

**Petrina Arnason Responses to questions provided by
the Langley Farmers' Institute
for the All-Candidate Meeting, September 22, 2022**

The Langley Farmers' Institute strives to advocate and act as a resource for the local agricultural community, meeting on a regular and timely basis to identify and address issues of interest and concern to local farms, farmers, and agricultural stakeholders.

My Priority: Food Security and Protecting Agricultural Land for Farming

Approximately 75% of the lands within the Township are in the Agricultural Land Reserve, representing high-volume opportunity for lands that should be farmed.

However, the current situation is complicated due to a number of issues such as parcelization, resulting in smaller property size, adjacencies to rural estate properties, economic pressure from speculation, and other factors playing a role in undermining local food production. The Townships' Agricultural Viability Strategy addresses some of these issues but needs to go further. In particular, opportunities to advance more prescriptive policies to ensure that lands designated for food production are not unduly compromised.

Farmland and food security are crucial issues for our community and I believe that local and regional food security should be a part of everyone's platform running for Langley Township.

If re-elected, I would work to create effective collaborative ties with the Province to address the considerations arising from emerging agri-tech businesses such as vertical farming.

Here are the questions provided by the Langley Farmers' Institute and my responses.

Q: Would you advocate, as a candidate, for the TOL to become a non-regulated community under the ALC? And why?

I strongly feel that the Township of Langley (TOL) should begin facilitated discussions with the Province on the removal of our regulated status regarding lands within the ALR. As one of the few regulated communities in the Province, we have specific challenges related to our urban development which is interspersed with agricultural lands. It is appropriate, and necessary, that we establish more detailed policies related to zoning that would allow the Township to have more autonomy over specific uses as opposed to the proposed unilateral application of one agricultural zone that would allow any and all uses across our ALR lands. As we continue to urbanize in our various neighbourhoods while also advancing more policies to promote food security, we must balance these

interests to ensure that we have the requisite tools to protect adjoining users such as in instances of agri-tourism with an adjacency to an abattoir, for example.

Also, with the Province's support for new agri-tech business models such as vertical farming, we need to negotiate more defined parameters with the Province to ensure that businesses that have heightened water and energy requirements as well as waste management issues are appropriately sited so that they do not unnecessarily impinge on other agricultural users. I believe that these more intensive uses should be situated in and around the areas bordering our urban environments which are connected to sewer, water, and have adequate access to waste management systems.

Q: In your vision of the future for agriculture in Langley, what would you do to increase local food production?

The Township of Langley needs to take more aggressive action to significantly increase local food production based on the promotion of locally produced food products of all types. Some of the initiatives that could be undertaken involve policies that raise awareness of the importance of food security to be undertaken by local government and stakeholder agencies. Another option is to expand the number of farmers' markets and community gardens to better address food insecurity and inflationary increases related to escalating food costs. Local restaurants, groceries and supermarkets could also be encouraged to offer more locally produced food and to expand farmgate opportunities for sales.

An important component in this conversation is the protection of land for food production. Land speculation and the high cost of production can be countered by such activities as connecting local growers and food entrepreneurs with financial support and real time advice from various levels of government for grants, low interest loans, and other programmes that can help to defray some of the start up and ongoing costs associated with farming.

Q: Expropriation of farmland is the current issue, either on Highway one or 16th Ave. Do you support trucks in the areas that horses are known to exercise in or in the flow of general traffic? How do we balance the flow of traffic and the type of traffic with an agriculturally focussed area?

Conflicts between user groups such as automobiles and trucks versus horses in rural areas are an ongoing issue which should be addressed. 16th Ave. is now a well-used vehicular corridor which undermines any possible responsiveness to the startle reaction of horses. Fully loaded dump trucks with a trailer are an obvious concern when they interact with equestrians that are also allowed to use the side of the roadway to access smaller side roads and trails. One holistic way to help to manage this conflict is the installation of signage which can alert drivers to the presence of horses and graphically depict ways to maneuver around them in rural areas.

Q: Many people find the Agricultural Advisory and Economic Enhancement Committee confusing as it lacks appropriate concentration on two topics very important to the Township of Langley. Would you separate the AAEEC into two separate bodies?

Yes. I feel that given the obvious need to support the agricultural community and to create more robust and tangible policies that the Township should reverse its earlier decision to amalgamate these two committees. Given an expanded emphasis on food security, the challenge of climate change, and need to support local food production, I would strongly support a newly reconstituted body of an AAC based on the evolving framework of the Agricultural Viability Strategy.

Q: There are speculators and developers that have purchased ALR land close to the urban boundaries in the hope that they will be able to pull it out of the ALR. How can we solve this issue?

This is a perplexing problem which needs to be addressed with a regulatory approach to discourage this practice which allows valuable farmlands to be left fallow or turned into rural estates. One strategy was brought forward by former BC MLA Andrew Weaver, who introduced a Bill in 2017 to protect agricultural land from speculation. This Bill would have protected agricultural lands by prohibiting foreign entities from purchasing lands over 5 acres in the ALR, without the permission from the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Challengingly, BC is the only western province that doesn't currently restrict the amount of farmland that foreign investors can purchase and that should change.

In addition to this potential enactment going forward, the Provincial government, as the presiding jurisdiction in the area, should continue in its broader review of policies related to agricultural land based on the prevention of land speculation and land banking. This could also be addressed by the implementation of a specialized tax treatment for residential properties in the ALR in order to close some of the existing property loopholes.

Q: In your opinion, do you want the ALR to be for farming, or for development?

I believe that the visionary decision to protect the extremely limited arable lands in the Fraser Valley for farming should be respected. This policy is aided by the Metro Vancouver Urban Containment Boundary which creates delineated areas for urban development in order to prevent sprawl and to protect these valuable lands for agriculture.

I have heard the argument that some of these lands should be released from the ALR to create more affordable housing. I do not support this perspective as I believe that we

can advance other opportunities to create more affordable housing and that it would be self-defeating to take lands necessary for food security out of potential production by urbanizing them.

Q: Farms need extra income to be financially viable while working in a fluctuating industry. Local farmers have come up with many industrious ideas to bring in extra income on their properties while still preserving soil and farming. Do you support a second dwelling on farms for supplemental income?

I believe that farming operations should be given some latitude to develop extra income streams that do not negatively impact farming operations or undermine the longer-term viability of the property for agriculture.

I do not support a second dwelling on farms for a supplemental income. For clarity, I do support a limited footprint residence or building for farm workers or relatives that are required to help to manage an actual farming operation.

There are many other strategies for generating further revenues to supplement farm income that would not negatively impact the agricultural viability of the lands. For example, chicken and other fowl can be raised for both meat and eggs, and fruits and vegetables grown in surplus of what you need can also be sold. And finally, an apiary is also an ideal income stream as pollinating bees can be rented out to others and the honey sales can provide further income for the farm.

Q: Many small scale meat producers in Langley have had to close due to issues faced when dealing with large operations for the slaughter of animals, thereby reducing our small scale, local meat production. Would you support the building of an abattoir in the Township to service all sizes of farming operations?

Yes. I have spoken to a number of small to medium scale farmers in the Township who have struggled, and continue to struggle, with finding a place where their animals can be slaughtered and to have their meat processed. Larger out-of-town operations are either too busy with other clients who bring more volume, or they charge a premium for processing a smaller volume of animals which can make the process unaffordable for smaller operators.

I believe that a cooperative-style abattoir similar to what has been developed in other communities could be a solution to the generalized problem and would provide a cost effective opportunity for a wide range of users. The only other important consideration is the zoning and ensuring that an abattoir would be compatible with other existing uses in the area.

Q: Langley soils are very beneficial to growing food and raising animals. There are some conversations around unfarmable land. There is a farming method called regenerative agriculture which works the land in a beneficial way that also gives back to the soil the animals and specific plants. There are proven examples that this works on TOL lands by past farmers. Do you support this concept of farming?

Yes, we should look at and embrace all farming techniques which can help to mitigate unfavourable soil conditions and generate more opportunities for expanded opportunities on available lands. Regenerative farming is a proven method to enhance agricultural productivity and to remediate soils based on rotational strategies used to integrate animal husbandry with crop growing.

Q: Climate issues have dominated the headlines in the past year, with heat domes, dry summers, floods. These weather patterns impact our local farmers beyond issues of our neighbours in urban communities. Animals will require proper husbandry, acres of land could require remediation, dikes might need to be armored, and pump houses upgraded. Do you support a disaster preparedness plan for farmers if we get another climate issue?

Yes. I know that farmers are being very impacted by the recent and evolving changes to our climate which have brought unprecedented storms, precipitation, overland flooding, as well as problematic drought and high heats which can negatively affect crops.

Diking is of specific concern, with the inadequate height and breadth of the infrastructure causing particular problems in the Glen Valley and in and around Fort Langley. Part of my platform is to ensure that we have adequate funding and collaboration with senior levels of government in order to fund the necessary diking infrastructure that we will need in the Township.

Disaster preparedness is also particularly important for farmers with respect to securing of property, relocating farm stock if necessary, and sandbagging and pumping in order to protect critical farm infrastructure.

Q: There are parcels of land within the ALR that are also designated as urban growth zones within the Township of Langley official plans and Metro Vancouver's regional growth plan. Which do you support. The preservation of land in the ALR or the development of this land following the official community plans?

I support the paramountcy of the Provincial legislation governing the protection of the ALR as well as the regional overlay of the Metro Vancouver framework as it relates to urban growth.

I support the preservation of land in the ALR and note that many of the applications for a change of use must be reviewed and forwarded by the local government in order for them to be considered by the ALC. Therefore, it is critical that individuals be elected who are willing to maintain and protect the integrity of the ALC boundaries, save and except, extremely unusual and compelling circumstances.

Q: What are your thoughts on non-farm use? If a farmer is forced to work three jobs to supplement their income, do you support more creative ways of using their farm if they also include farming on the property? At times the property itself does not allow for using the entire space for farmable land i.e. watercourses and invasive plants.

I believe that farmers should be allowed to utilize their properties in creative ways in order to supplement their income, with the provision that the proposed usage does not interfere with any fundamental aspects of the potential to farm the land either in the present or the future.

A good local example of such creativity is the local MacInnes Farm, which includes an on-site artisanal brewery, apiary, gardens, and a film set. Their application for a variety of uses including the filming involved a cogent explanation of the need for a variety of income streams in order to support other elements adding to the economic sustainability of farming on the site.

Q: Environmental farm plans can be created for properties to help local farmers manage waste, enhance for native pollinators, protect salmon bearing streams and preserve precious soil. These plans can also come with funding to help farmers enhance their properties. However there are very few EFP's in Langley. How do you propose resources regarding best management practises are made available to our local farmers?

Environmental farm plans can increase efficiency, enhance ecological function, as well as provide enhanced profitability and thus sustainability to farmers. It is therefore extremely advantageous that the use of this important tool be accelerated in our community.

As an important addendum, farmers are now not required to have "farm status" through BC Assessments in order to participate in the EFP plan. This evolution of the programme is especially beneficial to those wishing to manage their lands in an environmentally sustainable way.

One of the ways to enhance uptake is to provide grant funding from the provincial government and secured loans which may be necessary in order to pay for some of the costs associated with potential infrastructure and remediation associated with an approved plan.

From a landowner in South Langley:

‘ My concern is for loose asphalt being deposited on ALR land for roadways in these new farms and it is totally out of control throughout the GVRD. I live near 26 and 24th Ave. and most farms along 216 nearby are bringing in this product. My neighbour who was applying this product was caught and told to remove it, which he did as he was unaware of this rule. The large farms are getting away with it. There’s a reason why this product is prohibited on a ALR land.’

I don’t support the use of deleterious materials on roadways in the ALR and believe that this is covered by the ALC regulations as it could have a negative impact on the soil fertility and growing conditions over time. Maintaining soil viability and enhanced agronomy practices requires that toxic or substandard materials should not be introduced into the soil matrix as it will undermine the overall health of the dirt and potentially pollute local waterways if the chemicals leech into adjacent water bodies.

Q: Will you continue to support the non-profit agencies that provide agricultural awareness, such as a Langley Farmers Institute?

Yes. I strongly feel that this organization is, and will continue to be, a huge benefit to the Township. The Langley Farmers Institute provides invaluable support and enhanced educational opportunities to advance local farming and general husbandry practices.

I believe that in time this nascent organization can provide the breath and scope of services that are currently provided by the Delta Farmers Institute, which is a venerated non-profit organization in the lower mainland focussed on supporting community farming and farm operations.