

# Listening to the Garden City Lands = PARC

This discussion is illustrated by the PARC graphic. Park stands for Parkland for Agriculture, Recreation & Conservation.

When we look and listen, the Garden City Lands tell us what's good for them.

In the graphic, the underlying image is a satellite view in rainy season. Wetter areas look darker. Notice, for example, the light "clean clay fill" in the northwest corner and the darker—and wetter—lower-lying land south of it.

More subtly, several of the labeled areas convey the close-range view of Michael Wolfe, who knows and loves the ecology of the lands. He spent time with them this spring to map where he found native species, streams, and more.

A few streams caught the satellite's eye, but Michael located a hidden one with banks of abundant cloudberry and sphagnum. It's east of the green "ecology dyke trails" label and parallel to it, easy to miss but well worth conserving.

Aspects like that are the lands' way of showing us the "restorable sphagnum bog," which can be saved with dyking that holds in the acidic bog water and lets precipitation raise the water table. Michael was recording Nature's wishes when he drew a slanting and winding western border, which could be the future route of a dike trail.

In the northeast, Michael found none of the living sphagnum moss that enables a sphagnum bog. Still, it remains a field of ancient peat. With the right planting method and water levels, that's an ideal base for regenerating sphagnum. The city would witness the rebirth of a bog in its midst.

Although the bog ecosystem of the Garden City Lands is in critical shape, the published resources of the Canadian Peat Moss Association prove there are Canadian experts who could help. Also, the 2008 *Lulu Island Bog* book describes efforts to save bog remnants east of the Garden City Lands, and we can learn from the scant success. Leading-edge care is essential. Deep commitment will enable full recovery.

Agriculture expert Kent Mullinix says the higher land in the northwest is suited to orchard trees and farm animals, which would rather not stand in water. South of that, the soil is more organic. With drainage, it can become productive for growing.

The areas for agricultural education and community farms and gardens could be crisscrossed by a trail system designed to feed visitors' interest while prompting respect for what others grow.

The Garden City Lands have cousins, the Terra Nova Rural Park and Natural Area far to the west, role models to imitate in adapted ways. Farming groups outgrowing the Terra Nova Sharing Farm in the rural park would make good early adopters of community farms on the lands, and Food Bank clients might be able to help grow their food there.

In time, the 120,000 people who will be jammed into the city centre may require 25 acres for community gardeners on the lands. They'd grow culturally good food, chat with their garden neighbors and passers-by, and savor the settings of mountains and woods.

Around the west entrance, the most disturbed part of the lands is labeled "multi-purpose area." Clean clay fill, which would be brought in for trail-bearing dykes, could also extend the existing firm ground. That would suit buildings like a multi-purpose community barn and farmgate market, along with a little parking.

In the southwest corner, nesting birds and native bees reminded Michael that the water conditions and vegetation there are just right for them. Bee expert Brian Campbell tells us that native bees are best for pollinating native plants. Some species don't fly far from their nests, but they can be helped to find homes where their work is needed. For natural harmony, the "habitat" corner calls for distinct handling.

Those who listen to the Garden City Lands love to share the joy. They envision peaceful gathering places, tai chi beside reservoir lakes, theme playgrounds, lookouts, and lots of interpretive signs on all-weather trails for walking, cycling, and access.

By B.C. law this ALR land is agricultural, by nature it cries out for conservation, and as green wellness space in the city centre it's vital for recreation. So the Garden City Lands can be a great "PARC," which is more than a nod to bilingualism *en français*. As PARC, they're Parkland for Agriculture, Recreation, and Conservation.

The prospects are exciting. When we listen to the lands, enthusiasm is natural.