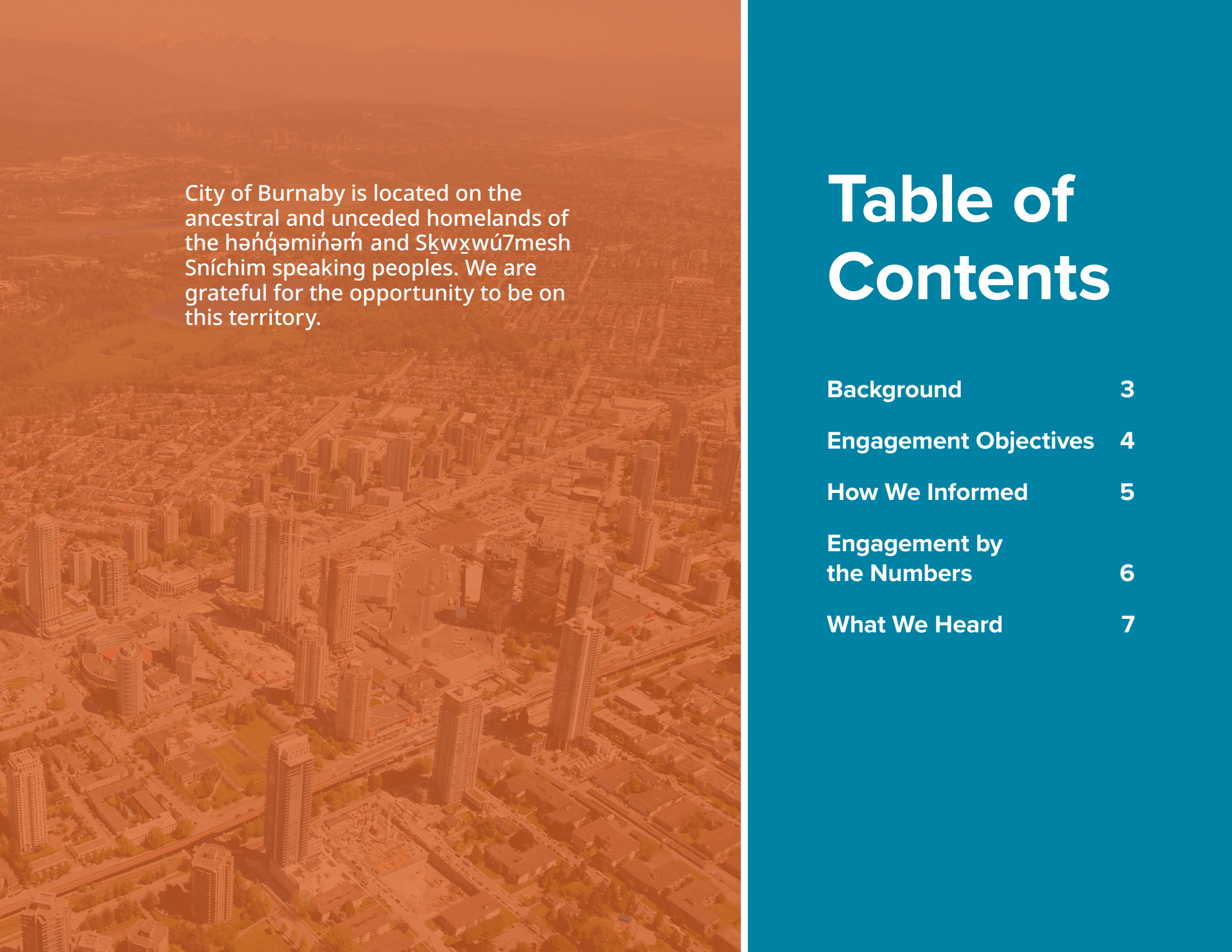




Burnaby Agricultural Land Review

What We Heard Report

MARCH 2024

An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely Burnaby, is shown with a semi-transparent blue overlay. The image captures a dense urban area with numerous high-rise buildings, residential structures, and green spaces. The blue overlay is a solid, medium-blue color that covers the entire image, providing a backdrop for the text and the table of contents.

City of Burnaby is located on the ancestral and unceded homelands of the hə́ńqəmiḥə́m and Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim speaking peoples. We are grateful for the opportunity to be on this territory.

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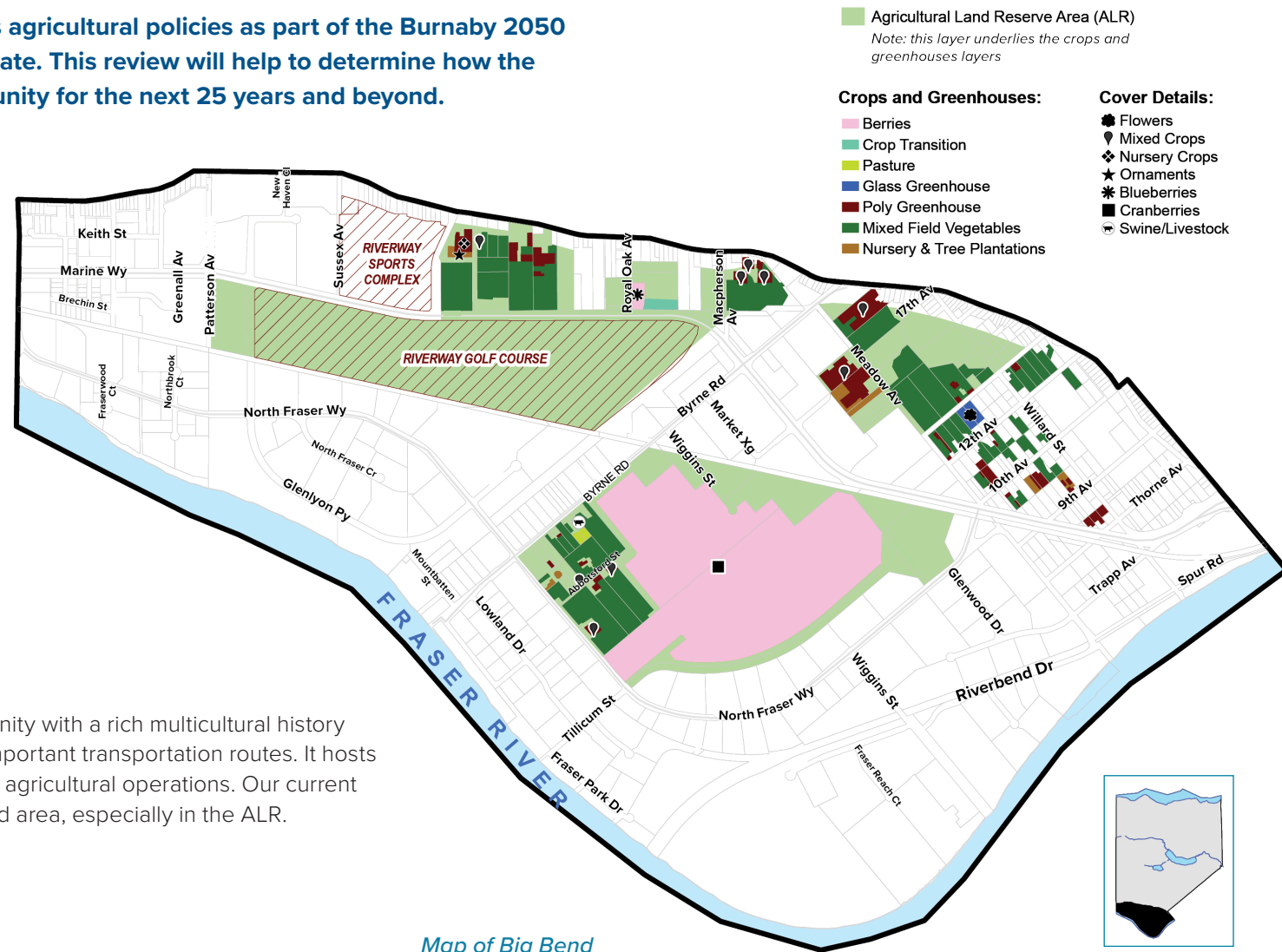
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Background

The City of Burnaby is reviewing its agricultural policies as part of the Burnaby 2050 Official Community Plan (OCP) update. This review will help to determine how the City can support its farming community for the next 25 years and beyond.

The Big Bend area has approximately 461 acres (187 hectares) of land zoned for agricultural use under the A1 (Agricultural), A2 (Small Holdings), and A3 (Truck Gardening) zoning districts. Of that area, approximately 362 acres (146 hectares) are in the provincially designated Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). The rest are located in the Riverside neighbourhood. The 170-acre Riverway Golf Course and the 43-acre Marshland Avenue Bog Forest and trail are also located in the ALR, but are zoned for park and public use.

Big Bend is a unique agricultural community with a rich multicultural history that is close to busy town centres and important transportation routes. It hosts a mix of small farms, nurseries and other agricultural operations. Our current OCP supports agriculture in the Big Bend area, especially in the ALR.



Engagement Objectives

Community input is an important part of our OCP planning process. To collect input, the City advertised three roundtable discussion events for farmers and residents of Big Bend. The purpose of these in-person sessions was to hear from farmers and residents about their unique experiences and to discuss ideas for new policies to enhance Burnaby's agricultural lands.

These events were an opportunity for Big Bend residents to raise issues that are important to their community and farming businesses. The sessions were also an opportunity to raise awareness of the Burnaby 2050 Official Community Plan update among the farming community.

Translation services in Punjabi, Mandarin and Cantonese were available upon request at the time of registration. Based on registration numbers, two roundtable events were held on February 12, 2024.

The engagement program was facilitated by independent consulting firms, Urban Systems and Upland Agricultural Consulting. City staff and consultants were available to answer questions about the Burnaby 2050 process and Agricultural Land Review.



How We Informed



POSTCARD

Information postcards were mailed out to all farms and residences in the Big Bend area to promote the project and invite people to attend one of three events. The postcard was translated into three languages (Punjabi, traditional Chinese, and simplified Chinese).



DISCUSSION GUIDE

A 'Let's Talk About Agricultural Lands' discussion guide was created to get people talking about Burnaby's agricultural lands and to raise interest in the events. This information was also available online at [Burnaby.ca/Agriculture](https://burnaby.ca/agriculture).



AMBASSADORS

Two local community ambassadors conducted additional outreach by distributing paper copies of the 'Let's Talk About Agricultural Lands' discussion guide and promoting the events by word of mouth.

Community members were encouraged to register in advance by emailing Burnaby2050@Burnaby.ca or calling 604-297-7874.



Engagement by the Numbers

Two roundtable discussion events were held on Monday, February 12, 2024, at Mulligan's House in the Riverway complex at 9001 Bill Fox Way. One session was held in the afternoon (12:30–2:30 pm) and the other was held in the evening (5:30–7:30 pm). The sessions included presentations from City staff and Upland Agricultural Consulting and featured focused conversations with participants. A light meal was provided. In total, 30 participants attended the events.

During the group discussion, participants were asked the following questions:

- What inspires you to farm in Burnaby?
- What is your vision for farming in Big Bend in 2050?
- What trends are you noticing in the Big Bend community?
- What land use challenges are Big Bend farmers facing?
- How can the City's OCP policies help support farming in Big Bend?
- What priorities should the City focus on?

Participants were also asked to provide input on the 2016 Agricultural Land Use Inventory, including any comments on current farming operations.

The Agricultural Land Use Inventory map shows where different crops and greenhouses are located in Big Bend based on data provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The most recent data that is available is from 2016.



What We Heard

The following section provides a summary of what we heard during the roundtable events.



INSPIRATION

When asked what inspires them to farm in Burnaby, we heard participants say:

- they love the nature of the work and find it fulfilling
- they have a passion for the family business
- farming is a lifestyle that they have chosen
- they appreciate the strong sense of community in the neighbourhood
- the rural character of the area and central location in the Lower Mainland is attractive
- the high-quality soils and supportive environment for agricultural production
- proximity to markets and ability to sell products locally



VISION

When asked about their vision for the future of Big Bend, we heard participants say:

- a productive agricultural area
- more farms, more crop variety and more food grown locally in Burnaby
- greater application of different farming techniques, both traditional and modern
- a new generation of farmers and more people farming
- more education around agriculture and farming practices
- more agritourism and support for farmer's markets
- a destination for produce sales
- limited new housing development to preserve land for agricultural purposes
- improved communication between the Big Bend community and the City



What is Agritourism?

In BC, agritourism is defined as a tourist activity, service or facility accessory to land that is classified as a farm under the Assessment Act.

Source: Agricultural Land Commission Act, Policy L-04, October 2016. Activities Designated as Farm Use: Agri-tourism activities in the Agricultural land reserve (ALR)





TRENDS

When asked about the trends they are noticing in the Big Bend community, we heard participants say:

- **The rural, agricultural character of the Big Bend area is changing**

- » There are fewer food production farms.
- » There is more residential development, including pre-loading for large single-family dwellings which may destroy the land's agricultural capability and raise the water table on adjacent properties.
- » There has been an increase in non-agricultural land uses (e.g. truck parking, storage for non-farm businesses).
- » New residents/property owners are moving here to build homes, not to farm.
- » Some properties are being held for investment, left derelict, or otherwise not used for agriculture.

- **The nature of the farming business is changing**

- » Farming is hard, dependent on weather, and unpredictable.
- » Old business models may not work anymore.
- » Land and operation costs (e.g. fertilizer, labour, supplies, shipping) are increasing.
- » It is challenging to make small farming businesses sustainable and profitable.
- » New residents/property owners may be hesitant to farm because they are unsure if farming will be profitable.
- » It is challenging to start up a new farm because the financial investment is significant and the risk is high.

- » It is challenging for farming businesses with retail on site to acquire liability insurance.

- Insurance companies want to reduce risk, do not want to take on any more farms.
- Without insurance, farm businesses are at risk of closing.

- » Some farmers/residents are only growing produce for themselves now.
- » New businesses are opening in the community (most in floriculture industry).

- **There are barriers to product distribution and sales**

- » It is challenging to market products and profit from sales.
- » Prices of agricultural products are unpredictable and influenced by current supply and demand conditions.
- » There are limited options for selling products.
 - Farmers cannot sell wholesale unless their business is certified. This requires a lot of work due to the many requirements and is not necessarily profitable.
 - Farmers must sell their product directly to make a profit, but this is challenging to do.
- » Some pop-up markets have been successful, but it is challenging to find staff to run them.
- » Farm sales signs along the road are not enough to attract consumers. Fast traffic may make it challenging for drivers to slow down and see what is available on the farm.
- » There is concern over farm stands being considered “illegal” and desire for City to permit them.



- **The shopping patterns of consumers are changing**

- » Fewer consumers are shopping locally for produce.
- » Many consumers prefer one-stop shopping at the supermarket because it is more convenient and affordable.
- » Consumers may find prices at local farmer's markets too high.
- » It may be challenging for consumers to find and support hobby farmers without more public awareness, better signage, etc.
- » Urban dwellers like their proximity to the rural area and want to visit farms to see their operations.
- » More businesses are selling products directly from their property than before.

- **There is a labour shortage to support farming operations**

- » Farming, especially multicrop farming, is labour intensive. It is not easy to generate interest in farming due to the challenging nature of the business.
- » Farmers are aging, and it is challenging to attract new, young farmers to the business.
- » It is challenging to attract local employees.
- » The lack of street lighting creates an unsafe environment for workers who commute.
- » Current zoning does not permit temporary housing for staff (only one primary residence per lot is permitted), making it challenging to hire seasonal workers.
- » Succession planning can be challenging – some children are interested in continuing the family business while others are pursuing different careers.



- **There are issues with pests and invasive species**

- » Many crops (e.g. watermelon, pumpkins, squash, etc.) can no longer be grown due to issues with rats in the fields and greenhouses.
- » Invasive species (e.g. weeds, noxious weeds, cottonwood trees) on unused parcels of land may spread onto neighbouring properties and impact farm productivity due to pesticide use.

- **There are issues with soil drainage**

- » High culverts and intensification of land uses (e.g. pre-loading of single-family dwellings, construction of mall) have contributed to poor soil drainage.
- » Properties experience flooding during heavy rains.
- » Soil quality has deteriorated on some properties and is no longer suitable for farming.
- » City waterways (ditches) are well-maintained but private ditches are not always well-maintained.

- **There is concern about how many farms will be left in 2050...**

- » if the farming community is not supported
- » if there is no succession planning
- » if labour shortages continue
- » if lots are sold and used for residential purposes
- » that vegetable farming may end in Burnaby





LAND USE CHALLENGES

When asked about what land use challenges Big Bend farmers are facing, we heard participants say:

- **Not all agricultural land is being used for farming**
 - » Farmland is becoming scarce; agricultural land in lots zoned as Agricultural District A2 (Small Holdings) is being replaced by residential development.
 - » There is inadequate protection of agricultural uses in A2.
 - » There are non-farm uses (e.g. truck storage, home-based roofing business, commercial vehicles, churches) on properties zoned for agricultural use.
- **Some lots are too small for viable farming business operations**
 - » Many lots zoned as Agricultural District A2 (Small Holdings) are too small.
 - These may be more suitable for growing food for personal use.
 - Many property owners are using A2 properties for housing, not farming.
 - » Small-scale farms in Burnaby cannot compete with larger, industrial-scale farms.
 - Land size is too small and land cost is too high to allow for many types of mechanization.
- » It is challenging to keep staff busy for six (6) months on small-scale farms.
- » Larger farms would be more viable but if the lot is too big, it may not be used entirely for agricultural purposes.
- » Large farms may do one crop a year (e.g. carrot, cauliflower, broccoli) and sell it to one retailer. It is challenging to grow enough of one crop on small farms to make a profit. Crop turnover is laborious.
- **Other restrictions/issues**
 - » Height restrictions on greenhouses are limiting the capacity for production.
 - » Provincial farm tax status regulations should be reviewed for ways to better identify farmed vs. non-farmed lands.





PRIORITIES

When asked about priorities the City should focus on, we heard participants say:

- **Policy changes to preserve agricultural uses in Big Bend**

- » Update bylaws that currently restrict certain agriculture-related uses in the ALR.
- » Update bylaws to restrict certain non-agriculture related uses on A2 lots (even though not in ALR).
- » Ensure properties are used for farming (e.g. consider requiring an irrevocable letter of credit).
- » Relax height and dimension restrictions of structures (e.g. barns, greenhouses) in A1.
- » Permit greenhouses to have unlimited land coverage.
- » Update the City's soil bylaws to support the Agricultural Land Committee's (ALC) regulations, and ensure that the City and ALC coordinate enforcement and compliance efforts.
- » Update the zoning bylaw to permit on-farm retail markets for selling products on-site.

- **Update housing policies**

- » Make sure the City's bylaws are consistent with the ALC rules when it comes to the size of residential development in the ALR or other lands zoned for agriculture.
- » Follow provincial regulations and permit housing for temporary workers on parcels in the ALR.
- » Restrict second homes for non-farming uses.
- » Provide financial support for the construction of temporary housing.

- **More flexible regulations around agriculture related activities**

- » Concern about the decline of vegetable farming in Burnaby.
- » Permit more creative and innovative uses of farmlands to help farms survive and continue being profitable (e.g. weddings, restaurants/ food service, markets, etc.).
- » Support more agritourism (e.g. farm tours, seasonal events, etc.).



- **Incentives to farm the land sustainably**

- » Advocate for an improved Provincial farm tax status program to make it more effective.
 - Farm tax status should be based on the percentage of land used for farming.
 - Offer farm tax status if land is being used productively as a farm.
- » Reduce cost of water for properties with farm tax status.
- » Support conservation practices that require less water (e.g. drip irrigation).
- » Promote the Provincial Environmental Farm Plan program to support a shift from the use of chemicals to organic forms of pest control.

- **Better communication and access to resources**

- » Form an Agricultural Advisory Committee with representation from different demographic groups and sectors of agriculture, or have the community delegate one person who liaises between the City and the farmers.
- » Delegate a City liaison to coordinate communication between the City and Big Bend community.
 - Handle inquiries.
 - Provide information on ongoing projects and initiatives.
- » Offer support with marketing products.

- **Support with land maintenance and infrastructure upgrades**

- » Upgrade pump stations.
- » Continue ditch maintenance and drainage of City ditches.
- » Support property owners financially with maintenance of private ditches.
- » Plow vacant lands to reduce growth of weeds.
- » Adopt integrated approach to drainage planning.
- » Lower culverts to improve drainage.

- **Make better use of City-owned, vacant land**

- » Lease land to farmers for small-scale farming (e.g. incubator, community gardens), services that support farming (such as educational activities) or to provide services to support farming.
- » Consider partnerships with farming programs at educational institutions (e.g. University of British Columbia, Kwantlen Polytechnic University) and mentorship opportunities.





NEXT STEPS

This What We Heard Report will be posted on the project webpage ([Burnaby.ca/Agriculture](https://burnaby.ca/agriculture)). This report will be considered by the project team in developing agricultural policies for Burnaby 2050 – Burnaby’s Official Community Plan (OCP) update. The OCP update will also be further informed by a third round of public engagement that will launch in April 2024.

