About Metro 2050

Metro Vancouver is updating Metro Vancouver 2040: Shaping our Future (Metro 2040), the regional growth strategy. Since its adoption in 2011, Metro 2040 has been a strong and effective tool representing the regional federation’s collective vision for livability and managing growth anticipated to come to our region over the long term.

Having a regional growth strategy allows Metro Vancouver and member jurisdictions to prevent urban sprawl by focusing growth (i.e., new homes and new jobs) in transit-oriented locations to support the development of livable neighbourhoods, with a range of housing, jobs, and amenities. The strategy also protects the region’s vital agricultural, ecologically important, and industrial lands. These efforts support the provision of affordable housing, a diverse economy, and mobility for all, and they help prepare the region for the impacts of climate change.

Metro 2040 was co-created and supported by all municipalities in the region, Tsawwassen First Nation, TransLink, adjacent regional districts, and the Metro Vancouver Board. The direction provided by the strategy recognizes the region’s collective vision for the future and the importance of cooperation among member jurisdictions to create that future together.

The regional growth strategy is being updated. Though many of the goals, actions, and tools that are working well in Metro 2040 will remain unchanged, updates will extend the strategy to the year 2050 and allow the region to better respond to critical and emerging issues such as climate change, social equity, resilience, and housing affordability.

Updates will also align the strategy with Transport 2050 (TransLink’s new regional transportation strategy) and implement policy improvements in a number of areas. The updated strategy, anticipated to be completed in 2022, will be called Metro 2050.
Agricultural lands and activities are an important component of the region, and crucial to supporting food production, economic activity, and resilience to climate change.

At 55,000 ha, the Agricultural regional land use designation makes up 20% of the region’s land base. This is where the region grows food, where farmers maintain agricultural businesses, and where farmland—as vegetated, undeveloped land—also contributes ecosystem services, such as nutrient and organic matter recycling, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, climate change regulation, water infiltration, and flood management.

Protecting agricultural land for food production over the long term is challenging because there are ongoing threats to converting farmland to other uses, which in turn impacts agricultural viability. Agricultural land in the Metro Vancouver region is constantly under pressures from residential, commercial, and industrial land users looking for less expensive land to purchase and develop.

Agricultural uses are located within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), outside the Urban Containment Boundary. The Urban Containment Boundary has been one of the most effective tools for protecting agricultural land because it limits regional sewer service extensions into agricultural areas, therefore reducing development potential.

Together, the provincial and regional designations create reinforcing and complementary layers of protection. Policies that maintain the integrity of the ALR and promote farming as a primary use will assist in ensuring the viability of the agricultural industry, and protecting agricultural land will enable local food production over the coming decades.

Metro 2040 supports regional goals to protect agricultural land and promote agricultural viability. Recommended changes for Metro 2050 are minor but will enhance and clarify current policies.

The Food Flows in Metro Vancouver study revealed there is an opportunity to increase the production of local food. Currently 8% of vegetables and 1.4% of fruit consumed in the region are produced in Metro Vancouver.

WHERE OUR FOOD ORIGINATES

- Metro Vancouver: 45%
- Rest of BC: 41%
- Canada: 26%
- US imports: 22%
- Offshore imports: 18%

60% of the Metro Vancouver food supply originates in Canada

Metro Vancouver Food Supply by Source (2018)
Recommendation #1: Enhance Distribution Avenues for Locally Produced Food

Metro 2040 does not currently address the importance of buying local food or protecting agricultural land for food security. Farmers need opportunities to sell their products, which makes expanding market access necessary to maintain agricultural land for local food production over the long term.

The recommendation is to better support agricultural viability, complete communities, and long term food security in the region and enhance the availability of local food for residents. Some potential actions for member jurisdictions are to enact local food purchasing policies, establish permanent farmers’ markets, and ensure resilient goods movement.

Recommendation #2: Prevent Conflicts with Agriculture Operations

Agriculture operations sometimes receive complaints when conflicts arise between different adjacent uses, such as residential, roadways, and trails. Complaints are typically focused on odour, noise, and trespassing. Informed by other work, such as the agricultural-related recommendations in the Regional Industrial Lands Strategy, the policy review recommends opportunities to address interface issues between farm uses and non-agricultural uses such as industrial and residential.

The recommendation to prevent such conflicts can be achieved by carefully planning the edges of agricultural and adjacent properties and adding buffers between them. This will reduce the number of nuisance complaints received by local governments and the Ministry of Agriculture. Community well-being will increase when a variety of activities, on- and off-farm, can be accommodated.
Recommendation #3: Discourage Non-Farm Uses on Agricultural Land and Encourage Actively Farmed Land

Non-farm uses on agricultural land displace farming activities and fuel land speculation. Though provincial regulations define appropriate residential, commercial, and industrial uses on the ALR, local governments may have conflicting bylaws allowing inappropriate zoning. Stronger policies to reduce land speculation and competition are necessary, as they can prevent farmers from starting or expanding agricultural businesses.

The recommendation seeks to discourage non-farm uses and encourage actively farmed land. One such action is to better align municipal zoning bylaw regulations with the Agricultural Land Commission Act.

Recommendation #4: Include Action for Climate Change Adaptation, Ecosystem Services, and Agriculture Awareness

Metro 2040 does not consider the multi-functional role of agricultural land in providing ecosystem services and requires updating to act on this and other emerging priorities. The recommendation to include actions for climate change adaptation, ecosystem services, and agriculture awareness will be supported by some of the proposed actions in Climate 2050.

Protecting farmland’s ecosystem services is one way to support climate change adaptation. More awareness of the importance of climate adaptation in the agricultural sector, and the range of issues faced by farmers, can help inform land use decision-making that prevents losses of actively farmed land and maintains agricultural viability.

Recommendation #5: Clarify the Intention of the Existing Policies and Actions

Minor adjustments to the text of Metro 2040 will assist in clarifying policy directions. For example, in addition to promoting agricultural viability, more emphasis should also be placed on strengthening the viability of local food production. It is also necessary to address process issues related to Strategy 2.3.4 regarding small parcels that are not subject to the Agricultural Land Commission Act.

Such adjustments will improve understanding of the goals in the regional growth strategy, support local food production for the long term, and address procedural issues that have arisen over the last ten years.

REGIONAL PLANNING PRINCIPLES

The recommended changes align with Metro 2040's established core regional planning principles to:

- Put growth in the right places (centres and corridors)
- Protect important lands (agricultural, ecologically important, industrial)
- Support complete communities
- Create diverse and affordable housing, better mobility, and a prosperous economy
- Enable efficient urban infrastructure (utilities, transit).

NEXT STEPS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Member jurisdictions have had opportunities to provide feedback on these recommendations through Metro Vancouver’s Regional Planning Advisory Committee, Regional Planning Committee, and Board. Member jurisdictions may submit questions or request a presentation from Metro Vancouver staff by sending an email to regionalplanning@metrovancouver.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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