



Corporate Report

NO: C016

COUNCIL DATE: July 10, 2006

COUNCIL-IN-COMMITTEE

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: July 5, 2006
FROM: Acting General Manager, Planning and Development FILE: 6880-75
SUBJECT: Review of Residential Densities within Suburban Transition Areas between the
Agricultural Land Reserve and the Urban Designation

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

1. Receive this report as information;
2. Approve the revised City Policy No. O-23 – "Residential Buffering Adjacent to the ALR/Agricultural Boundary", attached as Appendix I to this report, as a means to provide a broader range of lot sizes while still maintaining an appropriate transition between lands designated as Urban and lands within the Agricultural Land Reserve; and
3. Forward a copy of this report to the Agricultural Advisory Committee.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to respond to Council's direction to review current City policies regarding the suburban transition areas. These are the lands between the edge of the Agricultural Land Reserve (the "ALR") and areas of the City designated Urban in the Official Community Plan (the "OCP").

BACKGROUND

At the January 30, 2006 Regular Council Meeting, Council requested that staff:

"Review the current City policies with respect to transitional suburban development between the ALR and urban areas of the City with a view to determining if it would be reasonable to include larger size urban lots (for instance 10,000 sq. ft.) in the areas nearest the urban edge and gradually [increase] the densities towards the ALR edge and to report back to Council complete with recommendations".*

*Note: The word "increase" in the above-noted Council directive should have read "decrease".

Council referred specifically to the "Fleetwood Pocket" (east side of 168 Street, north of Fraser Highway) as an example of an area where this form of residential density could be appropriate. Relevant OCP amendment applications in the Fleetwood Pocket and another part of the City are discussed below as context for this policy review.

DISCUSSION

Existing Policy Framework – Official Community Plan

The OCP contains a number of policies aimed at protecting and enhancing agriculture, ensuring farm viability and maintaining agricultural boundaries. One of these policies is to promote compatibility between agricultural and non-agricultural land use (Policy F-1.1). The policy states that compatibility may be achieved by encouraging the development of effective buffers along the boundary of agriculturally designated land. It may also be achieved by encouraging adjacent land uses to be compatible with existing farm use and ensuring that the impacts on agricultural lands will be minimized.

In addition to providing a visible land use separation between communities, the OCP's Suburban designation is also intended to contribute to this compatibility by providing a transition between urban and agricultural land uses. This designation is characterized by a range of larger sized lots. The maximum allowable residential density in the Suburban designation is 5 units per hectare (2 units per acre).

To further protect agricultural lands for agricultural purposes, all lots outside of the Agricultural designation that are adjacent to the ALR designation is designated as a Development Permit Area. Guidelines related to building location, buffers and landscaping are specified in the OCP. Additionally, a farm-sensitive area is defined in the OCP as the area within 300 metres (984 feet) of Agricultural designated lands. Even though a Development Permit may not be required within parts of this farm-sensitive area (for example, where land is not immediately adjacent to the ALR), particular attention is still needed in the design of buildings and subdivisions, the layout of roads and storm water management, as part of the development review and approval process.

Existing Policy Framework - City Policy No. O-23

The current City Policy No. O-23 - Residential Buffering Adjacent to the ALR/Agricultural Boundary (attached as Appendix II) is another tool focused on protecting agricultural land in Surrey. Adopted in November of 1990 and revised in June of 2004, the policy applies specifically to the "transition areas" between urban

development and the ALR. This policy establishes minimum lot sizes and densities within a 400-metre (1/4 mile) transition area and states that wherever possible, the width of this transition area should increase to 1/2 mile.

Policy No. O-23 allows for half acre lots, including half acre gross density development, within the transition area, provided that at least one row of one acre lots (4,047 square metres or 43,560 square feet minimum lot size) is maintained along the ALR/agricultural boundary. Where an existing road right-of-way separates the proposed lots from the ALR/agricultural boundary, lots may be a minimum of half acre (2,023 square metres or 21,780 square feet) in size, subject to meeting the following criteria:

- A minimum 37.5 metres (125 foot) separation between the ALR boundary and the nearest wall of the principal building on the proposed lots;
- A minimum 15 metre (50 foot) wide landscape buffer along the edge of the proposed lots, adjacent to the road that separates the lots from the ALR boundary;
- A Restrictive Covenant is registered on all proposed lots adjacent to the ALR boundary to require the minimum building setback, to alert the owner of agricultural practices and to ensure that the landscape buffer is maintained.

The Half Acre Residential Gross Density (RH-G) Zone, Surrey Zoning By-law, 1993, No. 12000 (the "Zoning By-law") provides for lots with a minimum area of 1,300 square metres (14,000 square feet) [up to 50% of the lots within the plan of subdivision may be reduced to a minimum area of 1,120 square metres (12,000 square feet)] where 15% or more of the lands subdivided are set aside as open space pursuant to the provisions of the Zoning By-law.

Practices in Other Jurisdictions

The trend toward allowing urban residential densities close or adjacent to the ALR is highlighted in several nearby municipalities. In the Township of Langley's Northeast Gordon Neighbourhood Plan in the Willoughby area, densities of between 5 and 10 units per hectare (4 - 6 units per acre) are permitted, subject to the provision of Urban/ALR Interface treatment. To mitigate potential conflicts with development adjacent to the ALR, a dedicated landscaped buffer is required and new roads adjacent to the ALR are not permitted.

The recently adopted Official Community Plan for the City of Abbotsford recognizes the importance of agriculture, but does not contain policies requiring larger lots or specific densities adjacent to the ALR. Traditionally, most residential subdivision has been located in upland areas. The City of Abbotsford will, however, be exploring edge planning tools more fully as it works toward developing an Agricultural Plan over the coming year. Given the land constraints in Abbotsford, City staff advise that there is limited space to accommodate lots in the range of 0.2 - 0.4 hectares (one-half to one acre) in size.

Recent edge planning studies conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands recognize that, generally, as population increases next to an ALR boundary, and the closer the buildings are situated near farmland, the greater the probability for complaints by both the farmer and adjacent residents. However, their research has also shown that prior knowledge of the potential impacts of agriculture has helped to avoid complaints from arising.

Recent OCP Amendment Applications and Policy Implications

While the Surrey's OCP policies, Development Permit requirements and City policy provide an overall direction for the establishment of suburban interface treatment and protection of agricultural areas, there have always been challenges from developers and land owners who argue against the continuation of this suburban interface and attempt to push urban development outward from the Urban designation boundaries. In some cases, adjustments to the provisions of Policy No. O-23 were made to accommodate the proposed developments. This has been done in a manner which is intended to not unduly compromise the use of the adjacent or nearby agricultural lands. Two recent examples are examined below.

- **West Cloverdale**

In the West Cloverdale South Neighbourhood Concept Plan, an application (No. 7904-0241-00) (map attached as Appendix III) to redesignate lands from Suburban to Urban at 164 Street and 60 Avenue, to create lots ranging in size from 320 to 630 square metres (3,400 to 6,800 square feet), with an average lot size of 409 square metres (4,400 square feet), recently achieved third reading. The urban lots are proposed to be 230 metres (755 feet) from the ALR boundary and have a gross density of 20.6 units per hectare (7.5 units per acre). Between the ALR/agricultural boundary and the proposed new urban boundary, the suburban transition area will include half acre cluster lots with lot sizes ranging from 700 to 771 square metres (7,500 to 8,300 square feet) and averaging 716 square metres (7,700 square feet), a large park dedication and an area designated for future one acre cluster development. The gross density of the suburban portion is 5 uph or 2 upa. The proposed overall gross density (urban and suburban combined) is 12.3 uph or 5.0 upa.

- **Fleetwood Pocket**

Within the suburban transition area in Fleetwood (known as the Fleetwood Pocket), an application (No. 7903-0225-00) (map attached as Appendix IV) to redesignate lands at Fraser Highway and 170 Street from suburban to urban was approved by Council last year. The application involved 21 urban, single family lots, ranging in size from 560 to 937 square metres (6,000 to 10,100 square feet) and averaging 695 square metres (7,500 square feet), 200 metres (656 feet) from the ALR/agricultural boundary. The overall gross density of this development was approximately 10 uph or 4 upa..

Implications

In these two examples, urban development has been pushed closer to the ALR/agricultural boundary and, consequently, the width of the transition area has been significantly reduced. The minimum distance between the new or proposed urban lots and the ALR/agricultural edge in these two examples is reduced to 200 metres (656 feet).

The examples bring out several issues and policy implications which are briefly discussed below:

- **Should the City do away with this Suburban Transition Policy?**

The suburban transition policy is a useful planning tool to ensure compatibility between agricultural and residential uses. It has been very successful in Surrey, not only in achieving an appropriate density and land use transition, but also in providing for suburban life styles and a visual separation and transition from urban development for farm properties on the ALR side of the boundary, making Surrey unique in the Region. The Policy, in general, is considered a good policy and should be maintained.

- **Should the Policy be further adjusted to respond to the need of the development industry?**

The current Policy allows only suburban residential development at a gross density of 5 uph (2 upa) within the Transition Area. This maximum density of 5 uph (2 upa) falls between the urban designation (which allows 15 upa) and the ALR/Agricultural designation (with a theoretical maximum residential density of 0.3 upa). There appears to be some room for adjustment of the policy. The recent decisions by Council in the two examples cited above, where Council decided to allow urban development at a distance of 200 metres from the ALR/agricultural boundary, indicates that the City is prepared to accept some low density forms of urban development beyond 200 metres of the ALR boundary. The remaining 200-metre width of transition area along the ALR boundary would comfortably allow four rows of suburban lots, including one row of one acre lots abutting the ALR/agricultural boundary. It appears reasonable to consider adjusting the current policy to allow for some forms of low density urban development at least 200 metres from the ALR boundary within the 400m Transition Area defined by the current policy. On this basis, the 200-metre line is supportable. By defining the new 200-metre limit, two concentric "rings" are effectively created - the Inner Ring for some forms of urban growth and the Outer Ring for suburban transition.

- **What should the density and lot size be for the urban residential development within the Transition Area?**

Allowing the same density entitlement and the same range of urban residential zones as the urban designation within the Inner Ring would simply have the effect of pushing the urban designation boundary outward to the 200-metre limit. This is not recommended. Subdivisions within the Urban designation abutting the Transition Area are zoned RF, with a minimum lot size of 560 square metres (6,000 square feet)

at a gross density of 15 uph (6 upa). Considering that the allowable gross density in the Outer (Suburban Transition) Ring is 2 upa, the density gradient for the Inner (Urban) Ring would appear to be reasonable to be set at 4 upa. The gross density of 4 upa would result in a minimum lot size of 930 square metres (10,000 square feet).

Proposed Amendment to City Policy No. O-23

In light of the above discussion, an amendment to City Policy No. O-23 is proposed that, if adopted, will allow large urban-sized lots (i.e., with a minimum area of 930 sq. m. (10,000 square feet) in the areas currently designated Suburban that are at least 200m from the ALR boundary. The revised policy is attached as Appendix 1.

The amendment will keep the current Urban boundary intact and maintain the current 400-metre Transition Area, but would provide for a minimum lot size of 930 square metres (10,000 square feet) in the Transition Area at a minimum distance of 200 metres (656 feet) from the ALR/agricultural boundary. An area with lots of this size would have a gross density of approximately 10 units per hectare (4 units per acre).

As the 10 uph (4 upa) density exceeds the maximum density permitted under the Suburban Designation, one option is to redesignate the land from Suburban to Urban. This option is not recommended because the redesignation would generate false expectations for higher density urban developments. The recommended approach is to amend the density provision of the OCP Suburban Designation to permit a maximum residential density of up to 10 units per hectare or 4 units per acre in the Transition Area provided that such density is at least 200 metres from the agricultural boundary. No new zone is proposed at this time. All development applications within the lands affected by this policy change can be accommodated by a Comprehensive Development Zone (CD). A new zone may be drafted after sufficient experience has been gained by staff and the development industry with this type of urban development.

In several established suburban communities, the application of the existing policy has contributed to a consistent and stable pattern of development at suburban densities. Permitting 930 square metre (10,000 square foot) lots in these areas would be considered inappropriate. For this reason, the suburban communities of Sullivan Heights, Morgan Creek, Panorama Ridge and the Semiahmoo Peninsula are proposed as exemptions to this new policy provision.

Suburban densities would continue to be required in the remaining Transition Area abutting the ALR/agricultural boundary (Appendix V).

The proposed amendment will continue to provide for a range of larger lot sizes and, thereby, support a range of lifestyle and aesthetic values associated with suburban landscapes.

Proposed Amendment to the Official Community Plan

As noted above, adjustments to the policies of the OCP will be required in order to accommodate the moderate increase in density in the Transition Area without providing for the full urban density of up to 15 upa in this area that could be allowed by the Urban

designation. It is proposed that this policy adjustment be brought forward in the upcoming Annual OCP Review.

Agricultural Advisory Committee

At the June 1, 2006 meeting of the Agricultural Advisory Committee (the "AAC"), staff provided an overview of the proposed amendments to City Policy No. O-23, as documented in this report. The AAC endorsed the proposal and requested that a copy of the revised policy be provided to the AAC at their July meeting.

CONCLUSION

In order to assist in protecting the City's agricultural land base, a residential buffering policy was adopted by Council in 1990.

The existence of this policy has contributed in large measure to the maintenance of a strong suburban residential belt around much of the City's agricultural areas and provision of edge condition and separation between established urban communities in the City. In practise, however, the width of and density within the transition area has been occasionally challenged and adjusted in response to site specific conditions. In these instances, a compatible residential development pattern adjacent to the ALR/agricultural area has been created.

The proposed amendment to City Policy No. O-23 is intended to create within the current Suburban Transition Areas, an Inner Ring for some forms of urban growth, allowing 929 square metre (10,000 square foot) lots at a minimum distance of 200 metres (656 feet) from the ALR/agricultural boundary and an Outer Ring that continues to require one acre (4,047 square metres) and half acre (2,023 square metre) lots to directly interface with the ALR and agricultural areas. Existing suburban communities that are exempt from this new provision are also noted in the draft amendment. Transition areas within those communities would continue to require one acre and/or half acre lots only.

The creation of additional urban housing in appropriate locations can assist the City in focussing growth within urban areas. This will contribute to a more efficient land use that allows the City to grow in desired directions, while at the same time, preserving agricultural areas. Further, it will contribute to providing a range of choices in housing type and cost.

It is recommended that Council approve the revised City Policy No. O-23 (Appendix I) as a means to provide a broader range of lot sizes, while still maintaining an appropriate transition between lands designated as Urban and lands within the ALR and forward a copy of this report to the Agricultural Advisory Committee.

How Yin Leung
Acting General Manager
Planning and Development

TA/kms/saw

Attachments:

- Appendix I Revised City Policy No. O-23
- Appendix II Current City Policy No. O-23
- Appendix III Map showing location of Application No. 7904-0241-00
- Appendix IV Map showing location of Application No. 7903-0225-00
- Appendix V Map showing the proposed Inner and Outer Rings in the Fleetwood Transition Area



CITY POLICY

No. O-23

REFERENCE:

APPROVED BY:

CITY COUNCIL

DATE:

HISTORY:

REVISED

TITLE: RESIDENTIAL BUFFERING ADJACENT TO THE ALR/AGRICULTURAL BOUNDARY

The following is a policy for transition areas:

- a. The width of the Transition Area should be maintained at a minimum of 1/4 mile and wherever possible, this width should increase to 1/2 mile;
- b. Within the Transition Area a line at a distance of 200 metres from the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) or the Agricultural Designation Boundary defines two sub-transition areas: an Inner Ring Transition Area between the existing Urban Designation Boundary and the 200-metre line, and an Outer Ring Transition Area between the 200-metre line and the ALR/Agricultural Boundary;
- c. Within the Outer Ring Transition Area, 1/2 acre subdivisions including gross density development may be allowed, provided that at least one row of 1 acre lots should be created immediately adjacent to the ALR/agricultural boundary.

Where an existing road right-of-way separates the proposed lots from the ALR/agricultural boundary, the proposed lots adjacent to the intervening road may be a minimum of half-acre in size provided:

- (i) There is a minimum 37.5-metre (125-ft.) separation distance between the ALR/agricultural boundary and the nearest wall of the principal building on the proposed lots adjacent to the ALR/agricultural boundary;
- (ii) A minimum 15-metre (50-ft.) wide landscape buffer is provided along the edge of the proposed lots, adjacent to the road that separates the lots from the ALR/agricultural boundary;
- (iii) A Restrictive Covenant is registered on all proposed lots adjacent the ALR/agricultural boundary to:
 - (a) Require a minimum setback for the principal building from the lot line closest the ALR/agricultural boundary, such that the separation between the ALR/agricultural boundary and the principal building is a minimum of 37.5 metres (125 ft.);

- (b) Advise of agricultural practices in the area; and
 - (c) Ensure the landscape buffer is maintained.
- d. Within the Inner Ring Transition Area, lot sizes may be reduced to a minimum of 930 square metres (10,000 square feet) at a maximum gross density of 10 units per hectare (4 units per acre); and
- e. The provisions related to the Inner Ring Transition Areas do not apply to the Suburban communities in the Semiahmoo Peninsula, Panorama Ridge, Sullivan Heights and Morgan Creek. The maximum density in these Suburban areas will be 5 uph (2 upa) and the other provisions of this policy will continue to apply where applicable.



CITY POLICY

No. O-23

REFERENCE:	APPROVED BY:	CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR COUNCIL MINUTES NOVEMBER 5, 1990 PAGE 7	DATE:	June 7, 2004 (RES.R09-1409)
	HISTORY:	NOVEMBER 5, 1990

**TITLE: RESIDENTIAL BUFFERING ADJACENT TO THE
ALR/AGRICULTURAL BOUNDARY**

The following is a policy for transition areas:

- a. The width of the transition area should be maintained at a minimum of 1/4 mile and wherever possible, this width should increase to 1/2 mile; and
- b. Within the transition areas, 1/2 acre subdivisions including gross density development may be allowed, provided that at least a row of 1 acre lots should be created along the agricultural boundary.

Where an existing road right-of-way separates the proposed lots from the ALR/ agricultural boundary, the proposed lots adjacent to the intervening road may be a minimum of half-acre in size provided:

1. There is a minimum 37.5-metre (125-ft.) separation distance between the ALR/ agricultural boundary and the nearest wall of the principal building on the proposed lots adjacent to the ALR/ agricultural boundary;
2. A minimum 15-metre (50-ft.) wide landscape buffer is provided along the edge of the proposed lots, adjacent to the road that separates the lots from the ALR/ agricultural boundary;
3. A Restrictive Covenant is registered on all proposed lots adjacent the ALR/ agricultural boundary to:
 - (a) Require a minimum setback for the principal building from the lot line closest the ALR/ agricultural boundary, such that the separation between the ALR/ agricultural boundary and the principal building is a minimum of 37.5 metres (125 ft.);
 - (b) Advise of agricultural practices in the area; and
 - (c) Ensure the landscape buffer is maintained.





