



North Okanagan Naturalists' Club
Box 473 Vernon, B.C. V1T 6M4

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

7 March, 2025

JUST SAY "NO" TO SPRAWL DEVELOPMENT IN VERNON

Since its founding in 1951, the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC) has pursued its mission to encourage knowledge of and passion for nature and conservation in the fragile ecosystems of the North Okanagan.

NONC is deeply concerned about the sprawl development being proposed by Kerkhoff Develop-Build at 580 Commonage Road. The developer proposes re-designation of ten parcels of land totalling 421 hectares for mixed use residential housing, parks/natural open space, and neighbourhood commercial, with a total of 3,960 housing units. Responding to the staff report and discussion at the February 25th Council meeting at which the proposal was presented, we urge Vernon residents to say 'no' to the massive and long-term fiscal, social and environmental damage this sprawl development will visit upon our community and our region. Following are just a few of our concerns:

While some members of Council and city staff pressed for 'approval in principle' to allow the developer to hold an open house asap to "get the pulse of the community," notes Harold Sellers, NONC president, "for many years the community has been clear about saying 'no' to sprawl developments in general, and to protecting the Commonage lands in particular."

Sellers cites the City of Vernon's *Master Parks Plan* (2015), the *Regional Growth Strategy* (2019), the *City of Vernon Housing Needs Report* (2024) and the "*What We Learned*" report (2024) on the first phase of the current review of Vernon's OCP, all of which call for compact, sustainable development rather than increasing urban sprawl. He also points out that the *Environmentally Sensitive Area Mapping Study* (2025) commissioned by the City to support informed decision-making around sustainable, responsible development, says of the Commonage:

The City has two areas (Commonage and Bella Vista) ...largely comprised of intact, natural ecosystems. They provide essential habitat for species at risk and represent a unique mosaic of grasslands, sparsely vegetated areas, broadleaf woodlands often associated with gully features, and woodlands. These largely contiguous natural areas provide the City with an opportunity to lead in safeguarding unique wildlife habitats and preserving natural lands for its residents to enjoy. [Pp 13-14]

NONC recognizes the pressure on local governments to provide much needed housing of all types. But the proposed development is pushing a discredited model that will result in greenfield development far from the city core. It will strain existing infrastructure and services, including a huge increase in single vehicle traffic on already overloaded roads, and saddle taxpayers with long term costs for building and maintaining infrastructure. Even were the 'attainable' housing goals outlined in the proposal realized (questionable at best), the projected units would take years to build, nor would the units compensate for the many negative impacts that would result from approval of a sprawl development like this.

In their recent *Close to Home* report the Canadian Climate Institute has targeted the Thompson-Okanagan as susceptible to losing hundreds of millions annually from new homes being built in 'wildland interface' fire prone areas like the Commonage. As the wildfire experiences of the past few years have shown Okanagan residents, the wildfire risk is not merely 'hypothetical'.

In conclusion, NONC believes this is a bad proposal. We ask area residents to get informed, get involved, and urge Council to reject this sprawl development. You can express your concern to Vernon City Council by emailing Mayor Victor Cumming at mayor@vernon.ca, and/or by writing to Mayor and Council at 3400 - 30 Street, Vernon, BC V1T 5E6.

NONC contacts: Harold Sellers or Eric Kowalski at info@nonc.ca, www.nonc.ca.

NONC is an affiliate of the province-wide Federation of BC Naturalists (BC Nature). "Knowing Nature and Keeping It Worth Knowing".