

LETTER WRITING POINTS RE: THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AT 580 COMMONAGE ROAD

Want to write a letter to Council/the local media voicing your opposition to this development, but not sure how to start? Here are a few ideas/suggestions for how you may wish to focus your letter. We have included some references in the footnotes.

BETTER ALTERNATIVES EXIST:

RESPECT THE OCP - SMART GROWTH not SPRAWL!!!

YES TO: “smart growth”¹ principles - as outlined in Vernon’s past AND present (2025 draft) Official Community Plans!

NO TO: sprawl development.^{2 3}

YES TO: compact, sustainable development rather than increasing urban sprawl far from the city core.⁴

YES TO: settlement patterns that minimize the use of automobiles.

BAD FOR CLIMATE

NO TO: increased car use that will make it difficult for Vernon to meet its goal of net zero GHG emissions by 2050. Driving cars is responsible for 63% of Vernon’s greenhouse gas emissions.⁵

YES TO: protecting wild and agricultural lands, as these natural areas store carbon, meaning less of it goes into the air to make climate change worse.

NO TO: ignoring the science on potential climate impacts and ignoring the City’s own Climate Action Plan.^{6 7 8}

BAD FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

YES TO: truly affordable housing as outlined in Vernon’s 2024 Housing Needs Report.⁹

REMEMBER: Vernon’s 2024 Housing Needs Report. “A healthy housing network includes emergency shelters, transitional housing, supportive

housing, social housing, affordable rental and home ownership, and market housing.”

NO TO: ‘attainable’ housing that requires a minimum income of \$100,000 a year to afford the mortgage on a three-bedroom house.¹⁰

NO TO: sprawl development that requires homeowners to own a car to access most services and amenities.

BAD FOR NATURE

YES TO: protecting sensitive and essential habitats and ecosystems.

REMEMBER: the community has repeatedly stated its opposition to further development of the Commonage lands.¹¹

REMEMBER: 49% of the land in this proposal is classed SER1 (High Environmental Sensitivity) and another 44% is classed SER2 (Moderate Environmental Sensitivity). This proposal will see much of the SER 2 area covered with low-density residential housing leading to degradation of the adjacent SER 1 lands and destroying the ecological integrity of the site.¹² The result? Loss of almost all of the SER1 and 2 land, simply because of the nearby construction and ongoing human activity.

REMEMBER: sprawl development – e.g., Predator Ridge, the Foothills, The Rise, The Outback, Adventure Bay – have already resulted in significant destruction of the area’s natural environment.¹³

BAD FOR TAXPAYERS

NO TO: straining existing infrastructure and services.

REMEMBER: sprawl development puts greater pressure on water supply by increasing water consumption and runoff.¹⁴

NO TO: the long-term fiscal, social and environmental damage of sprawl development.¹⁵

THINK: absence of a full cost analysis for this proposed development makes it impossible for Council and the public to understand what the long-term infrastructure and servicing costs will be to the city taxpayers.¹⁶

REMEMBER: there is increasing awareness of water scarcity in the region.¹⁷

NO TO: expanding taxpayer costs related to wildfire protection.

REMEMBER: this is a wildfire interface area (although the report Kerkhoff had identified this as a low to medium risk area).¹⁸

BAD FOR RECONCILIATION

NO TO: building more developments on land that is contested by the Okanagan Indian Band.

REMEMBER: the OKIB considers the Commonage as Indian Reserve #9.¹⁹

¹ Smart growth is a community planning approach that encourages compact, mixed-use development, diverse housing options, and a variety of transportation choices like walking, cycling, and public transit to create livable, sustainable, and economically resilient communities. It contrasts with sprawling, low-density, car-dependent development by preserving open space, revitalizing existing neighborhoods, and providing more options for people's daily needs and commutes.

² Sprawl development, or urban sprawl, is the expansion of cities and towns into surrounding undeveloped land, characterized by low-density housing, single-use zoning, and increased car dependency. [Sprawl] leads to the destruction of natural habitats, increased traffic and pollution, higher infrastructure costs for municipalities, and reduced community cohesion and access to amenities

³ From “Rethinking Urban Sprawl: Moving Towards Sustainable Cities (OECD 2018): “Urban sprawl has been shown to have significant environmental consequences manifested in higher emissions from road transport and loss of environmental amenities within and at the borders of urban areas. Its effects on biodiversity are very context-specific; discontinuous development patterns may be harmful to biodiversity if they are accompanied by a fragmentation of the natural habitats surrounding urban areas. Sprawl’s economic consequences include significant pressures on local public finance, as it is more expensive to provide public services to more remote, low-density areas, as well as notable time losses due to congestion. Urban sprawl is also associated with social inequality and segregation, as the regulatory mechanisms that maintain low density may severely affect housing affordability.

⁴ 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 call for compact, sustainable development rather than increasing urban sprawl.

⁵ City of Vernon’s Climate Action Plan:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f65586f3171f457aaa2cc8ee7cfd1e2b>

⁶ Canadian Climate Institute notes the danger of promoting development in ‘wildland interface’ areas (a description that fits the Commonage): ...programs that aim to increase housing supply typically overlook climate-related hazards. With millions of new homes planned in the coming years, Canada risks compounding an already serious problem by allowing further development in hazardous areas

⁷ From: Capital Infrastructure Life Cycle Cost Analysis for the Commonage specific to Operation & Maintenance report: “Any potential charges related to climate and carbon emissions are not included in the cost analysis.”

⁸ City of Vernon’s Climate Action

Plan:<https://www.engagevernon.ca/10473/widgets/60256/documents/54224>

⁹ City of Vernon’s Housing Needs Report: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://pub-vernon.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=9775>

¹⁰ From: Kerkhoff’s 2024 Public Benefit Summary, p. 22: <https://pub-vernon.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=11148>

¹¹ City of Vernon’s Master Parks Plan (July 2015): The O’Keefe rangelands and the Commonage have been identified specifically as two of the top priority preservation areas by the public. What we Learned: City of Vernon OCP and Transportation Plan Update (2024)

¹² Habitat fragmentation's major impacts include increased species vulnerability, reduced genetic diversity and inbreeding, decreased connectivity between populations, edge effects that alter microclimates and increase exposure to threats like invasive species, and loss of ecosystem services like pollination and flood control. These disruptions force animals from their territories, leading to potential starvation, dehydration, injury, higher rates of predation, increased human-wildlife conflict, and a greater risk of local or even global extinction.

¹³ From RDNO Regional Growth Strategy *One Vision, One Future* (updated 2019): Growth over the last 20 years has impacted some of our most vulnerable ecosystems, our hillsides and our viewscapes. Healthy landscapes and watersheds protect the quality and quantity of our water supplies, aquatic ecosystems and our recreational opportunities.

¹⁴ From RDNO report, Greater Vernon Water – Summary of Water Licences and Long-Term Water Capacity Concerns: “...there are numerous areas where the water mains must be flushed and sampled frequently due to the very long extensions to these satellite developments increasing operational costs for all GVW customers.”

¹⁵ Kirkhoff’s proposal notes: “major road networks and sanitary sewer split 40% of cost to the development and 60% to the broader Vernon Community.” Kirkhoff estimates a surplus of total anticipated annual municipal revenue when the development is complete (projected in 20 years), however, in the interim costs remain and city revenue is significantly reduced. Kirkhoff also warns “The city must carefully plan for the excluded costs and ensure adequate funding for all necessary services and infrastructure.”

¹⁶ From: Capital Infrastructure Life Cycle Cost Analysis specific to Operation & Maintenance report: “...for this initial assessment, the focus is limited to the operating and maintenance stage of the asset life cycle; it does not include costs related to the production, replacement, or disposal of the assets.”

¹⁷ From RDNO report, Greater Vernon Water – Summary of Water Licences and Long-Term Water Capacity Concerns: “Even with full access to the volumes stated in the GVW water licences, there appears that there

is not enough water to service full build within the current GVW servicing boundaries when taking Unaccounted for Water (UFW) and climate change impacts into account.”

¹⁸ Canadian Climate Institute notes the danger of promoting development in ‘wildland interface’ areas (a description that fits the Commonage): ...programs that aim to increase housing supply typically overlook climate-related hazards. With millions of new homes planned in the coming years, Canada risks compounding an already serious problem by allowing further development in hazardous areas....

¹⁹ See this video for the story of this contested land in the OKIB’s own words:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xfNMoh58KU>