

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: August 28, 2023

From: Serena Trachta, Acting Director,
Climate Action, Planning and
Development
File: 01.0185.20

Item #: 2023-526

Subject: **Township of Langley Metro 2050 Amendment Application**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to send a letter to Metro Vancouver commenting on the Township of Langley's application to change the regional land use designation of 23699 and 23737 Fraser Highway, specifically encouraging measures that would address environmental and agricultural impacts and the ongoing need for cautious consideration of expanding Industrial use outside of the Urban Containment Boundary.

PURPOSE

To provide Council with details regarding the Township of Langley's proposed amendments to the Regional Growth Strategy, Metro 2050.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Township of Langley has submitted to Metro Vancouver a request to amend the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS), changing the regional land use designation of 4.12 hectares of land located at 23699 and 23737 Fraser Highway from Rural to Industrial. The application has been referred to the City for comment. This report brings forward an analysis of the application.

The two properties are currently being used for outdoor storage, vehicle and equipment parking, and similar low density industrial uses. These uses were enabled by a Temporary Use Permit (TUP) approved by the Township Council in 2019. The permit is set to expire in May of 2024. The proposed RGS amendment would allow for these current industrial uses to continue and for additional industrial uses to be permitted, subject to meeting development prerequisites.

Staff suggest the City put forward no formal objection to the change from Rural to Industrial since the amendment allows continuation of industrial land in an area that is well located by regional transportation routes. However, staff also recommend providing feedback to Metro Vancouver regarding the need to:

- address potential impacts on environment and adjacent agricultural lands; and,
- give careful consideration of the merits of any future application such as this for conversion of rural lands to urban uses outside of the Urban Containment Boundary (UCB).

BACKGROUND

Metro Vancouver received a request from the Township of Langley to consider an RGS amendment for two properties at 23699 and 23737 Fraser Highway, to change the regional land use designation from Rural to Industrial. The two properties are currently being used for outdoor storage, vehicle and equipment parking, and similar low density industrial uses. These uses were enabled by a temporary use permit (TUP) approved by the Township Council in 2019, which is set to expire on May 14, 2024. The TUP permits the following industrial uses:

- open storage of building materials;
- parking of commercial vehicles and/or equipment (excluding transportation and trucking);
- terminals and compounds including public transportation depots); and,
- vehicle storage (excluding wrecked vehicles, recreational vehicles, and boats).

The proposed amendment to Metro 2050 would change the regional land use designation permanently to allow the industrial uses.

The Township of Langley's proposed amendment is considered to be a Type 2 Amendment under the regional plan, which requires two-thirds weighted vote from the regional Board.

At its June 2, 2023 meeting, the Board of Directors of Metro Vancouver gave first, second and third readings to the amendment bylaws, and directed staff to refer the amendments to affected local governments and local First Nations.

On June 27, 2023, the City received the referrals from Metro Vancouver (see Attachment 1). The City of New Westminster is invited to provide written comments on the Township's proposal by September 8, 2023.

Site Context

The subject properties (red outline) are 4.12 hectares in size and bounded by the Agricultural Land Reserve to the north, Fraser Highway to the south, and rural properties to the east and west, which are mainly made up of low density forms of residential. A few industrial lands are located 150 metres to the east.

The subject properties are designated Rural in the Township’s Official Community Plan and zoned Rural Zone RU-1 in the Township’s Zoning Bylaw.

Proposal

The proposed amendment to Metro 2050 would change the regional land use designation from Rural to Industrial (See Attachment 3 for a depiction of this change). The Township of Langley would also consider amendments to the OCP and Zoning Bylaw to formalize the current land uses, as well as to allow additional industrial, subject to meeting development prerequisites. .

DISCUSSION

Attachment 2 describes the Township of Langley’s proposed amendment and includes regional analysis of the amendment request, including an overview of the trade-offs. Regional staff concluded that, on balance, the proposed amendment is supportable for the following reasons:

- the proposal would add an additional 4.12 hectares of industrial land to support a growing region with already limited industrial lands;
- the proposal is well situated along the Fraser Highway as a designated truck route to nearby industrial sites and other cities, which further contributes to economic and employment growth;
- the proposal would allow the continuation of current industrial uses on the subject properties; and
- edge planning and appropriate interface management between urban and agricultural uses are encouraged, with consideration to include a condition of approval, should the application be advanced.

Overall, City staff advise that the City put forward no formal objection to the change from Rural to Industrial. However, staff recommend sending a letter to Metro Vancouver commenting on the following:

- City support for Metro Vancouver’s consideration of requiring edge planning and appropriate interface management between urban and agricultural uses are as a condition of approval; and,
- the ongoing need for careful consideration of the merits of any future application such as this for conversion of rural lands to urban uses outside of the Urban Containment Boundary (UCB).

Protecting the Environment

The RGS includes a goal on protecting environment, addressing climate change, and responding to natural hazards. The properties are also in close proximity to a wetland and Class “B” watercourse to the west, which is considered a “significant source of food, nutrients or cool water supplies to downstream fish populations” in the OCP. Regional staff note that “edge planning and appropriate interface management between urban and agricultural uses are encouraged” if the application is to be advanced. City staff support this feedback being provided to the Township of Langley.

Supporting a Sustainable Economy while Focusing Growth within the Urban Containment Boundary

Another goal of the RGS is to support a sustainable economy. Industrial lands are recognized as a critical part of achieving this goal, with a focus on densifying and intensifying existing industrial sites. If this application is approved, it would formally add 4.12 hectares to the region’s limited supply of industrial land – a key rationale in the Township’s application. Further, these lands are well-situated on major truck routes that provide connections to other cities.

These lands are approximately 1.7 km from the nearest edge of the UCB, and further conversion to Industrial use should be limited despite existing Industrial parcels near the properties. The UCB is an important overlay in the RGS, establishing a defined area that ensures a concentration of urban development (including Industrial uses that require urban services), while maintaining strategic transportation and infrastructure patterns to support reduced emissions and protection of Agricultural, Rural, and Conservation and Recreation lands. Small scale industrial that do not require the provision of urban services such as sewerage or transit are permitted in rural area. The Township has not made an application to extend regional services to the site at this time.

City staff is concerned that this amendment may encourage further expansion outside of the UCB in the future, with impacts to the adjacent agricultural lands. Regional staff also acknowledge the likelihood that this application’s redesignation could incentivize adjacent properties to also seek redesignation. Contributing to the industrial land supply outside the UCB should be cautiously considered.

Supporting a Sustainable Economy Including Agriculture

Supporting a sustainable economy also includes supporting regional employment and economic growth achieved through the long-term protection of Agricultural lands. The subject site is adjacent to land that is designated Agricultural in the RGS. The RGS identifies a need to peruse strategies and actions minimize conflicts between agriculture and other land uses. City staff encourage efforts to address the transition to the adjacent agricultural lands, building on requirements put in place by the Township of Langley through the 2019 TUP application that required landscape screens be put in place, and stormwater management and sediment control measures taken.

NEXT STEPS

Following the comment period for affected local governments, local First Nations and the public, Metro Vancouver staff will bring summarized comments and the amendment request back to the Regional Board for their consideration of final reading.

OPTIONS

The following options are provided for Council's consideration:

1. Council direct staff to send a letter to Metro Vancouver commenting on the Township of Langley's application to change the regional land use designation of 23699 and 23737 Fraser Highway, specifically encouraging measures that would address environmental and agricultural impacts and the ongoing need for cautious consideration of expanding Industrial use outside of the Urban Containment Boundary.
2. That Council decline to comment on Township of Langley's RGS amendment request.
3. That Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommend Option 1.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Metro 2050 Amendment Referral Letter – Township of Langley

Attachment 2: Metro 2050 Amendment Request – Township of Langley (23699 and 23737 Fraser Highway)

Attachment 3: Current and Proposed Regional Land Use Designation and Overlay Maps

APPROVALS

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