



CITY OF RICHMOND  
**FARMING FIRST  
STRATEGY**



Adopted April 19, 2021





# Table of Contents

Summary .....	iv
ALR in Richmond .....	v
<b>Theme 1: Agricultural Land Base .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Objective 1: Continue to protect the City’s agricultural land base in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). .....	1
Objective 2: Ensure agricultural production remains the primary use of agricultural land. ....	1
<b>Theme 2: Agricultural Economic Viability .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Objective 1: Enhance long-term agricultural viability and opportunities for innovation. ....	3
Objective 2: Support the use of agricultural land for local food production and encourage a local food network to increase local food supply and consumption. ....	3
<b>Theme 3: Infrastructure for Agriculture .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Objective 1: Continue improvements to irrigation and drainage infrastructure in support of agricultural production. ....	5
Objective 2: Support farm access to properties located in the ALR .....	5
<b>Theme 4: Agriculture and the Environment.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Objective 1: Mitigate the impacts of climate change on agricultural production. ....	7
Objective 2: Maintain a balance between the natural environment and agricultural production. ....	7
<b>Theme 5: Inter-Governmental Support for Agriculture.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Objective 1: Continue to work collaboratively with upper levels of government to enhance agricultural viability. ....	9
Objective 2: Liaise with upper levels of government for legislative changes to support agricultural production. ....	9
<b>Existing Status of Road Improvements in the ALR Map .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>11</b>

## Summary

Agriculture is an important part of Richmond's history and current economy. Early settlers were attracted to Richmond by the fertile soils of Lulu and Sea Islands and promise of agricultural productivity. Over the years, Richmond has grown and evolved into a vibrant urban centre, while retaining a significant portion of Richmond's land area as agricultural. Today, agriculture forms an important part of the local and regional economy as well as a major land use in the city. Approximately 4,993 ha (12,338 ac) of Richmond's land base, or 39% of the City, is within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).

Council directed staff to update the 2003 Agricultural Viability Strategy (AVS) to ensure that it remains effective, and responds well to the current and future issues, trends and challenges facing the agricultural industry.

The City of Richmond Farming First Strategy includes themes, objectives and policies to guide decisions on the land use management of agricultural land, enhance public awareness of agriculture and food security issues, and strengthen agricultural viability in Richmond. The Farming First Strategy is focused around the following five major themes:



**THEME 1**  
Agricultural  
Land Base



**THEME 2**  
Agricultural  
Economic  
Viability



**THEME 3**  
Infrastructure for  
Agriculture



**THEME 4**  
Agriculture  
and the  
Environment

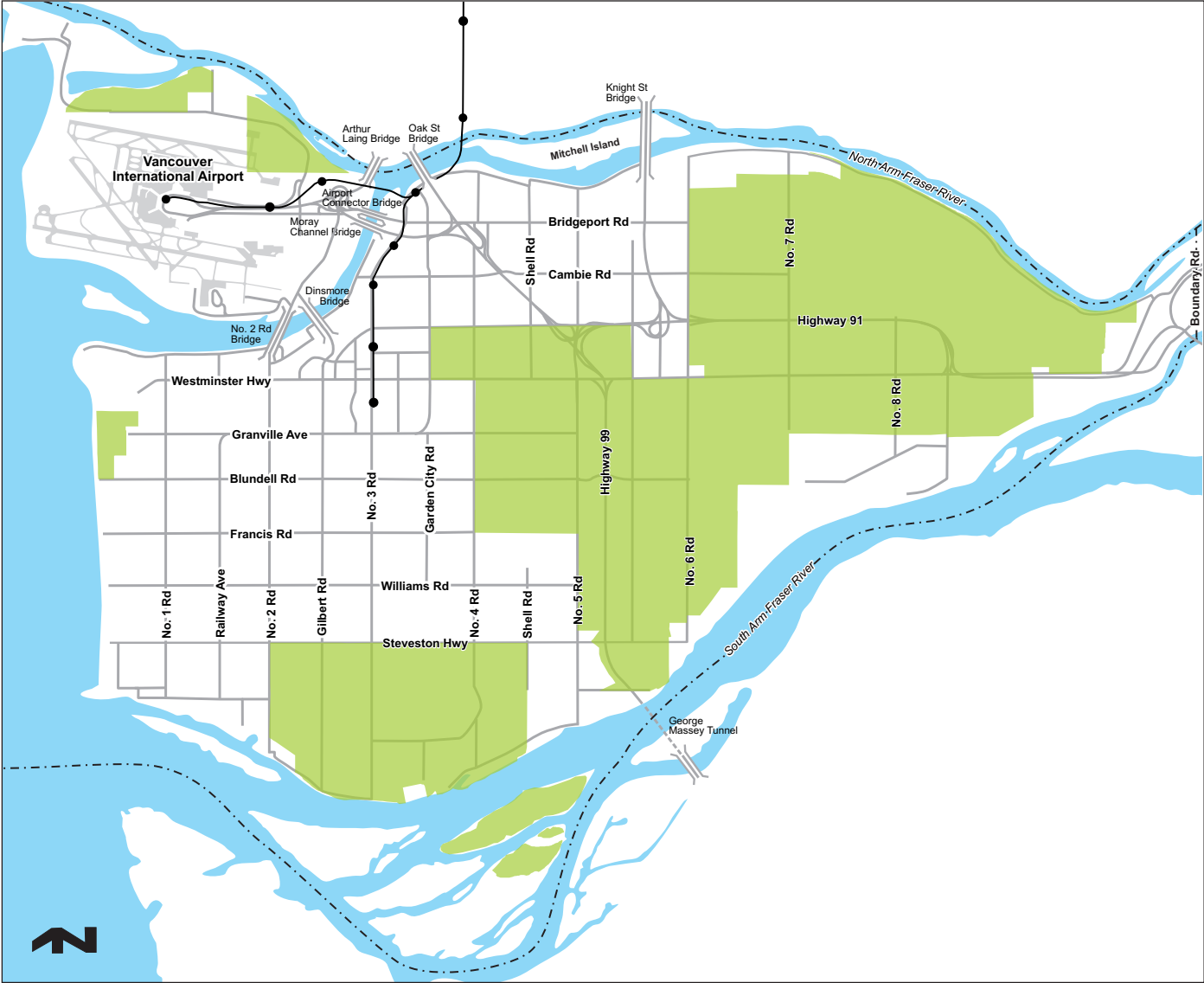


**THEME 5**  
Inter-  
Governmental  
Support for  
Agriculture

The themes, objectives and policies contained in the Farming First Strategy is a result of a multi-phase process, which included a review of existing policies and practices in Richmond, best practice research from other jurisdictions, and input from the City's Food Security and Agricultural Advisory Committee (FSAAC) and Richmond residents.



# ALR in Richmond



- Canada Line
- Agricultural Land Reserve



Photo Credit: Wade Comer Photography

# Theme 1: Agricultural Land Base

## Objective 1: Continue to protect the City's agricultural land base in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).

- a. Maintain the existing ALR boundary and do not support a loss of ALR land.
- b. Ensure that land uses adjacent to, but outside of, the ALR are compatible with farming by establishing effective agricultural buffers on the non-agricultural lands.
- c. Designate all parcels abutting, but outside of, the ALR boundary as Development Permit Areas with Guidelines for the purpose of protecting farming.
- d. Limit the area used for residential development on properties in the ALR.
- e. Limit the number of dwelling units to one on lots within the ALR. Any proposal for additional dwelling units would require approval from both Council and the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC).
- f. Seasonal farm labour accommodation, as an additional residential use, may be considered so long as the accommodation is accessory to the principal agricultural purpose and helps to support a farm operation in the Agricultural Land Reserve.

## Objective 2: Ensure agricultural production remains the primary use of agricultural land.

- a. Continue to encourage the use of the ALR land for farming and discourage non-farm uses (e.g. residential).
- b. Limit the subdivision of agricultural land into smaller parcels, except where measurable benefits to agriculture can be demonstrated as per the policies and regulations of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*.
- c. Consider agricultural projects which achieve viable farming while avoiding residential development as a principal use.
- d. Encourage soil-based farming by regulating the amount of hardsurfacing in agricultural buildings, structures and greenhouses.
- e. Ensure agricultural production (e.g. growing of crops and raising animals) remains the primary use of agricultural land and ancillary uses (e.g. farm retail, storing, packing, preparing and processing of farm products) are secondary uses and consistent with the scale of the farm operation.
- f. Ensure soil deposit and removal proposals enhance agricultural capabilities (e.g. greater range of potential crops) and are consistent with City bylaws and policies, and Provincial requirements.







Photo Credit: Wade Comer Photography

## Theme 2: Agricultural Economic Viability

### Objective 1: Enhance long-term agricultural viability and opportunities for innovation.

- a. Build relationships with farmers and the agricultural community through the City's Food Security and Agricultural Advisory Committee (FSAAC) to address issues impacting agricultural viability and food security.
- b. Increase public awareness of City and other initiatives related to agriculture by disseminating information on farming practices, farm products, and educational programs through the City's website, social media or other forms of communication.
- c. Provide information for new farmers and property owners of agricultural land, including property owners who own small parcels (e.g. less than 5 acres), to encourage active farming or lease the land for farming (e.g. Provincial land matching program).
- d. Encourage value-added agricultural related business initiatives consistent with City and Provincial regulations, while ensuring agricultural production remains the primary use of land.
- e. Develop agriculture-specific signage guidelines in order to support seasonal farm retail activities, including any necessary amendments to the City's Sign Bylaw.
- f. Continue to develop relationships with non-profit, academic and government organizations which promote local agriculture, organic growing, climate adaptation, carbon management and reductions in pesticide use.

### Objective 2: Support the use of agricultural land for local food production and encourage a local food network to increase local food supply and consumption.

- a. Continue to collaborate with Metro Vancouver, the Province, food producers, Vancouver Coastal Health, other municipalities and stakeholders to advance the goals in the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy.
- b. During the development application process, encourage applicants to consider urban agriculture into development projects outside of the ALR, including rooftop gardens, community gardens, vertical farming, backyard gardening, indoor farming, edible landscaping and the planting of food bearing trees.
- c. Raise public awareness, in coordination with the FSAAC, of local farming, farmer's markets, and local food products, produce and programs.
- d. Support food tourism initiatives, in coordination with Tourism Richmond, the FSAAC, and other local stakeholders to highlight local food production.
- e. Strengthen relationships with external organizations that provide agriculture-related educational opportunities and promote local farming.





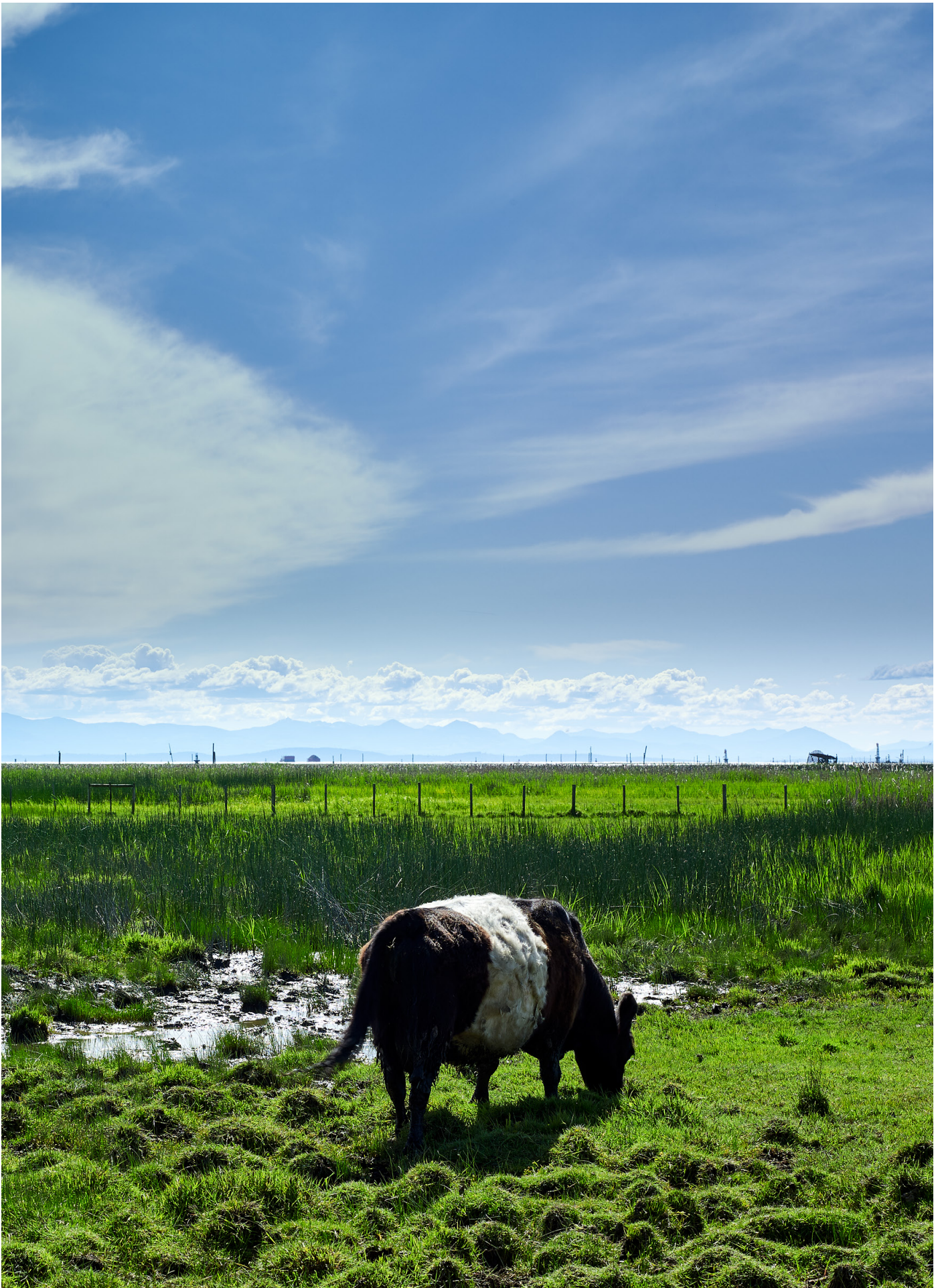


Photo Credit: Wade Comer Photography



## Theme 3: Infrastructure for Agriculture

### Objective 1: Continue improvements to irrigation and drainage infrastructure in support of agricultural production.

- a. Continue improvement of irrigation and drainage infrastructure to provide secure and suitable water supplies and functional drainage systems that support the agricultural sector while protecting environmental assets, in consultation with the agricultural community and relevant City departments.
- b. Consider separate water meters for the principal dwelling and the farm operation and ensure adequate service connections are installed for the farm operation.
- c. Update and implement the East Richmond Agricultural Water Supply Study.
- d. Encourage sustainable farm practices that utilize on-site water drainage, storage and use, and result in the reduction of potable water use.
- e. Continue to monitor the impact of the Fraser River 'salt wedge' on agricultural land and support improvements to supply salt-free irrigation water to affected areas.

### Objective 2: Support farm access to properties located in the ALR.

- a. Discourage, wherever possible, roads in the ALR, except as noted on the Existing Status of Road Improvements in the ALR Map.
- b. Consider how proposed road improvements (e.g. road widening) on existing City roads may impact farmland.
- c. For agricultural operations on agriculture sites with no direct road access, the City may facilitate farm access only (no new or improved roads) through unopened road allowances (via licensing agreements with the City).
- d. Regulate all soil deposition and removal, including for farm access roads, as permitted by Provincial regulations, through a City permitting process to ensure impacts are mitigated (e.g. adjacent properties, City property, Riparian Management Areas, and Environmentally Sensitive Areas).





Photo Credit: Wade Comer Photography

## Theme 4: Agriculture and the Environment

### Objective 1: Mitigate the impacts of climate change on agricultural production.

- a. Coordinate with Metro Vancouver, ALC, and the Ministry of Agriculture to assess the long-term impacts of climate change on agriculture and develop a coordinated response and tools to protect agricultural production.
- b. Continue to protect agricultural land and agricultural production, in coordination with the City's Dike Master Plan, Flood Protection Management Strategy and climate action initiatives to address sea-level rise.
- c. Encourage sustainable farming practices, in coordination with relevant City departments, the FSAAC, ALC and Ministry of Agriculture, including water and soil conservation, greenhouse gas emissions reductions and soil management.
- d. Ensure soil deposit and removal proposals for agricultural production enhance agricultural capabilities (e.g. greater range of crops) and address environmental issues (e.g. climate change, carbon storage, and groundwater table), consistent with the City's Soil Bylaw.

### Objective 2: Maintain a balance between the natural environment and agricultural production.

- a. Continue to implement standard assessment criteria for farming properties where designated Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) or Riparian Management Area (RMA) will be impacted, while continuing to support agricultural production.
- b. Investigate opportunities for reducing emissions from crop and livestock production, in coordination with the FSAAC, ALC and Ministry of Agriculture.
- c. Explore opportunities to promote the relationship between agricultural viability and biodiversity through agricultural practices that benefit wildlife.







## Theme 5: Inter-Governmental Support for Agriculture

### Objective 1: Continue to work collaboratively with upper levels of government to enhance agricultural viability.

- a. Coordinate with ALC and Ministry of Agriculture to ensure City bylaws and policies are consistent with Provincial policies and regulations, including the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, ALR Regulations, ALC Policies and the Minister's Bylaw Standards.
- b. Coordinate with ALC and Ministry of Agriculture to ensure development proposals are consistent with Provincial policies and regulations.
- c. Coordinate with Metro Vancouver to support the Regional Growth Strategy, which includes agricultural designations and policies for protection of agricultural land.

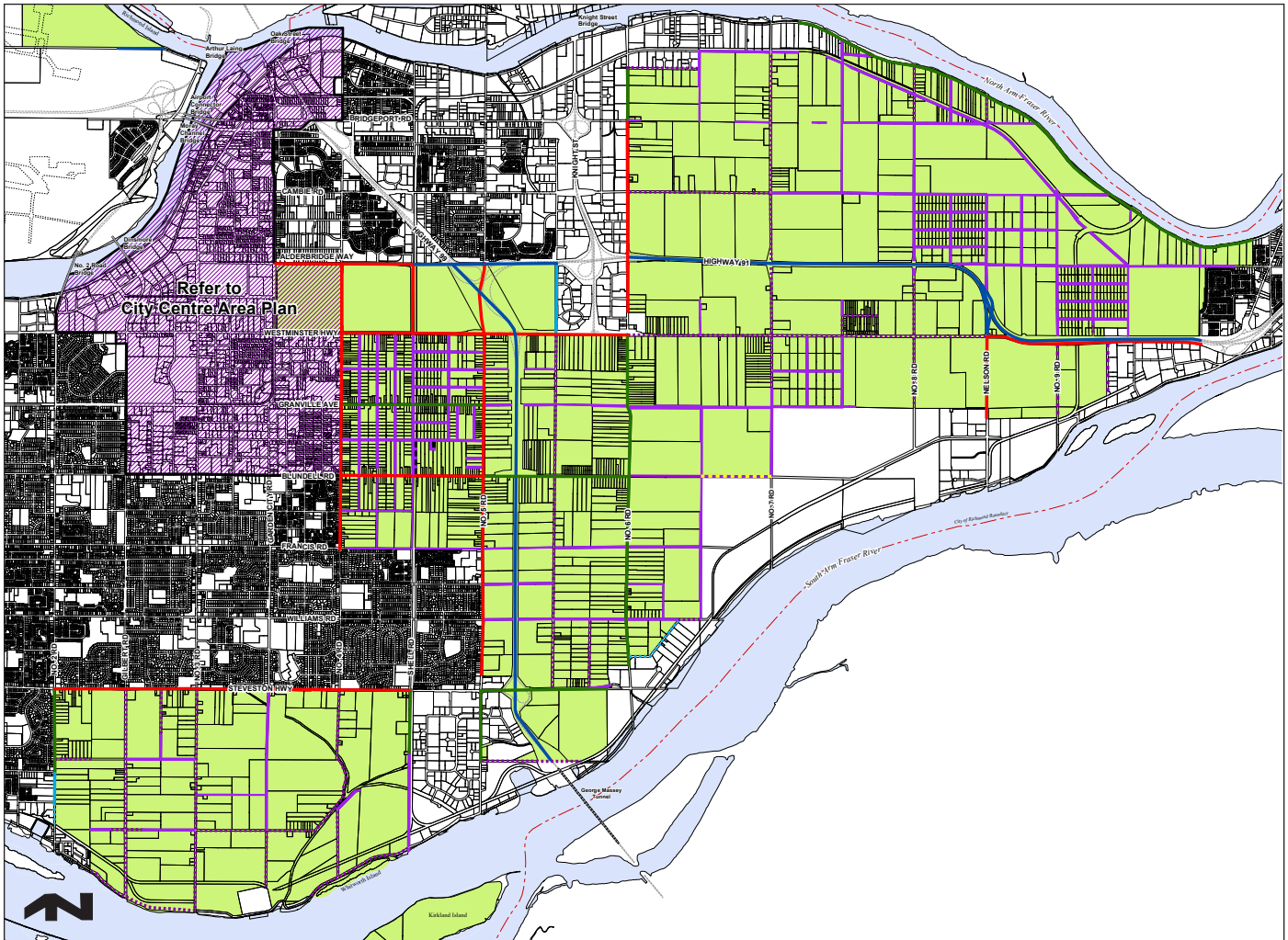
### Objective 2: Liaise with upper levels of government for legislative changes to support agricultural production.

- a. Continue to communicate with upper levels of government to address the following agricultural-related issues:
  - Review income threshold for farm status to encourage legitimate farming operations.
  - Protection for farmers who lease farmland and encourage longer term leases.
  - Strengthening the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and the ALR Regulations to explicitly prohibit non-farm uses in the ALR and encourage agricultural production.
  - Enforcement of contraventions on ALR property (including monitoring, inspections, and penalties for non-compliance).
  - Improved regulations for non-soil based greenhouses and limiting such structures to areas with lower soil class agricultural land (e.g. Class 4 or lower).
  - Explore financial incentives for farming operations (e.g. grants, tax breaks and training opportunities).
  - Explore financial incentives for environmental/sustainable farm operations, organic farming and reduction in pesticide use.
  - Incorporation of environmental stewardship initiatives into the *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act*.





# Existing Status of Road Improvements in the ALR



Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR)

**Improved Roads**

- Provincial/Federal/Regional Highways
- Major Arterial
- Proposed Major Arterial
- Minor Arterial
- Collector
- Proposed Collector
- Agricultural

**Unimproved Roads**

- Unimproved Road
- Proposed Major Arterial



## Conclusion

The City of Richmond Farming First Strategy is a result of a multi-phased consultation process regarding the current and future issues, trends and challenges facing the agricultural industry. The Farming First Strategy includes themes, objectives and policies to guide decisions on the land use management of agricultural land, enhance public awareness of agriculture and food security issues, and strengthen agricultural viability in Richmond. Given that the City can only act within its legislative authority, the Farming First Strategy is also critical in identifying the need to work collaboratively with upper levels of government, including the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC), to ensure local agricultural production is supported.

The City recognizes the importance of agriculture as a food source, an environmental resource, a heritage asset and an important contributor to the local economy. Agricultural land and farming is sustained by long-term City policies that maintain an urban containment boundary that keeps residential growth outside of the ALR. Richmond residents have always placed a high value on the protection of the City's farmlands.



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