

Notes from the Agricultural Municipalities Meeting at UBCM

September 19, 2024

Topic - Common issues of incorporated municipalities with more than 20% ALR Land

Municipalities in attendance:

District of Summerland
Town of Osoyoos
Town of Oliver
District of Lillooet/Squamish Lillooet Regional District
City of Kamloops
District of North Saanich
City of Abbotsford
City of Pitt Meadows
City of Surrey
District of Kent
Township of Langley
Spallumcheen Township

District of Summerland, opening remarks from Mayor Doug Holmes

- Noted that municipalities invited to meeting were those having 20% or more of their land base within the ALR (stats provided by Ministry of Municipal Affairs); requested one speaker per municipality to speak to the agricultural issues in their respective community to identify common themes and issues experience to work on together
- In Summerland, for everyone \$1 collected from property tax for ALR properties, it costs \$3 to service those lands. Only \$60,000 is collected annually in class 9 property taxes and an additional \$600,000 is collected from all other classes on ALR land, therefore the cost of servicing ALR properties is subsidized by residential tax payers
- Food security is important for all BC residents but the costs to service ag land falls on residents of agricultural communities
- It was a challenge discussing with the government the issue of the cost of servicing ALR land, tend to be bounced between different ministries; would like to work with other municipalities facing the same challenge.

Town of Osoyoos

- The Town is providing water to rural/agricultural areas since the dissolution of the South Okanagan Land Irrigation District (SOLID); wonder if the fee charged to those water users outside of the municipality is fair and if they are subsidizing municipal water users, or are municipal water users subsidizing those users outside of municipal boundaries
- Noted it is unusual for a municipality to have water councillors

Town of Oliver

- The Town is in better shape than in the past regarding ALR land; much of the farmland is located on the outskirts of town and is surrounded by dense subdivisions with municipal infrastructure already going to the subdivisions. ALR therefore easier to service
- much land that used to be orchards has now been converted to housing

Township of Spallumcheen

- 55% of the Township's land base is within the ALR; since the introduction of recent provincial legislation, taxes within the Township have been reduced by millions of dollars, although the Township has a good relationship with the ALC and is attending the meeting to listen to other municipalities experiences
- Large farming operations from the lower mainland have started expanding to the area
- The Township has introduced a road development cost charge but has exempted small farm buildings
- There has been a challenge getting water licenses approved for farms in the area
- The Township has partnered with the Young Agrarians to allow young farmers to lease land to farm (and allows retired farmers to remain on land)

District of Lillooet/Area B Squamish Lillooet Regional District

- Surprised the municipality was included in the database provided by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs
- Concern with farmland not being farmed

City of Kamloops

- Concern for the amount of land within the ALR, impacts to land due to CN Rail setbacks and housing requirements set by the province
- Concern for the water system as Kamloops has the second most complex water system in North America due to topography
- The City is not looking to have viable farm land removed from the ALR but would like to see land that is not viable for farming removed; would like to see a boundary review of the ALR as the impact of the lines being drawn at the time (1970s) were not understood and the ALC needs to balance the ALR with greater good of the community.

District of North Saanich

- 30% of land within the ALR but fortunate to have the airport and other industry to contribute to the overall tax base
- Concern for aging farmers and the ability to keep farms active; concern with encouraging food production on ALR land (not wanting homes to be built)
- There is concern for ensuring the forest canopy of private ALR land remains significant and is not removed for 'farming' purposes (i.e. to build horse stables)
- The District used to meet with an agriculture advisor from the Ministry who would visit farms and understand issues, however this position no longer exists
- Every other Province provides more support for agriculture than BC

- The District would support the common theme that the Ministry of Agriculture does not have enough presence/importance with the government of the day

City of Abbotsford

- The City is the largest geographical municipality in the province with 75% of its land base within the ALR and the highest farm gate receipts of any municipality in Canada; that 75% brings in less than 2% of its taxes
- Concern with the industrial land shortage in the city as this is the eco-system for modern agriculture; trucking is a huge component of modern agriculture
- The City would like to grow an industrial park currently surrounded by the border, railway, freeway and ravine, which is within the ALR but not being farmed as it is not viable; the City would like to take pressure off of viable farmland and grow the economy; 3% of land in the City is currently industrial
- Concern with the airport being surrounded by ALR land which inhibits the ability to grow the airport/airspace; concern with losing indoor grow opportunities to Alberta and other areas; concern with farms wanting to expand but cannot afford to purchase farmland at elevated costs
- Concern for increasing challenge for urban/rural split
- There is a challenge with food security and the total farming ecosystem needs to be understood

City of Pitt Meadows

- 80% of all land is within the ALR and all ALR land within the City is farmable; the City also has large industrial warehousing
- There are 60km of dykes within the City but the actual cost of serving farmland is not as bad compared to others due to a lot of the areas being fairly compact
- The City submitted 3 resolutions to UBCM and is committed to strengthening farmland; the City does not agree to increasing Class 9 tax rates but there is a potential option for reviewing the threshold for farming
- Would like to see max effort to ensure food is being produced on farm land; the City is advocating a vacant land tax on farm land; there is potential to remove the school tax rebate received by non-farmers living on ALR land
- Concern for young farmers being able to remain in farming as land is expensive
- Concern for lands being removed from the ALR by CN for railyards
- The City's current model is to respond to complaints regarding the ALR as they are unable to actively enforce

City of Surrey

- City Council member was a former ALC commissioner and has advocated for farmland and agriculture advisory committees for years
- Concerns with industrializing ALR land as there is not enough land to provide for food security in the Province; further concern with oversized houses, non-farm uses and illegal fill on ALR land

- Concern for the ALC making rulings and expecting local governments to enforce them (ALC legal budget is only \$25,000 annually)
- Noted 80% of all land removed from the ALR is removed by government

District of Kent

- Much of the District's land base is within the ALR to the point that it is difficult to increase the tax base; there would be impacts with an increase the class 9 tax rate
- There is 130 km of drainage within Kent; the District has utilized a 2/3 and 1/3 model where ALR properties pay 1/3 and the remaining comes from general taxation
- The District has implemented a road development cost charge on agricultural buildings
- Concern with truck parks, party houses and fine issuing on ALR land; the ALC has done a good job at preserving farmland but not the farmer

Township of Langley

- 75% of the Township's land base is within the ALR
- The Township is concerned with truck parking on ALR land as it creates/increases costs on the municipality to enforce violations on ALR land due to downloading from the ALC; noted concern for finding viable areas for truck parking. Not on ALR land, that will not impact the environment
- The Township is additionally concerned about the purchase of farmland (horse farms) to be turned in to 'party palaces' and for the ALC allowing more than 10 events per year
- The Township submitted a resolution to UBCM requesting for the ALC to enforce their own regulations/rulings rather than downloading to the local government
- Requested if emergency services, such as a fire hall, can be built on ALR land; ALR lands need emergency services as well and there are massive sections under serviced as there is no land to build such services on

Common themes identified:

- The Ministry of Agriculture does not enough clout within the Provincial Government even though agriculture is an economic driver that benefits the entire province
- Agricultural municipalities should work together to lobby their area associations, UBCM and ultimately the Province, to increase funding for the Ministry of Agriculture to address a variety of concerns/problems
- There is significant pressure on farmland from a variety of sources; there needs to be an increase in the tax base for municipalities with large amounts of land within the ALR.

Next Steps:

- Mayor Holmes to send meeting notes to all municipalities in attendance for review, to consider additional comments/ideas, and to consider whether the meeting was useful and to determine where to go next
- Mayor Holmes to send a letter after the election to the incoming Minister of Agriculture informing them of the meeting and to show that municipalities are working together to identify common/unique challenges and themes.