



DISTRICT OF MAPLE RIDGE PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Agricultural Impact Assessment Guidelines

Background

The agricultural industry can be affected by a variety of non-agricultural activities. The District of Maple Ridge (the District) seeks to reduce potential impacts on agriculture by using Agricultural Impact Assessments (AIA's) to review development on or near agricultural lands. AIA's also assist decisions makers in making informed decisions on the appropriateness of proposals and conditions necessary to eliminate or lessen impacts to an acceptable level.

The District's Official Community Plan (OCP) outlines in Section 6.2.2 "Sustainable Agriculture" goals and policies of maintaining the agricultural land base of Maple Ridge and promoting conditions for sustainable agriculture. In order to achieve these goals and meet the objectives of the OCP, the applicants are to provide the District with AIA and Groundwater Impact Assessment (GIA) studies. These studies are required to accompany all development proposals for lands on or near agricultural lands. The purpose of an AIA and GIA study is to determine if the proposal has identifiable or potential impacts on agricultural lands and if so, what mitigation measures are necessary. Comments from appropriate government agencies, including the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission, and from the local agricultural community should form part of the assessment. Additional approval agencies, such as the Ministry of Health, Transportation and Highways, and Environment, should be asked for comments and requirements as part of the assessment.

Criteria for an Agricultural Impact Assessment

An AIA must be conducted by a registered professional agrologist, who will prepare a written report submitted to the District that will:

- Describe the proposal and determine whether or not the potential impacts on agriculture are significant and if so, identify the types and level of impact and mitigation efforts possible that would avoid or lessen agricultural impacts;
- Describe the current use and agricultural capacity of the land under application and the neighbouring lands;
- Describe the nature of the proposed non-farm use and its compatibility within an agricultural area and potential to cause secondary impacts;

- Describe potential drainage impacts that can lead to flooding, erosion or siltation damage. Include how existing drainage patterns will be affected, and how road run-off and sediment and erosion control will be handled so as not to impact adjoining lands;
- Describe potential downstream water and septic impacts that may result from the development on neighbouring lands. Mitigation measures must be identified if risks are identified for surrounding wells. (A separate GIA study is required for projects utilizing septic systems and/or wells in rural and suburban areas of the District fronting onto agricultural lands. This report should address issues such as: rapid run-off affecting groundwater recharge capacity for human and agricultural use and the potential for sewage contamination of well and irrigation water, see Terms of Reference for GIA.);
- Consider the noise levels that the proposal will generate and the effects that noises may have on bird and animal production;
- Describe the type, volume and concentration of air emissions that the proposal will generate and the effects they may have on crops and animals;
- Consider traffic implications, such as the need to upgrade rural roads serving the farm community, restrictions on the movement of farm vehicles, the restriction of field access by traffic barriers, the impacts on safety of traffic volumes and speeds, the effect of contaminants from road run-off or ditch irrigation water, and the use of pesticides for weed control along roads;
- Describe potential servicing impacts on or near agricultural lands as a result of the proposal (such as water, sewer, storm drainage and utilities); and
- Describe strategies to minimize residential/agricultural land use conflicts, such as: theft of crops, animal harassment and trespass; vandalism to land, buildings and equipment; restrictions on crop spraying and the use of equipment due to noise levels. Where there is a potential for conflict, mitigative measures such as buffering and fencing, should be assessed and implemented.

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Source: Provincial Agricultural Land Commission, for a more comprehensive description, please visit:
http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/publications/planning/Planning_For_Agriculture/Chapter09/0901reference.htm#Agricultural