

DRAFT

DISCUSSION PAPER

For the Colwood Creek Rate Payers Membership

Version: June 11, 2026

Subject: Should Colwood Creek Park remain in the “Agriculture Land Reserve” (ALR) land-use zone, or be removed and placed in a “Municipal Park” land-use zone under the jurisdiction of the City of Colwood and their Official Community Plan (OCP)?

Discussion/Background: It is my understanding that the Colwood Creek Park has been in the ALR land-use zone since its inception. Like many other lands originally zoned ALR in BC, the intent is that any land not meeting the strict criteria of the ALR land-use zone be re-evaluated for conversion into the most appropriate land-use zone.

Removing land from the ALR is always a contentious topic among the general public. Discussions are often underpinned with misinformation and misunderstandings around the ALR.

The ALR covers about 5% of BC where agriculture is the top priority. It overrides local municipal zoning, strictly regulates non-farm land use, and requires approval from the Agriculture Land Commission (ALC) for subdivisions, filling, or building. The overarching principle is that the ALR is meant for food production. Another land management goal is that all land in BC be zoned based on its potential highest and best use.

The City of Colwood retained Madrone Environmental Services Ltd. to undertake a Land Capability for Agriculture study in Colwood Creek Park.

Madrone’s report (October 2025) concludes that the vast majority of Colwood Creek Park possesses low to very limited agricultural capability, with major limitations including stoniness, drainage constraints, seasonal flooding, and poor moisture retention. Even with significant intervention, most of the site within the Park would remain Class 6P or Class 3W/I under ALR classification, meaning it is unsuitable for viable agricultural use and largely unimprovable due to hydrology, soil composition, and water-licensing constraints.

I can attest to Madrone’s conclusion from personal experience after living adjacent to the Park for 35 years. In the first 10 years it took regular watering and ongoing soil enhancement (mulch) to get 6 Shore Pines closest to our property to establish themselves. While those 6 trees are doing well today, all but a handful of the other 60 or so other Shore Pines that were planted in the Park died.

Keep in mind that the Shore Pine are probably one of the most drought tolerant tree species on the Coast and can grow under the harshest site conditions.

Based on the above (and further verified in Madrone’s report) I find it difficult, if not impossible, to rationalize why any of the land in the Park would be zoned ALR.

That said, here are 3 options to help stimulate discussion on this subject.

Option 1. Status quo (keep the entire Park area zoned ALR as it is today).

Advantages:

- No further work is required.

Disadvantages:

- It is not the appropriate land-use zone given the land has been proven unsuitable for agriculture.
- The ALR land zone criteria do not reflect how Colwood Creek Park is actually used.
- The land falls under the jurisdiction of the ALC as opposed to the City of Colwood.

Option 2. Remove the Park in its entirety from the ALR and replace it with a Municipal Park land-use zone.

Advantages:

- It is the most appropriate land-use zone given the land has been proven unsuitable for agriculture.
- It accurately reflects how the land is actually being used.
- The land will fall under the City of Colwood's jurisdiction via the OCP.
- Management of Municipal Parks requires rigorous public input and transparency whenever municipalities seek to alter park designations, sell public land, or establish major recreational services.

Disadvantages:

- There are no significant disadvantages.

Option 3. Leave some of the Park in the ALR and transfer the remaining lands in Municipal Park land-use zone. This option is included because it reflects the recommendations of a Staff Report that was prepared for the Mayor and Council.

Advantages:

- No logical advantages.

Disadvantages:

- It could put City Hall in a difficult position trying to defend such a decision as I see no clear logic to support it.

Recommendation:

Option 2. Remove the Colwood Creek Park in its entirety from the ALR and replace it with a Municipal Park land-use zone.

Should the Ratepayers membership support this option, a subgroup will be established to present it at an upcoming Public Hearing. It currently looks like June 22 is the earliest this opportunity may be available.