

Hilary Mackey
Antrobus Crescent
Victoria BC V9B 5M6

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Via Email (corporateservices@colwood.ca)

Colwood City Council

Colwood Creek Park Is Not an Empty Landscape

Colwood Creek Park history

“Back in the early 1980’s when Colwood Creek Estates was being built, the City acquired Colwood Creek Park to protect and maintain it for its environmental benefits and the enjoyment of residents.” Over the following decades, residents participated in the process of its development from a former quarry backfilled with coarse sand and rocks into a highly valued green space. Berms were created and trees planted to reduce the impact of the adjacent highway, and the area evolved.

What exists today has inherent value which would be lost

Colwood Creek is a mature landscape with thriving drought tolerant trees and shrubs, walking trails, a creek corridor, wildlife habitat, and open space. It is not a little used park or vacant lot. I have lived and gardened directly across from Colwood Creek Park for two decades and observed ongoing daily use of the trail network and informal gathering areas for walking, dog walking, bird watching, community building, and year round passive recreational activity. For decades this park has served as a shared green commons for local residents and others from neighbouring communities. The park provides education about nature and a quiet place to enjoy it, close to home. Over the years I have transformed my own property, on the same substrate as Colwood Creek Park, into a mature, habitat garden that supports a variety of bird species. Before any major change is made to Colwood Creek Park, the city must pause, hear and understand how the park has long served the Colwood Creek Estate neighbourhood and other users who appreciate open, unprogrammed green space.

Who is this Community Garden intended to Serve?

Who is well served by a Community Garden in Colwood Creek Park?

- The crucial question is whether a recently announced garden hub is appropriate for a park which directly serves a neighbourhood of approximately 200 single family homes with private gardens. There is no evident demand from this or adjacent Colwood neighbourhoods with single family homes. There are very few multiresidential buildings without garden space in this part of Colwood, ie within walking distance of Colwood Creek Park. Replacing the usage of the Veteran’s Memorial end of the park with an uncommonly large community garden transfers a public asset from a broadly accessible use to a specialized use by users from outside the neighbourhood and outside Colwood. If the Colwood Garden Society is allowed to go forward with their proposal anywhere in Colwood Creek Park, then residents of Langford’s many multiresidential homes within walking distance would be beneficiaries of

sacrificing this much loved and needed open green space. This proposal should therefore be evaluated in the context of the park's existing character, Management Plan, the many community functions it already provides, and the losses that would occur if this proposal is allowed to proceed.

Questions Regarding Taxpayer Equity and Public Equity

- Why has the City permitted residents of Langford to rent community garden plots on City-owned land through the Colwood Garden Society for \$45 annually over the past 7 years?
- Approximately 200 households make up the Colwood Creek neighbourhood and collectively contribute substantial municipal tax revenues that support City services, including parks. Residents of other municipalities are welcome visitors to Colwood parks, but they do not contribute to Colwood's tax base. What is the rationale for allocating a significant portion of this neighbourhood park to a group whose membership is split 50/50 between residents of Colwood and Langford?
- What justification is there for the City supporting a federal funding application for a project that would substantially reduce public open green space in Colwood Creek Park while serving an organization whose membership includes 50% non-residents?

The **Colwood Creek Management Plan** states, *“Additional recreational amenities are not suggested for this zone given it is distant from the other built park amenities and it is in close proximity to residential neighbours.”* Also that *“public engagements participants were supportive of limited upgrades to this area of the park.”* Specifically *“Opportunities to improve the trail network including the addition of shade trees and benches.”* The community engaged with Colwood in a process of discovery which evolved into these recommendations, appearing on Colwood's website as current policy statements. Residents of Colwood Creek Park have had every reason to expect that these principles would guide the behaviour of our elected council members.

The **Colwood Parks and Recreation Master Plan** says it *“will guide improvements to our parks over the next 10+ years. Recommendations of the plan will be reviewed and adjusted annually to explore new opportunities and prioritize investments that reflect the needs and desires of the community.”* It allows for changes to the Colwood Creek Management Plan when consultation with the stakeholders is undertaken to see whether new ideas are in keeping with the needs and character of the neighbourhood. Again these policies and value statements allowed our community to trust that we would be consulted about significant structural and land use changes to our neighbourhood park. The residents from all parts of the Colwood Creek neighbourhood do not need this amenity and do not want to lose the park space which we have long enjoyed and been stewards of.

Consultation and Community Awareness

The process that led to the proposed garden hub raises significant concerns regarding community consultation. Throughout the period when the project was being developed, evaluated, refined, endorsed, and funded, the residents living adjacent to the proposed site were not consulted or directly informed.

At the December 8, 2025 Council meeting, the Manager of Parks presented an update on Colwood Creek Park Agricultural Land Reserve. An Agrologist was available for questions. Council discussed community garden locations, soil quality and land capability, access getting to the garden, compost

programming and education, access to water, and alternatives if declined by the ALC. Council directed staff to make an application for the partial exclusion of Colwood Creek Park from the ALC and that council direct staff to explore community agriculture and educational uses in the non-excluded portion of the park, the area being targeted for a project which does not align with the needs of the community of residents who would be most affected by its implementation.

The City of Colwood and the Colwood Garden Society worked together over an extended period to develop the proposal and secure grant funding. When the proposal was presented at the April 13 meeting for approval in principle, the room was filled with proponents and supporters. All six Councillors indicated their support and intention to vote for the proposal. Various Colwood groups had already submitted letters of endorsement and members of their groups were there to support and celebrate the good news. Only two people who spoke were from Colwood Creek Estates. They asked questions about other locations and asked that Council reconsider the proposed location. The vast majority of residents in the subdivision had not yet heard of the city's plans, nor had the city considered the needs of residents of the Colwood Creek Estates.

On May 5th, Colwood's website announced that the Colwood Garden Society had received a \$98K grant from Agriculture Canada and that a garden hub with over 120 raised beds would be built in Colwood Creek Park. Colwood residents were invited to attend a May 14th information meeting to learn about the project. For many in Colwood Creek Estates, this announcement was the first indication that a major land use change had been planned for their neighbourhood park, and we were eager to have a voice. Many more didn't learn of it until after Colwood Creek Ratepayers was formed on May 15th, and many still don't know, though the grapevine is getting stronger every day.

Since then, residents of Colwood Creek Estates have organized through the Colwood Creek Ratepayers Association, of which I am President. At the time of writing, membership has grown to 106 residents representing a substantial proportion of approximately 200 households. No door to door outreach has been undertaken during the past week while this submission was being prepared, yet additional residents have expressed interest in joining.

During the preceding weeks, I spoke personally with residents throughout the neighbourhood. The overwhelming majority of those aware of the proposal expressed concern about the location, scale, traffic, parking, consultation process, and other potential impacts of the proposed Community Garden Hub to the park and neighbourhood. Many reported having been unaware of the proposal until recently being informed by neighbours. Support for reconsidering the proposed location and undertaking meaningful consultation was nearly universal among those with whom I spoke.

Who will use the Garden Hub?

A representative of the Colwood Garden Society, which has operated a community garden at City Hall for seven years, stated at the April 13th meeting that 50% of its membership resides in Langford. Who in Colwood knew or expected non-residents to be gardening at City Hall for \$45 a year? It is the only municipal community garden we know of which does not limit membership to its residents. Plots are allocated on a first come first served basis from a wait list that includes non-residents, and the Society reports a current waiting list of 25. Why is a widely used neighbourhood and destination park being built out for a group with any non-resident members? Why are we not building community gardens in pocket parks near densely populated areas within Colwood? That is what

Langford did for the exclusive use of its residents by constructing its small and tidy Porcher Park community garden. Moreover that is what Colwood's OCP and Management Plan both point to.

The model currently operating at City Hall is proposed to be transferred to Colwood Creek Park, which is unacceptable. The area surrounding Colwood Creek Park is largely within Langford, and there is no evidence that local Colwood residents are lacking access to garden space or are seeking community garden plots.

Is Colwood Creek the Right Location?

What would be gained and by whom?

What would be lost and by whom?

The Official Community Plan

Policy 14.2.1.1 Encourage food production in both public and private realms by:

(c) Encouraging the distribution of community gardens and other food production spaces across the City, prioritizing areas of higher residential density, in order to maximize the number of residents who live within walking distance of one;

(d) Consider allowing neighbourhood residents and/or organizations to manage pocket parks as community gardens.

The only multiresidential building within walking distance of the proposed garden is an established townhouse complex with personal garden spaces at their doors. Langford multiresidential buildings within walking distance of Colwood Creek Park abound. Not only would we be prioritizing Langford residents with the location of this community garden but we would also not be serving Colwood residents who live in multiresidential buildings at a distance requiring transportation.

The project as described would create a mixed community of gardeners in Colwood Creek Park, at the expense of an existing community of residents who have long used and cared for the park with its uncluttered, open green space. Without disclosing the composition of its membership, the Society's proposition has implied that there is no space for (Colwood) community gardeners at City Hall, 25 (Colwood) gardeners are on a waiting list, up to 150 additional community garden plots must be constructed, and that Colwood residents should provide space. Residents would not only bear the congestion and danger of increased traffic, with limited parking and no sidewalks but they'd be losing the character of the park and the space for passive recreation which they and the region have enjoyed for decades through generations. Our subdivision takes pride in our homes and gardens. The fenced garden boxes at City Hall with their mismatched bulging boards, varied sizes and orientations, equipment, piles of dirt and bags of recycling is out of keeping with the character of our neighbourhood and destination park.

Resident Land Stewards

The park is zoned as Agricultural land, and Colwood wants to frame this project as agricultural use. As someone who has built soil over nearly two decades on the same former quarry, I didn't need the report of an Agrologist to learn that Colwood Creek Park is not suited to agriculture. Hundreds of trees planted by the city around Colwood Creek Park have died because they didn't get the kind of careful tending and watering needed for them to establish and thrive in the fast draining land with no

topsoil. Residents on the park side of Antrobus have tended many of the trees which survived and now thrive in that area of the park. It is unacceptable to cut down even one with the rationale that building this garden hub would support climate resiliency when mature drought tolerant trees are crucial in mitigating climate change.

Colwood received a grant of \$40K for trees which they subsequently planted in the Cecil Blogg side of the park about a decade ago. I was concerned about their capacity to survive and after walking in the park with Gord Beauvillier agreed to help. I weeded two areas close to the bridge then spread 2 truckloads of city delivered arborist mulch over two days. Most of those trees did not survive, as not enough water was applied consistently enough for the existing conditions. I understand that 150 trees were planted in the part of Colwood Creek Park that is being proposed for this project and less than 10% survived. Let us not be cavalier about those survivors.

Regional Food Security

If the goal is to strengthen local agriculture or produce the most food, supporting nearby farmers will usually outperform community food gardens. It takes time, specific knowledge, and the right conditions to successfully grow vegetables. Plants grow better directly in the ground where mycorrhizal fungi, beneficial bacteria and worms create far better, more nutrient dense soil than can be purchased and brought to a site. We drive for 15 minutes once a week to benefit from the wonderful quality and variety of food local farmers can have for sale because they can produce at scale. There are local opportunities to work with people farming on land, for community building, education, and nutritious food. At the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific one can learn from acres of different types of plants and courses. Colwood Creek Park can't compete with those growing programs and educational organizations and doesn't need to.

Colwood Creek Park has evolved over decades through natural recovery, municipal investment, and the stewardship of the residents who value it as a place for passive recreation, nature appreciation and community connection. The proposed Community Garden Hub would represent one of the most significant changes ever contemplated for this portion of the park.

I am not asking Council to reject community gardening in Colwood nor to reject all future improvements to Colwood Creek Park. I am asking Council to pause this proposal and undertake a meaningful evaluation of whether it is appropriate for this location, consistent with the park's Management Plan, and reflective of the needs and wishes of the residents most directly affected by it. Colwood Creek Park is not an empty landscape awaiting a purpose. It is already a much valued place. Before rushing to change it, Council should take the time to visit the park and hear from the neighbourhood that loves it as it is. Only then can Council fully understand what already exists, what may be lost, and whether this proposal is truly the best future for this park.

Hilary Mackey
(Retired Master Gardener)

cc: info@colwoodcreekratepayers.ca