

To: City Council and gathered audience  
Garden City Lands Public Hearing, Council Chambers  
From: Shane McMillan

SUBJECT: In opposition to the removal of the 136 acre Garden City Lands from the ALR.

Good evening, and thank you for hearing so many of us from the public speak here tonight. I am here as a private citizen to oppose the exemption of the Garden City Lands from the ALR.

But before I go into my reasons for upholding the ALR status of the Garden City Lands, I want to touch briefly on fairness in the public debate, and on the importance of keeping our facts accurate. We have heard a lot about this issue over the last three months or so, and public debate has been passionate on both sides. At times however, it seems that some parties have been trying hard to confuse the issues at hand, or perhaps to mislead the public.

I also find it odd that the only people who have been using an “us versus them” mentality in this argument are the proponents of this plan – the very people who say they are so happy to be in this partnership. At the February 18<sup>th</sup> General Purposes Meeting, the honourable Malcolm Brodie himself said, “I don’t want to speak in adversarial terms”, then proceeded to do just that! In a March 8<sup>th</sup> Richmond Review editorial, former Mayor Greg Halsey-Brandt talks about people who “object to Musqueam aspirations that conflict with our vision for Richmond.” Well, I for one do have a vision for Richmond, yet I do not see any conflict between “us” and “them”.

The Musqueam want social and economic development. They want training, and a chance for cultural expression. No one in Richmond would deny the Musqueam Band of these things. But is it their aspiration to develop more urban sprawl in a city that is already becoming overdeveloped? Exactly whose “vision” are we in conflict with?

Some supporters of development have been telling the public that this deal is the ONLY way that Richmond can get a piece of this land. That, “half of something is better than all of nothing”. What these people fail to understand is that for those who want the land to remain in the ALR, ownership of the land is of no consequence. We don’t care if the city of Richmond owns not a square inch of the lands, we just want the lands to remain in the

ALR. What matters to us is that the land STAYS in the ALR! It doesn't matter who owns the land – the Musqueam, the city, the federal government, or anyone else – as long as the land can not be used for large scale development. These questions of ownership and jurisdiction that have arisen repeatedly only serve to cloud the true issue. What matters most is that we do not erode the ALR, which was established in 1973 by a government that was wise enough to plan for the future.

Another group with an interest in the Garden City Lands is the Richmond Sports Council, which has been asking for more sports fields to support Richmonds growing population for decades. But if the Garden City Lands are removed from the ALR, and divided between the parties, it is highly unlikely that the sports fields will be included. First of all, the M.O.U. states that the city's properties will be "scattered" amongst the development. So there will be no guarantee of any large contiguous open space where sports fields can go.

Secondly, with only between 48 and 68 acres to work with, the city will be forced to contend with a number of competing interests. Given the current climate around food security, and the fact that the city is already committed to community gardens and some kind of urban agriculture, sports fields will likely be displaced. It seems that in this game of rock, paper and scissors development trumps urban agriculture, but urban agriculture trumps sportsfields. So the only way that we can ensure there is enough room for everyone who needs green space is to keep the entire 136 acres in the ALR. This should come as no surprise to the city, since their own predictions show a deficit of 200 acres of green space to account for the projected growth in Richmond's city centre population.

I'd like to talk now about the Kwantlen Proposal. Kwantlen's Institute of Sustainable Horticulture has proposed an Urban Agriculture Research and Education Centre for the city of Richmond. This new centre would provide education for the next generation of farmers, and for the larger community. It would give us a place to find solutions to the problem of meeting our food needs in a changing world. And it would be the only school of its kind in North America. We need to fully support this project. Currently the average age of farmers in Canada is 55. Who will replace these farmers as they retire? Where will they learn how to farm?

It is also worth noting that the city of Coquitlam is watching what happens with this proposal VERY closely. If it does not work out with Richmond, the centre will likely go

to Coquitlam's Colony Farm, and this would be an enormous loss for the city of Richmond.

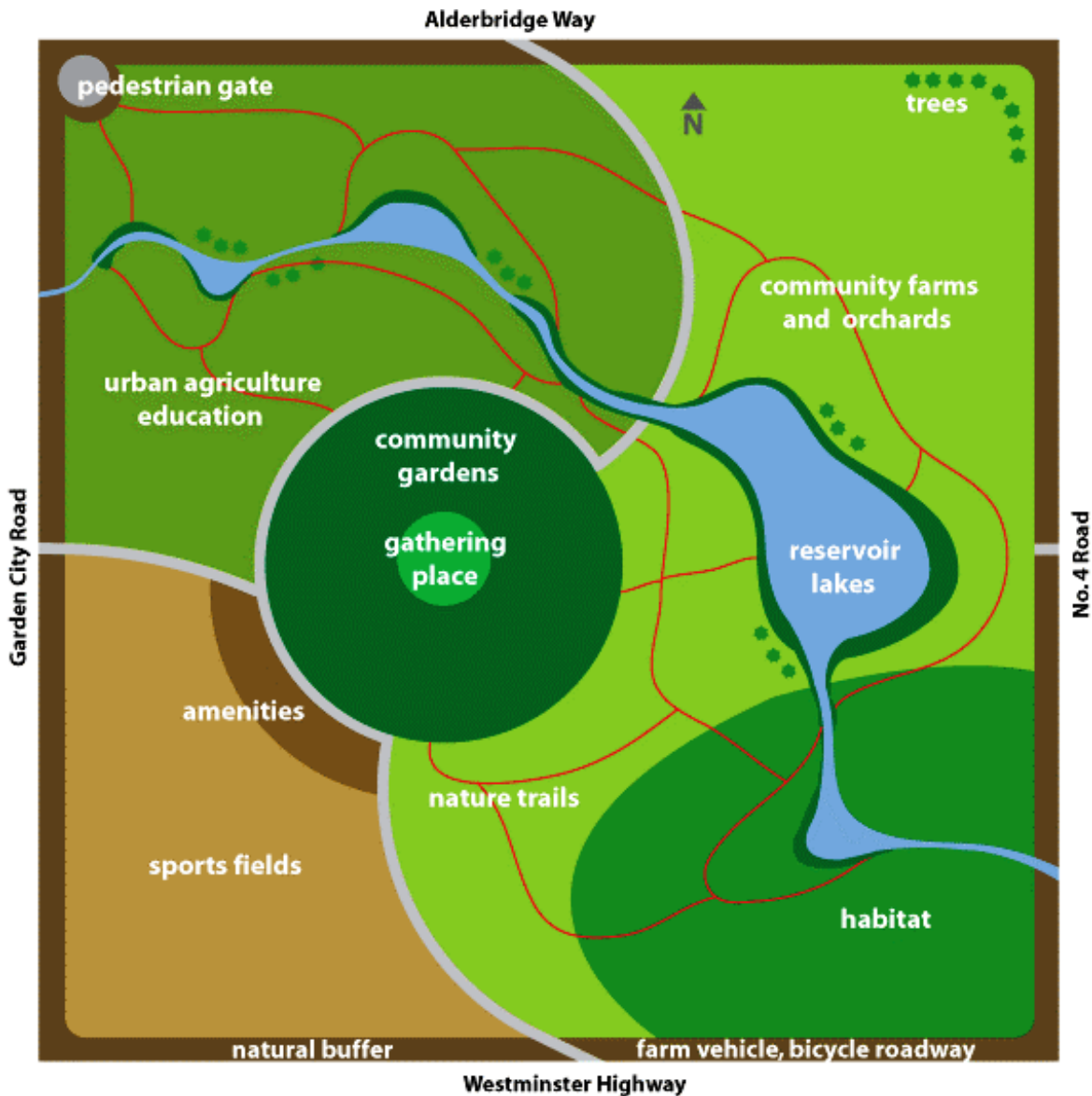
The CLC Lawyer told us last night that the Garden City Lands had already been offered to and turned down by every federal department. But that was sometime before the Musqueam came to the negotiating table in the fall of 2004. He also cited a letter from the Treasury Board dated December 4, 2007 stating that they have no policy for the land to revert back to the crown, and this could only be done if they needed to run a program. Well the Kwantlen proposal provides us with just such a program, and all it takes is demand from citizens and councilors to bring this matter to the attention of the federal ministers. On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007 the federal ministers and treasury board would have had no knowledge of the Kwantlen proposal, or the fact that many people in Richmond are interested in keeping the Garden City Lands green.

The Urban Agriculture Research and Education Centre would require about 40 or 50 acres of land. Although the Kwantlen proposal does not specifically ask to be on the Garden City Lands, it really is the only place in Richmond that makes sense. The lands are a five-minute walk to the Richmond Campus, and the only empty chunk of land that directly borders the urban centre.

So again, we see that in order to accommodate all of these needs – the community gardens, the sports fields, the Kwantlen proposal, and so on – we will need the entire 136 acres to be protected from development.

I'd also like to point out that the proposal for a Food Systems Park that has arisen from public input aligns perfectly with the principles of Smart Growth, and also with the Recently published *British Columbia Agriculture Plan, Growing a Healthy Future For B.C. Families*. The plan recognizes that agriculture in B.C. is at a turning point – caught between remaining competitive in the global marketplace, and meeting local demand for fresh, healthy, and locally produced food. The plan outlines 23 strategies within five themes, including:

- Producing Local Food in a Changing World
- Meeting Environmental and Climate Challenges
- Building Innovative and Profitable Family Farm Businesses
- Building First Nations Agricultural Capacity
- Bridging the Urban / Agriculture Divide



By contrast, from what little the partners of the M.O.U. are able to tell us, it is clear that their proposal does not support Smart Growth, or the B.C. Agriculture Plan.

Still, city staff have claimed that the proposed development of the Garden City Lands makes sense from a city planning perspective, with regard to “Smart Growth.” Sadly, this is just not true.

And why would the city build this awesome, sustainable community – according to the Canada Lands Company, a real showcase for the city – why would they build it way out here in the boonies of the urban core? If this is really the best model for a livable, sustainable city, why not do it where you mean it: In the city centre.

Proponents of the M.O.U. boast a ten minute walk to the skytrain station. Hmm... or a 30 second walk to your car and the immediately accessible freeway? According to the math, option two gives me an extra 9.5 minutes of sleep in the morning right off the bat. I suspect that residents of the new development would come to the same conclusion, and few would opt for the walk.

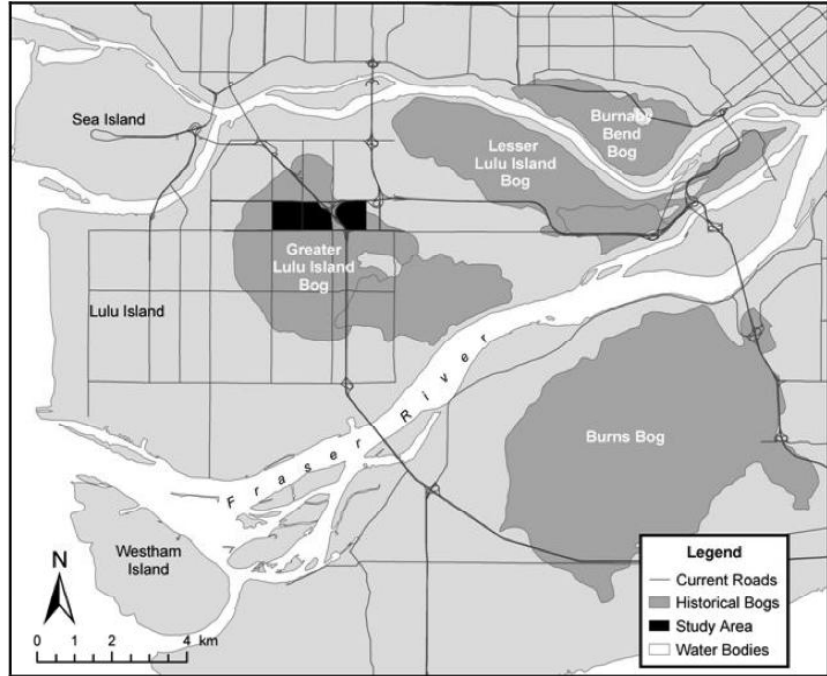
Again, why not build this amazing example of urban living at Westminster and Three road? Why is it that all I see being built in the rest of the downtown core is densely packed highrises of nearly uniform height and boxiness? Is this what is envisioned for the Garden City Lands? How is this new development going to be any different? But more importantly, why do it here, in the boonies... on top of a peat bog... next to a spooky old forest.

If Richmond actually wants to showcase sustainability and green development, then they would actually abide by the principles of smart growth. This means that ALR land would not be an option for development. It also means that open spaces, natural beauty, and environmentally sensitive areas must be preserved.

It is also worth noting that all of the properties shown by the Canada Lands Company last night were built on brown fields, or previously developed or contaminated sites. None of them were built on open space.

The city and its partners say the lands have limited agricultural viability. Again, this is not true. As summarized so clearly by Wendy Holme last night, urban agriculture on the Garden City Lands would be viable both agriculturally and economically.

As you can see on this map, the Garden City Lands are a small remnant of the Greater Lulu Island Bog, which used to cover a vast area of Richmond.



Jagger, Bret. 2007. Chapter 7: A Site History of the Lulu Island Bog. IN: Davis, Neil and Rose Klinkenberg (editors). 2007. A Biophysical Inventory and Evaluation of the Lulu Island Bog, Richmond, British Columbia. Ecology Committee, Richmond Nature Park Society, Richmond, BC. Available on-line at <http://www.geog.ubc.ca/richmond/city/inventory2002.htm>.

This map shows Richmond’s Agricultural Land Reserve.

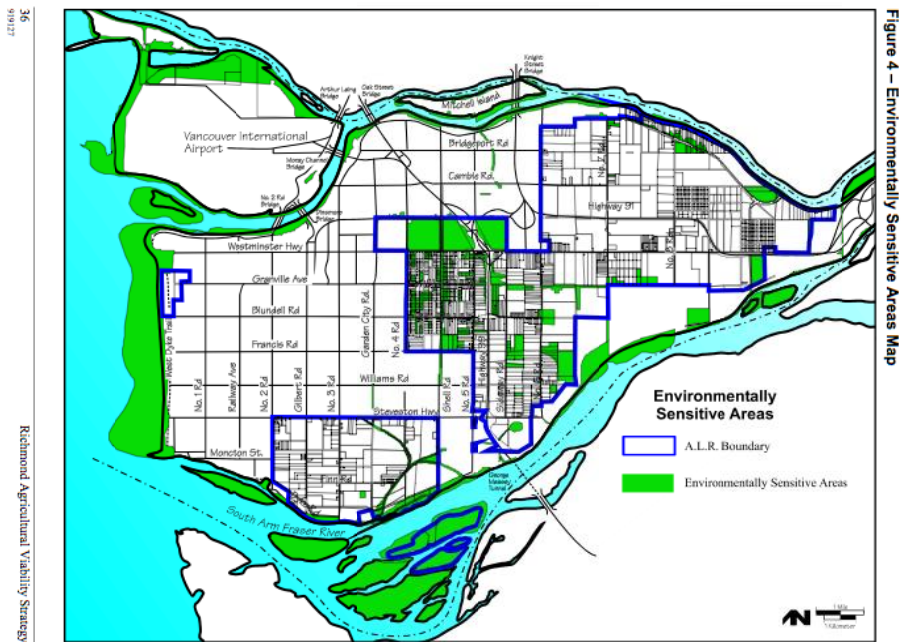
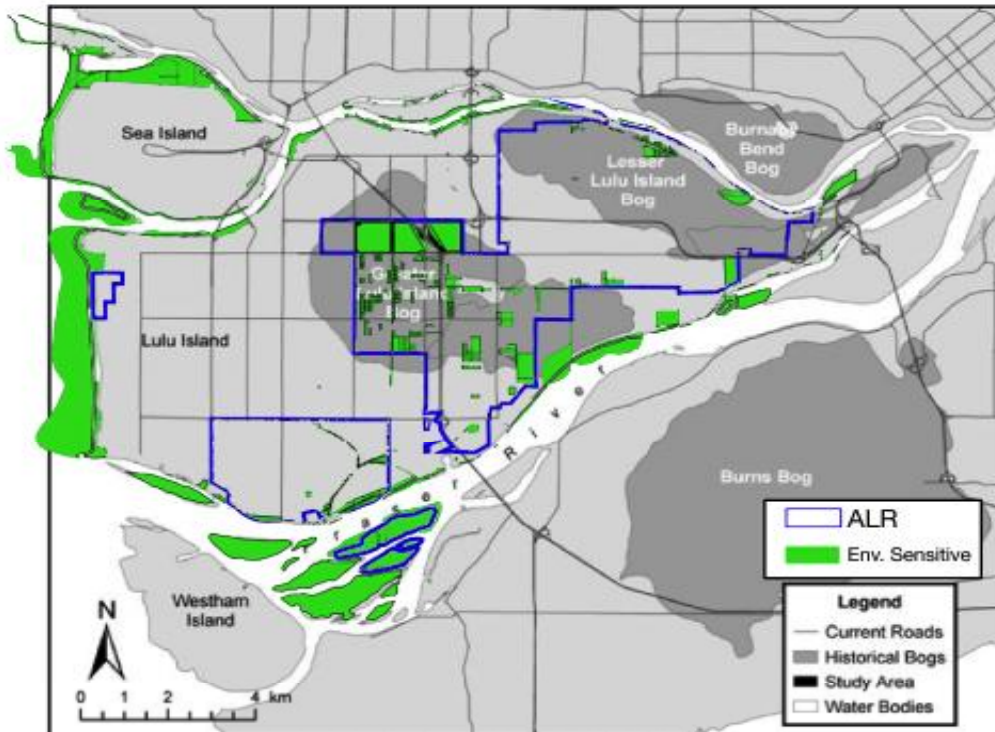


Figure 4 – Environmentally Sensitive Areas Map

VISION for the FUTURE: "The City and the farm... working together for viable agriculture." City of Richmond

36  
09/2017  
Richmond Agricultural Viability Strategy



**Map of current ALR land, showing historical bogs.**

When we overlay the two maps, we can clearly see that a huge section of Richmond’s most productive farmland was once bogland, just like the Garden City Lands are now. So the argument that the lands are low grade, and unfarmable simply does not hold any water.

Richmond boasts one of the best climates and soil profiles for food production in all of Canada. What’s more, the close proximity to the urban centre is an advantage to economically viable small-scale agriculture, and to the people in neighbouring areas who will benefit from the fresh, healthy produce available at their doorstep.

In 1968 Garret Hardin wrote a paper called *The Tragedy of the Commons* in which he stated quite accurately the root of many environmental and social problems. The Tragedy of the Commons relates to the conflict between individual interests and the common good over finite resources. The current situation regarding the Garden City Land is an example of this mentality of, “oh just a little bit here, a little bit there won’t make a difference.” Additionally, the Garden City lands situation is a perfect case in which the personal gains of a few are in direct conflict with the long term good of the many. Essentially, environmental responsibility is thought of as somebody else’s problem.

The argument is made that this land represents less than one percent of Richmond's total ALR base. But what kind of an example is this council setting for the rest of Richmond, many of whom live on land that is currently designated as ALR. Look at all those people on No. 4 Rd. south of Westminster Hwy. Will they think it's fair that the city of Richmond and its partners are allowed to benefit from the removal of ALR land, but a citizen of Richmond is not?

What makes this a tragedy is that a little bit here, and a little bit there does add up – especially when it is happening on the global scale.

I have talked with people who believe that we don't need to grow food here, we can always just import. All we need is money, and with money we can buy whatever we want. These folks usually cite economies of scale. They say that industrial agriculture can best meet the needs of a growing population, via the global economy .

But what these people fail to understand, is that the same pressures face every city in the world right now. In 2007 for the first time in the history of the human race, more people lived in urban areas than in rural areas. And this growth of urban centres is encroaching on farmland at an alarming rate worldwide. This can be seen locally in every community of B.C. In Richmond, Delta, Langley, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Prince Rupert, Prince George, Kelowna... And that's just in British Columbia, where we are lucky enough to have the ALR to protect farmland and create denser cities – not sprawlier ones.

Other parts of the world are not so lucky, and farmland is being lost not only to urban development, but also to massive soil erosion, disappearing or polluted water supplies, the spread of deserts, and the effects of climate change.

With all due respect, I'm a lot younger than the people making this important decision. And the decisions made tonight are going to affect me a lot more than they do you. Some people here tonight have a lot to gain economically in the short term – and I don't mean the Musqueam Band – it is time that they get the same access to economic development as we all have. I am talking about the developers, the hotel owners, the chamber of commerce, the lawyers... All of these people who are behind the deal...

Albert Einstein once said "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." And the same is true here. The logic that says take this

land out of the ALR to develop for profit and benefit as we have in the past is the same kind of thinking that has been destroying the native land since settlers first arrived. Now, after having almost totally wiped out the native culture of Canada, we are making the first nations buy into the very economic system that nearly destroyed them.

We are forcing the Musqueam into an economic system that creates money by destroying the land and resources. By diminishing the Earth's resources more and more, we can get wealthier and wealthier. But there is a problem here, because now we are using more stuff – more raw materials, forests, atmosphere, than the Earth can produce. In fact, we are using a lot more. If everybody on Earth enjoyed the lifestyle of an average Canadian, we would need between 4 and 6 Planets worth of stuff just to keep ourselves going. Unfortunately, we only have just one planet.

Of course, Adam Smith would say that there is no problem at all – This 18<sup>th</sup> century Scotsman considered to be the father of free market economics had some great theories. So great that they persisted for over 200 years and have become the basis of our entire global economy. But like many theories, eventually we find the flaws... eventually the theory no longer holds true.

Smith's biggest failing is that he separated the economic world from the natural world. This was necessary because his system depended entirely on the notion of infinite growth... There is no limit to trade. No limit, whatsoever. Only labour and capital matter – natural resources are not a limit. Of course in nature, nothing is infinite, and there are always limits.

We live in a closed system where for countless millennia everything has been recycled, and life has persisted. Then humans came along like a swarm of termites that just eats and eats... But we eat EVERYthing! Plants, animals, trees, mountains, rivers, lakes. By Consuming and consuming, we grow. Land is used up, resources are consumed, and mountains of toxic trash are left behind. If this kind of wastefulness continues, then we have no hope. We can't play by the old rules anymore.

Fortunately, there is one thing that sets us apart from the termites, and that is our ability to learn from our past mistakes. For hundreds of years we have thought that we are the masters of nature, and now Nature has told us that we are not. Now with this – historic – agreement we have the chance to take a stand for nature. We can make a decision – to

follow the status quo and develop high-rises on green space. Or we can make a decision to say, “enough is enough”, and do the right thing. One path leads to immediate monetary gains but puts our future in peril. The other is an investment, for the future.

Think of our food system as a person – at infancy it only has what is immediately available to it. Then it develops and as a young fit person the food system can travel around the world and eat terrible chemicals, and seem to get along alright – but now it’s getting old – clogged arteries, trouble breathing, all those chemicals over the years. And as it ages, the food system needs to make wiser, healthier decisions. So we can think of ALR land as the retirement savings plan for our food system. This is what we’ll depend on when our international food system doesn’t work anymore. The Garden City Lands are a vital part of Richmond’s savings plan, and it would be foolhardy to cut the initial land investment in half.

So in conclusion – Keep the Garden City Lands within the Agricultural Land Reserve. Ownership is not important, but maintaining the ALR status is. The Musqueam Band deserves to have the economic development, training and business opportunities that they are seeking. I believe that a lot of this can be achieved on the Garden City Lands, within the ALR.

The sports community needs more access to playing fields. Leaving the Garden City Lands in the ALR can make this happen, but removing them will likely not leave space available.

Developing an urban agriculture park along with Kwantlen’s research and education centre will bring real community benefit to Richmond, while following the mandate for agriculture set by the provincial government.

Development under the M.O.U. follows an outdated economic system that is still wreaking havoc on our natural world, and is destroying our future for the sake of quick monetary gains. To quote Rachel Carson, “Man is a part of nature, and his war on nature is inevitably a war against himself.”

Under the ALR, all interested parties can work together to find a solution that works. I urge this council not to go ahead with the block application. But if you do, I sincerely hope that the Agricultural Land Commissioners will deny the application once again.