

To: Finance Committee

From: Heather McNell, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Policy and Planning

Date: February 5, 2025

Meeting Date: February 13, 2025

Subject: **Consideration of a Development Cost Charge Reduction for Intensive Agriculture**

RECOMMENDATION

That the GVWD/GVS&DD/MVRD Board direct staff to advance work to analyze and propose a Development Cost Charge reduction for Intensive Agricultural developments that have a low environmental impact for Board consideration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines a proposed approach to address concerns raised by the agriculture industry about the impacts of Metro Vancouver Development Cost Charges (DCCs) on Intensive Agriculture. Metro Vancouver's DCC framework currently only has one non-residential rate, which may not be suitable for Intensive Agriculture developments given the small demand on infrastructure relative to their size of buildable area. There are four member jurisdictions that have an Intensive Agriculture rate for municipal DCCs, and these are relatively lower in comparison to the other non-residential categories.

In January 2025, a DCC work plan was endorsed by the Finance Committee that includes an update to residential and non-residential definitions, including consideration of Intensive Agriculture developments, for the next regional DCC bylaw update in 2027. As an interim measure, this report is seeking direction to develop a reduced DCC rate for Intensive Agriculture developments that meet criteria for low environmental impact. This could be achieved through a DCC reduction bylaw, which is permitted through the *Local Government Act*. If approved, staff will provide further analysis and draft a DCC reduction bylaw for Committee and Board discussion for approval Spring 2025.

PURPOSE

To seek Finance Committee and GVWD/GVS&DD/MVRD Board direction to undertake further analysis to develop a DCC reduction for Intensive Agricultural developments that have a low environmental impact and bring this back for Committee and Board consideration.

BACKGROUND

In November 2024, Metro Vancouver met with agriculture industry representatives including Metro Vancouver's Agricultural Advisory Committee and the Greenhouse Growers Association over their concerns regarding the impacts of Metro Vancouver's DCC costs on Intensive Agriculture developments. Intensive Agriculture refers to development such as greenhouses, retail nurseries, manufacturing and processing plants for agriculture related products, facilities used for intensive livestock purposes, and commercial businesses located within agricultural zones. Representatives

expressed gratitude for the meetings, but were disappointed to have not been consulted during the development of the DCC rate update last year, noting the new DCC rates are significantly impacting the viability of agricultural development in the region. Metro Vancouver staff committed to addressing any unforeseen implications of the DCC program as soon as possible. This report provides an overview of the proposed short- and long-term solutions to address Intensive Agriculture through Metro Vancouver's DCC waiver/reduction bylaw and DCC program update.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

Metro Vancouver DCC Program Update

In January 2025, the Finance Committee endorsed a workplan to review and update Metro Vancouver's DCC program. This includes work in 2025 to review DCC rate categories, analyze differences in infrastructure demand and use, and propose updates to DCC rates based on new categories as well as new population projections and capital program costs. This work would inform the 2026 budget process to implement changes to the DCC program in 2027, with new rates taking effect in 2028. This work will provide a long-term solution to develop fair DCC rates for Intensive Agriculture development in the region that adequately captures the costs of infrastructure demand for this type of development. As an interim measure, Metro Vancouver staff propose an update to the DCC Waiver/Reduction Bylaw to provide a reduction for Intensive Agriculture development that has a low environmental impact. This will help to address the immediate needs of the agricultural sector for Intensive Agriculture developments that are not already exempt from regional DCCs (e.g., developments that have some impact on water or sewer infrastructure).

DCC Considerations for Intensive Agriculture

In conversations with Metro Vancouver, the agricultural industry has raised concerns around how Metro Vancouver's non-residential DCC rate is broadly applied to all commercial activity while the impact on growth infrastructure from agricultural uses can vary greatly. This variation is amplified based on the particulars of agricultural structures, such as greenhouses or nurseries that cover a large area of land and primarily use rainwater collection for operations, which do not use a commensurate amount of water as would other non-agricultural developments of a similar size. The regional DCC rate per square foot is currently based on an average of all non-residential groups which does not appropriately capture Intensive Agriculture's impact on infrastructure. This is resulting in a significant financial impact on new/expanded greenhouses to the point that this DCC rate could prevent intensive agricultural development within the region. As one of the key strategies in *Metro 2050* is to protect and strengthen agricultural viability, it is important to address this unintended consequence of the regional DCC program in the immediate term (through expanding the waiver/reduction bylaw), and to find an appropriate long-term solution and appropriate rate through the review and update of the DCC program.

In addition, the employment projections used for developing the Metro Vancouver non-residential rate did not include agriculture, and Metro Vancouver Water Services estimates that agriculture comprises a small percentage of projected growth for non-residential uses. More data is needed to quantify the impact of Intensive Agriculture on growth infrastructure, and this work will be completed as part of the DCC Program update, in addition to further refining non-residential categories and definitions. Given that any update to the regional DCC bylaw will require review by

the Provincial Inspector, this is a lengthy process and is best addressed through the comprehensive update in 2027.

In the meantime, an interim solution is needed to address Intensive Agriculture developments that occur before the new DCC rates are implemented in 2028.

Interim Solution: Expand the DCC Waiver/Reduction Bylaw to Include Intensive Agriculture with Low Environmental Impact

The *Local Government Act* outlines two situations where DCCs may not apply or fully apply: exemptions and waivers/reductions. DCC exemptions can apply in specific circumstances. For example, when a development does not impact or add an additional burden on infrastructure, or a building permit value is below \$50,000. Metro Vancouver was able to work with one Intensive Agriculture applicant who was able to prove, with a Qualified Professional report, that the proposed greenhouse development would not place an additional burden on infrastructure as all water used was from collected rainwater and was therefore exempt from regional DCCs. However, for future applications that may have some impact on infrastructure, it is important for Metro Vancouver to have a solution to ensure that the viability of agricultural development is not impacted before the DCC Bylaw is updated in 2027. This could be done in the interim through a partial waiver/reduction.

Waivers/reductions are permitted, pursuant to a waiver/reduction bylaw, only for developments that are not-for-profit rental housing, for-profit affordable rental housing, or designed with a low environmental impact. The only applicable category for Intensive Agriculture would be for developments designed with a low environmental impact. To create a reduced DCC for Intensive Agriculture developments that have a low environmental impact, staff would need to establish the following as per the *Local Government Act* section 563:

- a definition of what constitutes an eligible Intensive Agriculture development or class of eligible developments;
- the requirements or criteria to be met (such as lower water use measures); and
- the reduced rate (e.g., amount or percentage of DCC fees to be waived).

Staff propose to work with member jurisdictions with Intensive Agriculture developments, and to analyze potential impacts to regional infrastructure, to develop these criteria and bring back a proposed DCC waiver/reduction bylaw for Committee and Board consideration in Q2 of 2025.

ALTERNATIVES

1. That the GVWD/GVS&DD/MVRD Board direct staff to develop a Development Cost Charge reduction for Intensive Agricultural developments that have a low environmental impact for Board consideration.
2. That the Finance Committee receive for information the report dated February 5, 2025, titled "Consideration of a Development Cost Charge Reduction for Intensive Agriculture."

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In the Metro Vancouver region there are four municipalities that have a specific Intensive Agriculture DCC rate; Richmond, Surrey, Delta and Pitt Meadows, and rates range from \$0 to \$9.24 per square metre based on 2025 rates. Metro Vancouver's non-residential rate for water and parks combined is \$59.63 per square metre based on 2025 rates, which would encompass Intensive Agriculture developments. Further, over the past 5 years, the number of building permits under this category can range from zero to over 4 per year with a development size range of just over 150 square meters of buildable area to over 101,000 square meters of gross floor area. This indicates significant variability in Intensive Agriculture developments, which creates difficulty in assessing future foregone DCC revenues and financial implications.

Should the Board choose alternative one, further analysis is required to determine the criteria and the applicable DCC rate for Intensive Agriculture development that would be eligible for a DCC reduction. Further analysis of financial implications will be provided should the Board direct staff to pursue the development of DCC partial waiver/reduction for Intensive Agriculture development.

CONCLUSION

Metro Vancouver has met with agricultural industry representatives over their concerns regarding the impacts of Metro Vancouver's DCC costs on Intensive Agricultural developments (such as greenhouses) who noted the current rates are threatening the viability of agricultural development in the region. While Metro Vancouver is undertaking a work plan to update its DCC program, the changes will not take effect until 2028. In the meantime, an interim solution is proposed for Board consideration. Staff propose undertaking further analysis to develop criteria for a DCC partial waiver/reduction for Intensive Agriculture developments that can be shown to have a low environmental impact, that is, a low impact in terms of water use. Staff recommend Alternative 1 to direct staff to undertake the work to develop a DCC reduction for Intensive Agriculture for Board consideration.

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