

VERNON MORNING STAR

Letter: Commonage proposal in Vernon makes no SENS

Julia Lissau

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A B.C.-based developer is proposing 1,800 attainably priced homes for Vernon's Commonage lands located south of the city. / 580Commonage.ca

The Sustainable Environment Network Society (SENS) has worked in this area of the Okanagan for over 50 years.

Our Society was one of the first in BC to initiate recycling. We continue to work to educate and make this a more sustainable and healthy community for all.

Directors of SENS are greatly concerned to hear that a massive sprawl development is being

proposed for 580 Commonage Road.

The fact that council approved this development in principle does not make sense when council has already given their support for our OCP, Transportation Plan, and Climate Action Plan, all of which call for compact, sustainable development, not sprawl.

SENS hosted a workshop to gather information for our last OCP where city employee Laurie Cordell gave a Smart Growth presentation. All comments made by attendees supported Smart Growth principles for Vernon's future. All information collected was sent to the city afterwards and was accepted by the city.

Official Community Plan expectations: Note: All expectations listed here are taken directly from Vernon's OCP:

- Avoid sprawl;
- Minimize vehicle traffic and support active transportation;
- Provide density – build up - in the downtown core;
- Housing, close to all amenities;
- Protect sensitive ecosystems/green spaces;
- Avoid development that damages natural features/environmental sensitive areas.

Our current OCP was generated from an enormous amount of public input by caring and concerned citizens of Vernon. The direction has never wavered. Citizens want to live in a sustainable community.

Transportation Plan expectations: Note: All expectations listed here are taken directly from Vernon's Transportation Plan:

- Reduce use of single occupancy vehicles; encourage alternative/active transportation;
- Make Vernon more youth-friendly and senior friendly for non-vehicle owners;
- Provide more efficient use of services and infrastructure already in place;
- Improved public health, stronger community, a more prosperous city;

- Cost effective for personal travel decisions;
- Improved air quality;
- Protect land use through transit-oriented development;
- Quality lifestyle and health – walkable, transit/cycle friendly - that attract business.

Climate Action Plan expectations: Note: All expectations listed here are taken directly from Vernon's award-winning Climate Action Plan:

- Lessen our impact on the environment by reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;
- Prepare for future climate impacts (fire, for example):
- Protect our infrastructure;
- ...' be a net-zero emission and climate resilient city by 2050;'
- Low carbon lifestyle is the norm;
- Proactive to deal with reduced snowpack, flood risk, wildfire, smoke, severe storms, drought...;
- More retrofits to save money and reduce GHGs;
- Energy efficient buildings and use of zero carbon energy systems;
- Natural assets protected and valued;
- Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory identifies climate sensitive ecosystems, habitat and species at risk, and protects, enhances and expands climate sensitive areas Once sensitive ecosystems, habitat and species at risk are identified, the public expects council to protect them.

The Commonage has been specified by Vernonites as a place that must be preserved. SENS realizes that the B.C. government is mandating the city to increase housing of all types. Unfortunately, this sprawl proposal is presenting an out of date and out of favour plan.

It does not align with our OCP, our Transportation Plan or our award winning Climate Action Plan, all of them endorsed by the city....as indicated above.

We already have infrastructure within the city and plots of land in town that could be developed much faster. We can provide much cheaper options than that of the 580 Commonage Road sprawl.

Our working poor, seniors, and youth need to be able to use active transportation and buses to get to

work and to get around town. Many cannot afford to purchase a car or pay for costly vehicle insurance. They can afford public transit in town or use active transportation around town. They will not be walking, biking or driving to/ from 580 Commonage.

The majority of Canadians, and most Vernon residents, support taking climate action. This sprawl development contradicts the wishes of our community.

They want Vernon to deal with the climate crisis we are currently experiencing and paying for, eg., fires, flooding, heat domes, drought, etc. These climate events will only get more expensive and more devastating for the City of Vernon, and its residents, going forward.

Other issues that are of concern to SENS:

- Sprawl development can lead to increased tax burdens for residents as the City of Vernon would face higher costs for infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, maintenance, etc.) for a sprawl development far from the downtown core;
- About 4,000 units/dwellings would require a great deal of water. As reported in the Morning Star on March 10, 2025: "dry conditions have led to low water source levels. The snowpack is less than in 2024 and could cause another drought year. A city official says that the situation is serious, adding that, "if conditions remain the same as last year, reservoirs won't be filled." Question: Where will their reservoir water come from?;
- Wildfires are predicted to increase in the coming years, due to climate change. New homes built in the wildland interface, like these homes would be, "are predicted to incur significant costs and greatly impact housing affordability if built" (taken from the new report from the Canadian Climate Institute);
- This development would see over 4,000 more vehicles on the same number of Vernon streets. How will the city achieve the promised GHG emission reductions for local transportation? Road dust and air pollution are already a problem and this sprawl development will exacerbate both those problems;
- The Commonage is something we all have a responsibility to protect as stewards of this planet. Wildlife needs habitat to survive. Buildings, roads, and trails act as barricades to the corridors they need to survive. This sprawl development should not be approved. The growth would be better located in and around the downtown core;
- Affordable? What is affordable to a worker making minimum wage, to a senior struggling to live on a pension, to a resident on disability, or a young family? Vernon businesses are having trouble finding employees. It was a top concern for business owners when the DVA did its annual report. Workers

need affordable accommodation;

- The price of building materials has skyrocketed over the past few years. There is no guarantee that the developer would be able to honour their commitment to provide 56 per cent 'affordable' if material costs continue to increase. The wealthy will be the ones that benefit, not the local workers, seniors, and youth that we need and value.

In summary, we ask council to protect this parcel of the Commonage. We also ask that council NOT allow Kerkhoff Develop-Build to build this development at 580 Commonage Road. The proposal presented does not align with Vernon's OCP, Transportation Plan, or Climate Action Plan.

ALL were created with enormous public input. Should you approve this development we fear it will only lead to more of the same. How could Vernon council justify turning down another sprawl development after approving this one?

Julia Lissau

Secretary-treasurer, SENS, for all SENS directors

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