

15.0 Agriculture and Food Access

Goals

Protect Agricultural Land Reserve lands and seek opportunities to encourage agricultural production.

Collaborate on the development and implementation of a regional Agricultural Area Plan and agricultural economic development plan to strengthen the role of agriculture in the local and regional community and economy.

Encourage food access and production opportunities for Vernon residents.

Encourage agricultural economic development through support for agri-tourism, value added production, agricultural business start up activities and intergenerational learning/land transfer.

Guiding Principles Met

Foster prosperity for people, business and government

Protect agricultural land

Create a culture of sustainability

Create strong, compact and complete neighbourhoods

Context

Agriculture holds a significant place in the history, identity and future sustainability of Vernon. Agriculture has contributed to the creation of the land use patterns, transportation routes, community identity and economy of Vernon. The community places a high value on both the productive capacity of active local agriculture and the idea of proximity to agricultural lands. As a result, support for the protection of agricultural capacity, production and access to agricultural products has been identified to be of great significance by the community.



The Vernon agricultural industry is a contributor to the local economy. Virtually all of the high productivity lands within the City of Vernon are preserved for agricultural uses by being designated as Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) lands. There are 2,306 hectares of ALR land within the municipal boundary (Map 8), which represents 24% of the land base. In addition, agricultural lands without the ALR designation, but with strong rural character, are designated Rural/Agricultural, which also applies to some of the

steep sloped hillsides and the more inaccessible portions of the municipality. This designation does not

necessarily imply agricultural or farming use of the lands, as it can also denote a rural character of development.

All Rural/Agricultural lands within the City of Vernon are within the Agricultural and Hillside Residential District (District 3) of the Land Use Plan. This includes land located at Okanagan Landing, the Bella Vista Road orchards above Okanagan Lake and the Eastside bench lands, as well as parts of the Department of National Defense property. Areas with the Rural/Agricultural designation are intended to remain rural in character with agricultural and resource uses permitted. Areas within the ALR are subject to the provincial Agricultural Land Commission Act, and any non-agricultural use must receive Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) approval (unless the land is released from the ALR by the ALC).

To further recognize the significance of farming in the area, policies that help alleviate conflicts along the agricultural use/non-agricultural use interface are encouraged. Not only do adjacent land uses need to be compatible, they also need to foster stronger links and buffers between agricultural and non-agricultural uses.

The Ministry of Agriculture encourages local and regional governments to consider preparing an Agricultural Area Plan (AAP). An effective AAP benefits from the involvement of all the local governments and electoral areas in a joint planning process to establish solution oriented policies, provide a greater focus on agricultural issues, maintain a planning process where members of the farm community are full partners in the plan's development and improve policy integration with other agencies. As part of Regional Growth Strategy implementation, an Agricultural Area Plan is being prepared in which the City is participating. Following completion of this process, provisions exist in the Local Government Act to prepare a Farm Bylaw, which can work to protect farming and decrease land use conflicts.

With interest in locally produced and marketed foods increasing in communities throughout Canada, Vernon is in an enviable position to encourage and continue to establish community food access opportunities. The high proportion of agricultural lands both in production and protected in the ALR within the city provide the opportunity to support local producers and small scale, integrated food production. These are key components of a successful, sustainable community. Through the creation of community and neighbourhood gardens for those without access to productive land and through support for local processing, marketing and distribution facilities for local producers, food access and choice are supported for all members of the community.

Supporting Policies

- 15.1 Encourage the protection of agricultural land through the support of the ALR and the continued farm use on lands with Rural/Agricultural designation. The City will direct new growth away from ALR lands and Rural/Agricultural lands to infill areas and redevelopment areas.
- 15.2 Protect Agricultural Land Reserve lands which have viable, productive soils which may be improved through standard farming practices of soil capability classes 1-4, and consider the exclusion of ALR

Lands which are not considered to be able to be improved through standard farming practices (i.e. irrigation), classes 5-7. Consider the exclusion of lands (classes 4-7) that are immediately adjacent to infrastructure, services and amenities, with due consideration of the rural protection area boundary. Where such lands fall within the rural protection area, but are deemed to support the City's growth strategy and are in keeping with the RGS goal of compact, complete communities, require the Regional District of North Okanagan's approval on the redesignation of the lands as growth or future growth areas in the Regional Growth Strategy prior to exploring any redesignation of the lands in the OCP's land use plan to a more intensive land use.

- 15.3 Recognize the importance of agriculture to the economy of the area and support industry practices as identified in the Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act.
- 15.4 Support the development of regional Agricultural Area Plans (AAPs) and a regional agricultural economic development plan in collaboration with other partners, as appropriate.
- 15.5 Coordinate with the Regional District of North Okanagan to identify opportunities to support and strengthen agricultural economic opportunities in Vernon and throughout the region.
- 15.6 Encourage compatibility between existing agricultural uses and adjacent land uses and ensure that the impacts on agricultural lands are minimised. Critical areas include higher density residential, institutional, recreational and all other uses that are people intensive at any one time, which are adjacent to agricultural uses (non-ALR and ALR).
- 15.7 Require buffer strips to protect agricultural operations where non-agricultural properties are adjacent to land with agricultural uses, particularly ALR lands. This buffer should be located on non-agricultural land and may include a variety of landscaping, vegetation and fencing types and sizes such as those outlined in the Landscaped Buffer Specifications from the Agricultural Land Commission and the Ministry of Agriculture's Guide to Edge Planning. To allow for buffering, the City will establish larger setbacks and lot depths for properties abutting agricultural uses, particularly ALR lands.
- 15.8 The City will prepare appropriate zoning regulations and supporting policies that facilitate and encourage agri-tourism in agricultural areas.
- 15.9 The City will continue to support the development of high quality agricultural infrastructure.
- 15.10 With regard to Rural/Agricultural designations located within the ALR, the City of Vernon will:
 - a. Confine land uses to agricultural activity, as permitted under the Agricultural Land Reserve Act.
 - b. Strongly support the continuation, enhancement and growth of agricultural activity and agri-tourism.
 - c. Work closely with the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) and relevant agencies on any developments that have a direct impact on ALR lands to minimize any potential impacts on agricultural uses.

- 15.11 With regard to Rural/Agricultural designations outside of the ALR, the City of Vernon will:
- a. Allow for very low density residential use, low intensity recreation, agricultural use and resource use as permitted by the Agricultural Land Commission Act.
 - b. Permit trail development, low intensity recreation activities and open space areas within the Rural/Agricultural designations in these areas.
 - c. Maintain a subdivision lot size minimum of 12 hectares (30 acres), or an equivalent density of 1 lot per 12-hectare (30 acre) lot area, to preserve the present nature of the Vernon countryside and encourage maintenance of the agricultural industry. Exceptions include parcels intended for utility, transportation or public use within the Rural/Agricultural designations in these areas.
- 15.12 Collaborate with the Agricultural Land Commission to mitigate the impact of recreational trails and transportation routes on ALR lands and agricultural operations through sensitive routing, signage, fencing and other measures.
- 15.13 Encourage collaboration and partnerships with community agricultural organizations, private industry and government agencies to support and encourage food access programs and alternatives.
- 15.14 Support sustainable rural and urban agricultural practices within the city, including support for community and neighbourhood gardens and urban food production wherever possible, and encourage the development of a year round, indoor public market.
- 15.15 Encourage new development to include contiguous space intended for garden space for residents. Density bonusing may be considered for multiple family developments which allocate roof top garden space for residents. A covenant would be required to guarantee its ongoing maintenance and protect resident access to the facility.
- 15.16 Support community access to food, with specific emphasis on local farm products and encourage increased capacity for local food production and marketing.

