

ALC denies land plan

City of Powell River's application for ALR property removal grinds to a halt

L A U R A W A L Z
PEAK EDITOR

BC's Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) has refused the City of Powell River's application to remove 343 hectares (847 acres) from the agricultural land reserve (ALR).

In a decision released on September 24, the commission found that many areas of the land under application have agricultural capability and are suitable for agricultural production; that the case for community need has not been established and

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Decision puts dent in business strategy

Commission finds proposed development initiative lacking in sufficient detail

ALC

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the proposed solution was lacking in detail; and there was a lack of offsetting benefits to the ALR and agriculture.

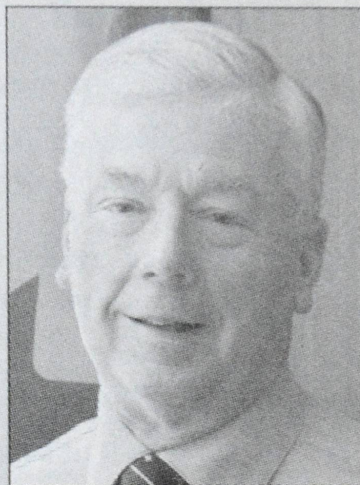
The city applied to remove the land, contained in five parcels and three locations, to allow development and expand economic opportunities within the community. Four of the parcels are owned by PRSC Land Developments Ltd., in which the city, Tla'Amin (Sliammon) First Nation and Catalyst Paper Corporation are partners. Catalyst owns the fifth parcel.

Yrainucep Development Corporation has a development proposal for land in the Wildwood area, which includes an airport, residential homes, a golf course and an equestrian centre.

But the commission found "the proposed development initiative was lacking in sufficient detail to provide a level of confidence that it would address the challenges facing the community. Furthermore, in response to the commission's request for more details, the proponent declined, citing security concerns."

Also, the city did not present a detailed inventory of the land base in Powell River, the commission found, and 100 hectares that were removed from the ALR in 1994 for economic development remains undeveloped.

Mayor Stewart Alsgard said the ALC decision was



STEWART ALSGARD

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a baffling and bizarre outcome. "This was a good application, not supported by the Powell River Regional District, and turned down for no valid reason," he told the *Peak*. "The city's application was encouraged by go-for-the-whole-package Colin Fry of the ALC, and Commissioner John Tomlinson said, 'I love this application. There is something in it for the proponents, for the agricultural community and the ALC. This truly is a win-win-win.'" Alsgard said Tomlinson made the comments when he was in Powell River for the ALC public meeting in July.

Alsgard said the city had discussions with Stan Hagen, minister of tourism, sport and the arts, Mike Harcourt, former BC premier, and MLA Nicholas Simons at the UBCM (Union of BC Municipalities) convention in Vancouver on Monday, September 24, the day the ALC decision was announced. "We continue to consider our options, including those we have been

reluctant to pursue until now," said Alsgard. "They will unfold in the fullness of time."

The city will not give up on establishing Millennium Park, Alsgard also said. The sale and redevelopment of the lands in the ALR would have provided the city with the revenues necessary to buy the lands for the proposed park. "We will find a way to pursue and obtain this park for our citizens," he said. "No is not in my vocabulary. This council will continue to fight to preserve the Millennium Park."

Walter Paul, Tla'Amin chief and president of PRSC, said he was disappointed with the decision and that it puts "a serious dent in PRSC's business plan. We had a credible multimillion-dollar proposal on the table from Yrainucep Development Corporation for the parcels in the Wildwood area that would have created hundreds of well-paying jobs, new streams of revenue and taxes, as well as much-needed infrastructure for the Sliammon Nation. The

ALC decision limits potential uses for the lands, which makes the task of community growth and diversification that much harder."

Paul said it was too early to comment on what PRSC's plans for the land will be now.

Simons, who represents the Powell River-Sunshine Coast riding, did not support the city's application. "The ALC is required by law to protect agricultural land and they did that with this decision," he said. "Now it's time to get on with other proposals for economic development and try to engage as much of the community as possible in the plan."

ALERT (Agricultural Land Emergency Response Team) launched a vigorous campaign against the city's application. "We're pleased that the ALC recognized the need to preserve agricultural lands and look forward to an open planning process with full participation of all sectors of the Powell River community," said Denise Reinhardt, an ALERT member.

Helena Bird, who owns Hatch-a-Bird Farm in Wildwood along with her husband Peter, had said if the proposal went through, it would be the end of their organic farm, which borders PRSC property. "It's a win for agriculture," she said. "Maybe we can work with PRSC towards something more beneficial to agriculture."

The ALC's full decision can be found on its website, www.alc.gov.bc.ca.