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1.0 Description of Proposal

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to determine whether urban development on prime agricultural soils within the Greater Edmonton Region is logical and has minimal impact on the future of agricultural lands within the area and the province. The report is required as part of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board’s Growth Plan. Section 5.1.1 requires an Agricultural Impact Assessment to be completed when an expansion of an ASP boundary is applied for when the lands are situated on prime agricultural lands determined by soil suitability ratings.

The subject lands are located in the northwest region of St. Albert proposed within the North Ridge Area Structure Plan (ASP) as seen on Figure 1. The Badger Land Development Corporation currently owns the land and is amending the North Ridge Area Structure Plan to include a portion of these lands as Phase 2 of the fully developed North Ridge neighbourhood. The proposed use of the land is primarily residential development with a small commercial site at the future intersection of Hogan Road and Fowler Way. The land uses surrounding this parcel include existing residential development, an organic waste and snow removal site, future residential development, and future arterial roadway.

1.2 North Ridge Area Structure Plan

Fowler Way is planned to bisect the lands owned by Badger Land Development Corporation. The lands north of Fowler way will eventually be incorporated into a new Area Structure plan once development is viable and more lands are annexed from Sturgeon County. The Land south of Fowler Way is being incorporated into the North Ridge Area Structure Plan as Phase 2. Phase 2 of the North Ridge Area Structure Plan is designed to be walkable to promote the use of public parks and open spaces. There is a large stormwater management facility with trails that will allow connections to existing neighbourhoods and open spaces. The parks and open spaces provide connectivity throughout the development and are large enough to allow for a variety of recreational activities. In the northeast corner of the development there is a 1.5-hectare commercial site. The site will be at the future intersection of Hogan Road the future arterial road, Fowler Way, which will allow for a separate access from the rest of the neighbourhood. This will reduce conflicts between commercial and residential uses. The residential component of the development will include a variety of housing products including single detached residential with and without rear lanes, semi-detached homes, street-oriented townhomes as well as 2 multi-family sites. The residential development of this area will meet the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board’s density targets that are outlined within the Growth Plan. The development concept can be seen on Figure 2.
FIGURE 2

THE CITY OF ST. ALBERT

LEGEND
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential I
- Medium Density Residential II
- Commercial
- Park
- Stormwater Management Facility
- Public Utility Lot
- Trails
- ASP Boundary

SCALE 1:5000

FUTURE FOWLER WAY ALIGNMENT

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

ELECTRICAL SUB-STATION

HOGAN ROAD

VILLENEUVE ROAD

PHASE 2 FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

NORTH RIDGE PHASE 2
THE CITY OF ST. ALBERT

134-12001_15_PRF002.DWG

December 11, 2019
2.0 Planning and Contextual Factors

2.1 Applicable Planning Policies and Regulations

Area Structure Plans have many regulating documents, including provincial and municipal plans. The following statutory and non-statutory documents have been incorporated into the writing of the Area Structure Plan and this Agricultural Impact Assessment.

2.1.1 Municipal Government Act

Section 633 of the Municipal Government Act (MGA) provides the framework for what shall be included in the conception of an Area Structure Plan. MGA policy states that ASP’s must be consistent with overarching plans such as a Municipal Development Plans (MDP) and Intermunicipal Development Plans (IDP). Sections 636 and Section 692 of the MGA outline the processes that must be followed before the adoption of an ASP can be approved by a Municipality.

2.1.2 Edmonton Metropolitan Region Growth Plan

The Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board (EMRB) has developed a plan for future growth within the Edmonton Metropolitan Region. The EMRB Growth Plan guides development for the region by instituting multiple requirements designed to prevent urban sprawl and promote efficient use of land for the region. The guidelines within the Growth Plan outline the guiding principles of development for the next 50 years, including achieving compact growth to optimize infrastructure, managing growth responsibly, and ensuring wise management of agricultural resources. The lands are situated in the Metropolitan Area within the EMRB Metropolitan Structure. A growth direction for the Metropolitan Area is to plan and develop compactly and contiguously.

The agriculture sub-section of the Growth Plan sets out objectives for the preservation and management of prime agricultural lands. A main objective of guiding future development locations is to identify and conserve prime agricultural lands to maintain viable food sources for the future. Major factors to meet these objectives are minimizing fragmentation of agriculture based land uses, and conserving prime agricultural lands within the metropolitan area for as long as possible until urbanization occurs due to growth. Section 6.2.4 of The Growth Plan lays out the following criteria for converting prime agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses:

6.2.4.a – The lands are contiguous with built-up urban areas and/or planned areas,
6.2.4.b – The lands are required to accommodate municipal employment and population projections,
6.2.4.c – If residential uses are proposed, the lands are within a proposed statutory plan in conformance with the applicable minimum greenfield density,
6.2.4.d – An Agricultural Impact Assessment has been completed to identify the potential adverse impacts of the proposed development on agricultural lands and existing agricultural operations on-site and off-site in the surrounding area, and

6.2.4.e – Mitigation measures recommended through an Agricultural Impact Assessment are incorporated in the planning and design of the proposed development to minimize potential adverse impacts on agricultural lands and active agricultural operations on-site and off-site in the surrounding area from near neighbor impacts of urban growth.

An Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) is required when a new Area Structure Plan is proposed to develop class two or class three soils, classified as prime agricultural lands by the Land Suitability Rating System (LSRS). An AIA is also required when an existing ASP is expanding its boundary for the inclusion of new lands that fall under the prime soil classifications.

2.1.3 Intermunicipal Development Plan

The Intermunicipal Development Plan (IDP) area between Sturgeon County and the City of St. Albert was repealed by Sturgeon County in 2010. The area was predominately agricultural land. The IDP’s proposed future land use concept generally proposed the subject lands to be a mix of commercial and residential development. There were areas within the IDP that were reserved for agriculture uses however they were separated from the proposed urbanized lands by natural features like rivers and natural areas. The IDP polices included reducing conflicts between intense agricultural uses and other land uses, and avoiding premature subdivision and development of agricultural lands.

2.1.4 Municipal Development Plan

The City of St. Albert Municipal Development Plan generally identifies the subject lands as residential development based on the future land use map. The agricultural objectives of the MDP include avoiding premature subdivision and conversion of agricultural lands, reducing leapfrog development where plots of agricultural lands become fragmented, which creates patches of urban development surrounding an agricultural land use. Policies 11.1 and 11.2 within the MDP ensure that land will be subdivided in an orderly and economically beneficial way through the Area Structure Plan process, and minimize leapfrog development by ensuring development is contiguous.

2.1.5 Natural Area Conservation and Management Plan

The Natural Area Conservation and Management Plan prepared by Spencer Environmental Management Services Ltd. for the City of St. Albert, highlights the southeast corner of the subject lands as a natural area, however the plan also recognizes that natural areas that have no ecological connection to major ecological networks will require further investigation. A supplementary Ecological Assessment was completed by Spencer Environmental Management Services Ltd. for the land owner. The natural area was identified as having three separate tree stands and a meadow area.
2.1.6 Land Use Bylaw

The subject lands are currently designated as Urban Reserve, which allows for agricultural land uses, however this land use recognizes that agricultural uses are to be a placeholder until future urban development is necessary.

2.2 On-Site Physical Resource Inventory

The current use of this land is the cultivation of hay. The land has been cultivated consistently since at least 1949, as seen in historical air photos and noted in the Environmental Site Assessment completed by Hoggan Engineering and Testing Ltd.

2.2.1 Agricultural Capability

According to the Land Suitability Rating System (LSRS) prepared by Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, the majority of the subject lands are designated as class 2 for soil suitability, which is the highest rating for Alberta soils due to climate. Class 2 recognizes that there are slight limitations and the subclass code H determines that the major limitation comes from inadequate temperatures for optimal growth. There is also a possibility of some soils having very severe limitations in this area due to drainage implications causing the soil to have excess moisture. The information provided by the Land Suitability Rating System (LSRS) was confirmed using the Agricultural Region of Alberta Soil Inventory Database (AGRASID) viewer to determine which soil polygons the subject lands are situated in as seen in Figure 3.

2.2.2 Drainage, Flood Control, and Irrigation Improvements

The general drainage of the site has minimal overland flow, the majority of drainage is collected in the northwest corner and the southernmost portions of the site. Drainage runoff from Villeneuve Road and Hogan Road are factors as well due to the lands being at a significantly lower elevation than the constructed roadways. Drainage from the north portion of this site eventually makes it to Carrot Creek to the west, which is the nearest major drainage water body in relation to this site. The south portion of the site drains via ditch and swale along Villeneuve Road.

2.2.3 Slope/Topography

Based on an Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) done by Hoggan Engineering and Testing in 2013 it was determined that site has remained relatively unchanged for the past 70 years. The general topography of the site has remained flat and has been cultivated yearly. Figure 4 shows an aerial photo and the general topography of the site.
AGRASID SOIL POLYGON CLASSIFICATIONS

December 11, 2019

Scale 1:50,000
1 inch = 3000.33 feet
1 cm = 361.12 metres
Map centre at latitude +53.662°N and longitude -113.677°E

Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, iGO, NGA, NRCAN, GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), DeLorme, and the GIS User Community

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Government of Alberta, Alberta Open Government License
2.2.4 Drainage Details

Based on the ESA it was determined that the site has fair drainage capability. Based on an Ecological Assessment completed by Spencer Environmental in 2012, four wetland locations were found on the site, two of which are considered insignificant tilled wetlands. The drainage of the site generally flows to the wetland locations.

With a proposed residential development of this size a stormwater management facility will also need to be constructed. The logical location for this is at the low point of the site in the southwest corner. The exact size of the stormwater management facility and ultimate design will be determined at the detailed engineering stage of development. Stormwater management facilities shall be designed in accordance with the engineering standards of the City of St. Albert.

2.2.5 Groundwater and Irrigation

Groundwater testing was completed for both the ESA and the Ecological Assessment. Both studies found groundwater to be at a depth between 3 - 6 metres depending on the test hole. There are no known contaminants to the groundwater within the subject lands, however there could be groundwater contamination within the leases of surrounding abandoned oil well sites on adjacent parcels.

Based on the ESA it was determined that there is one oil well located within the site boundary. The Alberta Energy Regulator records indicated that this well was never placed into production. The risk of contamination is high based on limited site observations and available information, however this rating is only limited to the immediate vicinity of the well and would not apply to the remainder of the site.

2.3 On-Site Features

The ESA details former owners of the site. There was a singular owner during the early history. In 1906 the Edmonton and Slave Lake Railway Company purchased the land and held it for 50+ years. It was individually owned for another 10 years before being sold to corporations. The land use of the site has remained the same for the entire time period. Based on information gathered from the Government of Alberta Fish and Wildlife Internet Mapping Tool (FWIMT) it has been determined that there are no significant species of wildlife inhabiting the subject lands or land within 1 kilometer of the site. (See Figure 5)

2.3.1 Past Farming Practices

As far back as airphotos can be found, the site appears to have been used as farmland. It has been farmed at a low intensity for hay consistently since historical documents and photos can account for.

2.3.2 Existing Agricultural Production

The crops being cultivated on the subject lands appear to be hay. No evidence of intensive agricultural uses, such as livestock, have been found or recorded on this site.
2.3.3 Non-Agricultural Land Use On-Site

The Ecological Assessment describes the non-agricultural uses on the site as a natural area in the southeast corner of the site consisting of three (3) separate aspen woodland tree stands and a meadow area containing various shrubs and forbs. The rest of the site has been cultivated. The absence of any wildlife corridors to and from this site affects the habitability of any animals within site boundaries.

2.3.4 Parcel Size Configuration and Agricultural Accessibility

The subject lands are 30.5 hectares large with site access from multiple locations. The approximate size of the cultivated lands is 28 hectares. The land is rectangular in nature with current access capability from Villeneuve Road and Hogan Road.

2.3.5 Existing Farm Management

The current landowner is not farming the lands. The land is being leased to another farmer to use the land before development occurs. The lease of the farmland will shrink as development occurs until the site becomes unviable as an agricultural operation.

2.3.6 Capital Investment in Agriculture

This parcel is privately owned and there is no known investment from the municipality, provincial, or federal government to enhance and maintain the agricultural use of this land.

2.3.7 Local and Regional Context

According to the Stats Canada 2016 Census of Agriculture, the adjacent Sturgeon County consists of 377,000 acres (152,566 hectares) of agricultural land. The subject parcel consists of approximately 69 acres (28 hectares) of agricultural land. This is proportional to 0.018% of agricultural lands in Sturgeon County.

With existing residential to the south and planned residential and commercial development to the east, this land is positioned as a contiguous development area. This parcel of land is subject to higher residential density than adjacent development due to regional policy and market affordability. Higher planned density will transition from existing North Ridge to the south where the predominant building form is single family housing. It is a good transition area to have increased density near a major transportation corridor of Fowler Way compared to existing neighbourhoods with lower built out densities. The lands are designated as residential in all statutory and non-statutory documents and the development of this site will keep the urban boundary contiguous with the built out portions of the City of St. Albert.

2.4 Off-Site Features

The subject lands are located at the northwest corner of the Hogan Road and Villeneuve Road intersection. The land is directly north of the existing North Ridge residential neighbourhood and west of the future residential neighbourhood Jensen Lakes.
2.4.1 Surrounding Land Use Types

The current surrounding land uses are designated as residential based on the MDP and surrounding Area Structure Plans. The lands are situated approximately 2.5 km away from a major commercial corridor along St. Albert Trail.

Phase 1 of the North Ridge Area Structure Plan is a completed neighbourhood with a mix of large and medium sized residential lots, multi-family sites, significant park spaces with recreational facilities, large stormwater management facilities and an open space trail network that connects the entire neighbourhood.

Phase 2 is directly adjacent to the Jensen Lakes neighbourhood, a community with a private lake and beach with large estate homes and a commercial strip along St. Albert Trail. Jensen Lakes is a fairly new residential development that will take years to completely develop. Unless staging plans change, the lands directly adjacent to the subject lands will continue to be agricultural lands for several years.

With the future development of Fowler Way, and potential annexation by the City of St. Albert, it is anticipated that lands north of the site will eventually be developed as residential communities. There is currently a farm house and associated agricultural building located adjacent to Hogan Road, north of the site. Lands to the west are currently used as a municipal organic waste dump site, as well as, a snow and salt storage site during winter months.

2.4.2 Existing and Potential Constraints to On-Site Agriculture

Existing constraints include being adjacent to Villeneuve Road and Hogan Road, which could cause pollution issues due to heavy traffic flow and runoff from the road. Based on the Ecological Assessment, the four small isolated wetlands do not provide any constraints to the site. The natural area at the southeast corner of the site contains some natural vegetation, but has no connections to other naturalized areas, this isolated natural area has been avoided in cultivation practices in the past, and would require removal to be cultivated.

Based on the ESA investigation, it was determined that a large crude oil tanker trailer has been parked on the parcel directly north of the subject lands for a significant portion of time. It was determined that this posed very little risk in terms of environmental impacts to the site.

2.4.3 Regional Land Use, Lot and Tenure Patterns

As a developing city, St. Albert has grown in size and population steadily in recent years. The City is currently writing a new Municipal Development Plan for Growth to 100,000 in population. For the City to grow in size, lands to the west, north and east will have to be annexed and developed as mainly residential neighbourhoods. Residential lots in St. Albert have traditionally been large in nature however, in recent years smaller residential lots have become more popular and affordable to homebuyers. The subject lands do not have any existing structures or buildings located within the parcel.

2.4.4 Availability of Agricultural Services

No improvements or supporting services have been made to the subject lands for the continued cultivation of the lands.
3.0 Agricultural Viability

The subject lands are classified as class 2 soil, which classifies the lands as prime agricultural lands. This classification is the highest rating given in Alberta by the Land Suitability Rating System (LSRS) determined by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The lands are currently farmed for hay and have been for a significant amount of time. The parcel of land is approximately 30.5 hectares, 28.0 hectares of which has been continuously cultivated by farmers. The area that hasn’t been used as farmland is a naturalized area that includes trees and shrubs but contains minimal wildlife.

The City of St. Albert MDP designates the lands for residential development. Typically, lands within an urban boundary are anticipated to allow for development growth in a contiguous manner as demand warrants. Anticipated annexation of the agricultural lands to the north into the City boundary, would further promote development.

Fowler Way is a major arterial road that is planned to bisect the parcel creating a regional transportation link to St. Albert Trail. The roadway would impact the viability of agricultural lands due to localized grading and construction activities.
4.0 Potential Impacts on Agriculture

The impact of future agricultural cultivation is minimal due to several factors with this site. The City of St. Albert has been annexing multiple quarter sections of land in the north part of the City based on its continued growth and its need to expand the City boundary further into Sturgeon County. Additionally, an arterial road has been planned and designed to connect St. Albert’s two major transportation corridors. The proposed arterial road, Fowler Way, will bisect the subject lands, separating the ASP amendment area lands from agricultural uses. With the development of an additional major arterial road with the city, it provides more opportunity for urban development within the current city boundary and within future annexed lands from Sturgeon County. The proposed development will have minimal impact on the future agricultural viability in the region.
5.0 Alternate Location Analysis

The City of St. Albert and Sturgeon County Inter-Municipal Development Plan (IDP) designates these lands as a mix of residential and commercial business. This development aligns with policies within the IDP as it provides an orderly and economic development as an expansion of the urban development of the City of St. Albert and doesn’t fragment any parcels of agricultural land.

The Municipal Development Plan (MDP) of St. Albert aligns similarly with the IDP objective of not fragmenting agricultural land. The MDP also promotes reducing leapfrog development and encourages contiguous development. This amendment aligns with these policies.

With the future development of Fowler Way connecting Ray Gibbon Drive to St. Albert Trail these lands will be in an ideal location for residential development with good access from multiple directions and its proximity to commercial land and open spaces. The location of this amendment makes for smooth contiguous development in the expanding north region of St. Albert.

The neighbourhood directly adjacent to the south is fully constructed, therefore this is a logical and contiguous expansion of the neighbourhood and the urban boundary of the City of St. Albert.
6.0 Mitigation Measures

Phase 2 of the North Ridge Area Structure Plan will be developed over multiple years as staged subdivisions, which will limit the premature development of these agricultural lands.

These lands have been designated as residential within the City of St. Albert Municipal Development Plan and the land is adjacent to other residential neighbourhood developments. The neighbourhood will meet density targets set out in the EMRB Growth Plan to encourage efficient use of urban lands and avoiding premature expansion into agricultural lands. With increasing populations and demand for growth, these lands are a logical expansion for the urban boundary of the City.

The small area of this amendment does not significantly impact regional agricultural viability or production.
7.0 Conclusion

This Agricultural Impact Assessment has been completed by Select Engineering Consultants Ltd. for Badger Land Development Corporation, as a supporting document for the North Ridge Area Structure Plan Amendment. The findings of this report support the City of St. Albert Municipal Development Plan, which designates the lands for future urban development on Prime Agriculture Lands designated as Class 2 Soils by Schedule 11 of the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Growth Plan.