

Ten Areas of Influence of Local Governments in Agricultural Planning

Planning for agriculture involves many levels of government, the farming sector, non-profits, post-secondary institutions, and the business community. Each has different ways they can impact and influence agriculture. In order to develop an effective and implementable Agricultural Plan for the Comox Valley, understanding the areas where local government has influence is important.

The following ten areas are examples of some of the ways local government policies and bylaws can influence and have an impact on agriculture. This is not a comprehensive list, but provides examples for key topics related to agriculture.

- 1. Land Use Planning for Agriculture:** Local governments are required by the Agricultural Land Commission Act (ALCA) to consider and show Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) in land use plans such as Official Community Plans (OCPs) and Regional Growth Strategies (RGS). Local governments can also use zoning bylaws (ZBLs) to allow agriculture in additional areas such as rural residential. Currently, existing OCPs, ZBLs, and RGS in the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) include agriculture but may need to be updated to reflect current conditions, as changes to the ALCA have occurred.
- 2. Housing on Farmland:** Local governments can be more restrictive than what is allowed by the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) (e.g. allow smaller or fewer houses) but cannot be less restrictive (e.g. allow larger or more houses) and may include complementary regulations (e.g. setbacks). Currently, the CVRD reviews housing development proposals in the ALR. The modernized 2023 Agricultural Plan can reflect any changes in provincial regulations.
- 3. Agri-Tourism:** Within the ALR, tourism and related accommodations are regulated by the ALC. Local governments can be more restrictive, even prohibiting tourism accommodation entirely in their bylaws, but they can't be less restrictive than the provincial regulations. The 2002 CVAP resulted in a ZBL update to enable agritourism accommodations in a manner that supports agriculture as a primary use.

Example: The ALC allows up to ten agri-tourism beds (either tents or bedrooms in cottages) to be used for activities associated with active farming. However, many communities have prohibited them altogether including Denman Island.

- 4. Managing Development Near Farmland through DPAs:** One way to manage development near farmland is to designate Development Permit Areas (DPAs) for the protection of farming on properties adjacent to (but outside of) the ALR. The CVRD requires a development permit for any construction on neighbouring residential or commercial/industrial lands within 30 metres of land that is designated as Agricultural Area or the ALR boundary. The permit may require screening, landscaping, and fencing along that border at the time of development.
- 5. Water Management for Agriculture:** The CVRD has also developed the Tsolum River Watershed Plan that has specific recommendations for agriculture. These recommendations can be reflected and amplified through the Agricultural Plan. Watershed stewardship and conservation priorities can also be included within the recommendations of the plan.

6. **Waste Management for Agriculture:** Local government solid waste facilities (e.g. landfills and recycling centres) can provide services for farms, such as green waste composting. Some local governments provide farmers with reduced tipping fees. Locally, services are provided by Comox Strathcona Waste Management.

Example from another region: Metro Vancouver's landfill provides a discounted tipping fee for green waste from vehicles registered to members of the Delta Farmers Institute.

7. **Compliance and Enforcement for Agriculture:** Local governments can work with the ALC to increase enforcement of rules on farmland to discourage illegal dumping of fill, truck parking, or other non-agricultural uses of the land.

Example from another region: City of Kelowna and the Regional District of Central Okanagan partnered with the ALC to address compliance complaints within the ALR on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis, effectively ensuring that all major violators were brought into compliance.

8. **Communications for Agriculture:** Local governments can communicate the benefits of having agriculture in the region to urban and rural residents. This can include the use of websites, social media posts, online videos, road signs, and festivals or celebrations.

Example from another region: The Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako has a very active 'Agriculture' section on their website that has a lot of valuable information for producers and the public, including a monthly newsletter and a podcast that shares information about the regional agriculture to residents and producers.

9. **Agricultural Economic Development:** Economic development resources can strengthen agricultural businesses. Local government can support economic development through OCP and RGS policy as well as advocacy for funding for community initiatives. The CVRD no longer has an economic development service that supported the 2002 CVAP. The CVRD has allocated funding for an Agriculture Coordinator position and is currently working with the community to explore food hub infrastructure.

10. **Agricultural Committees or Commissions:** Local governments can establish Agricultural Advisory Committees or Commissions (AACs) that provide advice on planning decisions that impact agriculture. AACs are often involved in, and support, projects aimed at promoting public awareness, diversification and growth of the agriculture sector and can advise the Board of Directors on matters regarding the agricultural sector. The CVRD has an active Agricultural Advisory Planning Commission.

This document has been prepared as part of the 2023 Comox Valley Agricultural Plan project. To find out more about the project please visit: www.comoxvalleyrd.ca/agplan