,650 residents. That assumes units averaging 1200 square feet and households averaging 2.8 people, as in the 2006 census. A city staff report provided the other needed statistic, the total floor area of the development. For details, see "The 14,650 Coincidence" in the Garden City Lands blog.

So far we've seen that the city's share of a developed Garden City lands would not provide any parkland to offset deficiencies in the City Centre. Next we'll see how the proposed development would actually cause a parkland deficit.

To begin, be aware that the City Centre standard is just a supplementary safeguard. It is not a watered-down replacement for the city-wide Richmond standard (7.66 acres of park per thousand residents).

If we apply the city-wide parkland standard to 14,650 new residents on the Garden City lands, the requirement is over

112 acres. Since only 47.6 acres could be available, the Garden City Lands development would actually make the parkland problem worse.

To buy non-ALR land outside the City Centre, the cost is typically about \$2.5 million an acre. Offsetting the development's parkland shortfall could cost \$160 million.

As we've seen, the basic way to meet community needs with the Garden City lands is to stop the development. That will only happen if the Agricultural Land Commission refuses to remove the Garden City lands from the ALR. Then the lands will at least continue to be green open space with ecological values. And they will be available for food purposes in a future where even dinosaurs will see the need.

If Canada Lands Company CLC, the caretaker owner on behalf of the taxpayer, starts showing community social responsibility, Richmond should be able to buy the lands, using its right of first refusal at the renegotiation stage. At the City Centre land value of at least \$5 million an acre, 136 acres would usually cost at least \$680 million. However, the purchase price for the Garden City lands should be at their ALR value. That's roughly one-fiftieth as high.

In a popular vision, the lands could even become a unique park for residents and tourists. It would be a Stanley Park with an agricultural theme in keeping with Richmond's heritage and growing commitment to local food security.

As far as I can learn, all 136 acres would count as both farmland and parkland, even if some is used for Kwantlen Polytechnic University urban agriculture education. And, with trails, lakes, and gathering places throughout, it would be a wonderful park.