

# Langford cranks up farmland fears

**T**he letter," says Langford administrator Rob Buchan, "was somewhat premature."

OK, but bombs that explode early still have an impact.

The bomb in this case was a March 8 letter from the municipality to 84 property owners in the Happy Valley-Luxton area, asking if they wanted the city's help in getting their land out of the agricultural reserve.

"For the past year, the City of Langford has been working on a new local area plan for the south Langford neighbourhood," the letter read.

Prior to going ahead with the necessary planning bylaw, it continued, the city "would like to submit an application to the Agricultural Land Commission to remove Agricultural Land Reserve designation from all properties in the City of Langford." Attached was a consent form that would allow the municipality to apply for ALR exemption on the owners' behalf.

Reaction was swift. To those who fret about the fate of B.C.'s Agricul-

tural Land Reserve, particularly now that the provincial government has made it easier to remove property, it was just one more sign that their fears were justified. And this time it wasn't just individual owners looking to remove land, but a municipality pushing the process — the traffic cop handing out beer at the road-block.

Hold on, says Buchan. No decision has been made. The city is just looking at all the alternatives, part of the south Langford planning process that has been going on for a year. Council hasn't decided what direction to take. There is no blanket application to remove all ALR land. A second letter to that effect is being mailed out to the property owners.

The city will have an agronomist report on those lands that owners don't think are farmable, the letter says. Council will consider "supporting the removal from the ALR of those lands that are not useful for farming." But no action will be taken unless the property owner asks for it.

Still, that leaves the question of what will eventually happen to the area, which represents in microcosm what planners like to call B.C.'s rural-urban interface, the place where the fields and the pavement come together. Some land is being farmed, but isn't in the ALR. Some is in the ALR, but isn't being

farmed. Some ALR properties sit like orphaned islands in a sea of development, potential gold mines in the current housing boom.

Drive down Happy Valley Road, and you'll see townhouses sprouting beside brand new streets in what was recently forest.

"Homes from \$329,000," declares a sign beside one subdivision in which about 40 houses are in some stage of development. On the other side of the Galloping Goose Trail sits a barn that has seen better days.

"There's actually very little farmland here," says Randy Josephson, sitting in the kitchen of his Happy Valley Road home. A horse grazes outside the window, but his 10-acre parcel produces no commercial crop.

The south Langford area has been fragmented, carved up into small parcels that he says are hard to farm at a profit even for those who already own the land. Better to develop the area in a planned way, protecting the most sensitive bits, and take the pressure off viable farmland in Metchosis and on the Saanich Peninsula, he argues. "A lot of people here see it's time for change."

He's one of about 15 property owners who, over the last year or so, have told Langford they want their property out of the ALR. Not to



Times Colonist

Happy Valley-Luxton area was farmed. They started growing potatoes, then oats, then raspberries and strawberries. Chinese immigrants leased land for turnips, grew "gorgeous" vegetables on Dewdney Flats.

"Land has got to be saved," she says. "You can't take it all and build houses on it."

David Sands, a retired provincial agrologist who has been campaigning against the erosion of the land reserve, says that nibble by nibble, B.C.'s best farmland is being consumed by urban sprawl. And once it's gone, it's gone: "We're not going to be taking down houses and putting up farms."

Since the Liberals changed the rules to make it easier to take land out of the reserve, 85 per cent of the property that people have applied to exempt has been removed, he said. "ALR lands should be treated preciously."

OK, argues the other side, but not all ALR lands are created equal.

"The bottom line is there are processes set up by the provincial government for removing land from the reserve if it's warranted," Buchan says.

As for what happens in Langford, that has yet to be determined. "It's very much going to be driven by what the residents have to say." [jknox@tc.camwest.com](mailto:jknox@tc.camwest.com)

## HOPES FOR 'GOOD FAITH' GIFT

### Canada, U.S. to revisit softwood dispute

BY ALLAN WOODS  
CanWest News Service

CANCUN, Mexico — Prime Minister Stephen Harper and U.S. President George W. Bush have ordered their officials to take a step toward re-starting negotiations on the softwood lumber dispute, but there still remains a cool relationship between the trading partners over the long-running, unresolved disagreement.

In wide-ranging comments following an afternoon meeting between the two leaders, Harper said the Canadians and Americans have ordered officials to look for common ground in their respective positions, in the hopes they can re-engage on the multibillion-dollar trade irritant.

"We have given instructions to our officials to examine the options," the prime minister said in French. "But we also made it clear that the Canadian government's position is that if there is no resolution we intend to pursue all our legal options and to enhance support our lumber industry."

Bush said he told the prime minister "our intention is to negotiate in good faith ... to resolve this issue," but a PMO spokeswoman, Sandra Buckler, said Bush misspoke.

"We actually appreciate when the president used the word 'negotiate' but that might mislead people," Buckler said.

She explained that officials for the two governments "will independently examine options."

A senior government official added: "They will compare notes" to see what common ground exists between the two sides. The official explained they will start looking at the interests of industry and the numerous levels of government.

"When you look at that ... you say 'Gee, is this miles apart or within the same world that provides a basis for seeing if you can crunch it to a conclusion,'" the official explained.

The U.S. has collected some \$5 billion in import duties on Canadian lumber shipped south of the border because it claims the Canadian government sub-



Mexican President Vicente Fox shakes hands with Prime Minister Stephen Harper as United States President George W. Bush looks on following a tour of the Mayan pyramid in Chichen Itza, Mexico, on Thursday. The three leaders are having a North American summit in Cancun, Mexico, over two days.

Tom Hanson/Canadian Press

sidizes its lumber industry through low stumpage rates. Dispute-resolution panels ruling on the North American Free Trade Agreement have judged those import duties to be illegal, while several World Trade Organization panels have ruled in favour of the Americans.

Bush said Harper made an "emphatic case" for Canada's position in the dispute, which has been stalled since formal negotiations broke off last August.

"I appreciate his steely resolve to get something done," Bush told reporters, adding that he, too, wants a deal to put the issue behind the world's largest trading partners.

Turning to Harper, Bush said: "I appreciate your pushiness."

Movement in the trade standoff was not entirely unexpected. Harper came to power in January promising an improved relationship with the United States, and many predicted the Americans would give Harper a good-faith "gift" in Cancun.

The two leaders spoke extensively

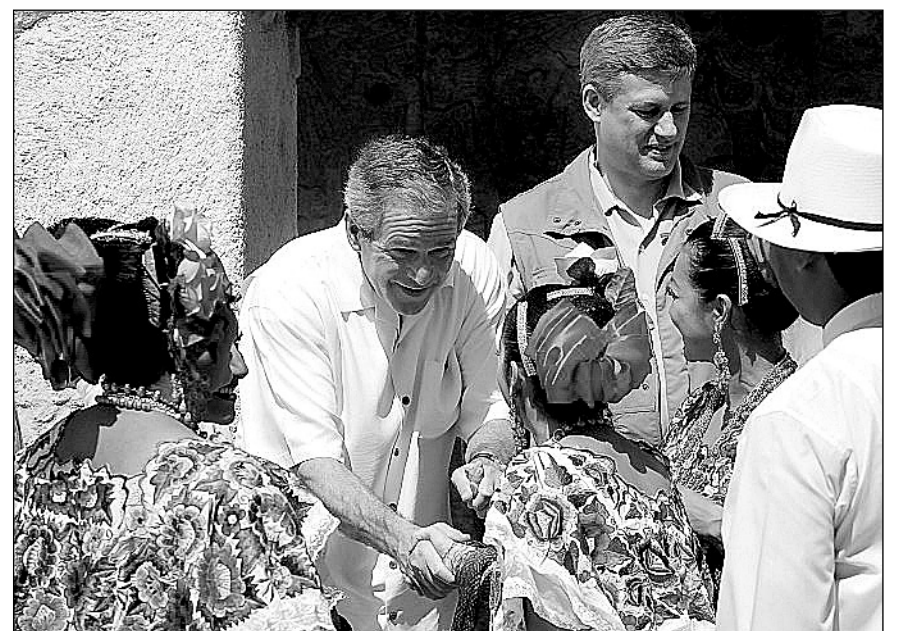
about their respective involvement in global conflicts such as Afghanistan, Sudan's Darfur region and Haiti.

"Canada and the U.S., from time to time, will disagree," Harper said. "But there should be no doubt that Canada and the U.S. share very important values like freedom, democracy and the rule of law."

They announced they will meet again this spring to further discuss international issues, such as environmental concerns and energy security.

The two leaders also plan to intensify talks related to Congressional legislation that would require people on both sides of the border to show passports in order to cross. The legislation for sea and air crossings kicks in on Jan. 1, 2007, and goes into effect one year later for land crossings.

Business and government worry tourism in Canadian border towns will take a hit, and that the flow of goods between the two countries will be disrupted.



George W. Bush and Stephen Harper greet traditional dancers during tour of Mayan ruins at Chichen Itza, Mexico.

Gregory Bull/AP

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