



June 19, 2006

Mr. Erik Karlsen, CEO
Agricultural Land Commission
3940 Canada Way
Burnaby, BC V5G 4K6

CC: Premier Gordon Campbell
Pat Bell, Minister of Agriculture
Carole James, NDP Leader
Bruce Ralston, NDP Agriculture Critic
Brian Underhill, Director Strategic Planning & Corporate Policy, ALC

Re: Application # 35256 from the Barnston Island Majority Landowners and Residents Committee for the Exclusion of approximately 1,100 acres or a total of 85% of all ALR lands for industrial development

Dear Mr. Karlsen,

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the application to exclude approximately 1,100 acres of ALR land for industrial development on Barnston Island. As you are undoubtedly aware, Barnston Island consists of 1,500 acres of mainly prime farmland (capability classes 1-3) and significant wildfowl habitat in the Fraser River between Surrey and Pitt Meadows.

The fundamental component for the sustainability of agriculture in B.C. is the availability of land. We know that once it is removed from the ALR, our farmland is gone forever. It is precisely because of our farmland and of the presence of our ALR that communities across British Columbia have flourished. In addition to its important role in farmland protection, our ALR has acted as an extremely effective urban containment boundary – a unique legislation that is the envy of jurisdictions across North America.

The Barnston Island exclusion application raises considerable concerns. From an economic, planning, or environmental perspective, the application is not justified. From our consultations with farmers on the Island, and with planners from the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), Smart Growth BC does not believe there is a case for exclusion of these highly productive soils, or a “community need” -based argument for additional industrial land in the Surrey/Pitt Meadows region or the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) at this time. We are also concerned about the overall costs and viability of conversion of this land to industrial uses.

It is our understanding that the ALC’s final decision on this application may be based upon the viability of a new bridge or enhanced ferry system to increase the transportation of agricultural products to and from the island. However, many of the agricultural operations, including Avalon Organic Dairies and Opus Cranberries, which were interviewed for your staff reports, indicated that their businesses are flourishing and that they are planning on expanding their operations regardless of the implementation of an enhanced ferry service or the construction of a new bridge. Furthermore, connecting a bridge to Barnston Island will undermine the agricultural

activities of the area by increasing industrial, commercial, and/or residential development pressures on the island.

While the Barnston Island Majority Landowners and Residents Committee understandably wants to encourage economic diversity, a successful industrial lands strategy requires a regional approach. It makes little sense for Barnston Island to compete with Surrey, Langley or Pitt Meadows for industrial activity when cooperation through the GVRD could mean greater success for everyone. In addition, we understand that while the majority of the landowners on the Island are seeking this exclusion from the ALR, it does not reflect the view of the lessees, the actual food producers of the island who are opposed to this application.

The applicant's consultant report indicates that 600 acres of the total 1,100 acres proposed for exclusion from the ALR are suitable for industrial development. According to a recent report by the GVRD (<http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/growth/pdfs/IndustrialLandsInventoryforGreaterVancouver.pdf>), there were 6,859 acres (2,775 ha) of "vacant" industrial land in the GVRD in 2005. This land is "not currently utilized for industrial purposes, but designated for future industrial development". The City of Surrey alone contains 46% of the region's vacant industrial land supply. An analysis of the infrastructure servicing suggests that approximately one third (2,400 acres) of the vacant industrial land could be developed within the short term (approximately 1 year), one third in the medium term of 2 – 10 years, and the remainder available in the longer term of 10 years plus. About 90% of the long term land availability is within the City of Surrey.

Based on demand estimates using historical land absorption rates and taking into consideration potential development constraints, the GVRD report claims that the supply of industrial land could accommodate regional development demand for the next 10 to 15 years. This would suggest that there is no compelling "community need" to remove Barnston Island from the Provincial ALR and the GVRD Green Zone on the basis of foreseeable regional industrial land requirements.

It is Smart Growth BC's long-established policy, reinforced by generally accepted principles of sustainable development, to encourage local governments to pursue more intensive and efficient development patterns before turning to protected Green Zone and/or ALR lands. Any economic benefits brought on by the conversion of Barnston Island into an industrial park could arise from industrial development in the region on land that is already zoned, developed and/or serviced.

With a commitment to agriculture, intensification and innovation for economic diversity, and a regional strategy for industrial land, the GVRD and the Surrey/Pitt Meadows communities could generate exciting options for industrial development without compromising the farmland of British Columbia. We sincerely hope that the Agricultural Land Commission will help Barnston Island to realize its aspirations for a value-added and prosperous agricultural community by holding the line on urban expansion and fostering innovative and fiscally responsible urban development.

Yours truly,



Cheeying Ho
Executive Director
Smart Growth BC
314-402 West Pender St
Vancouver BC V6B 1T6
P:604-915-5234
F:604-915-5236