

# Triage

## Suburban to Rural Recovery Programs

### Strategic Planning Concepts

Richard Balfour B&A • Strategic Planning  
Agricultural Land & Triage Paper 2006.06

A. Neighbourhood & Community Cooperative  
Land Assembly for Self Sufficiency.  
A Program Draft.

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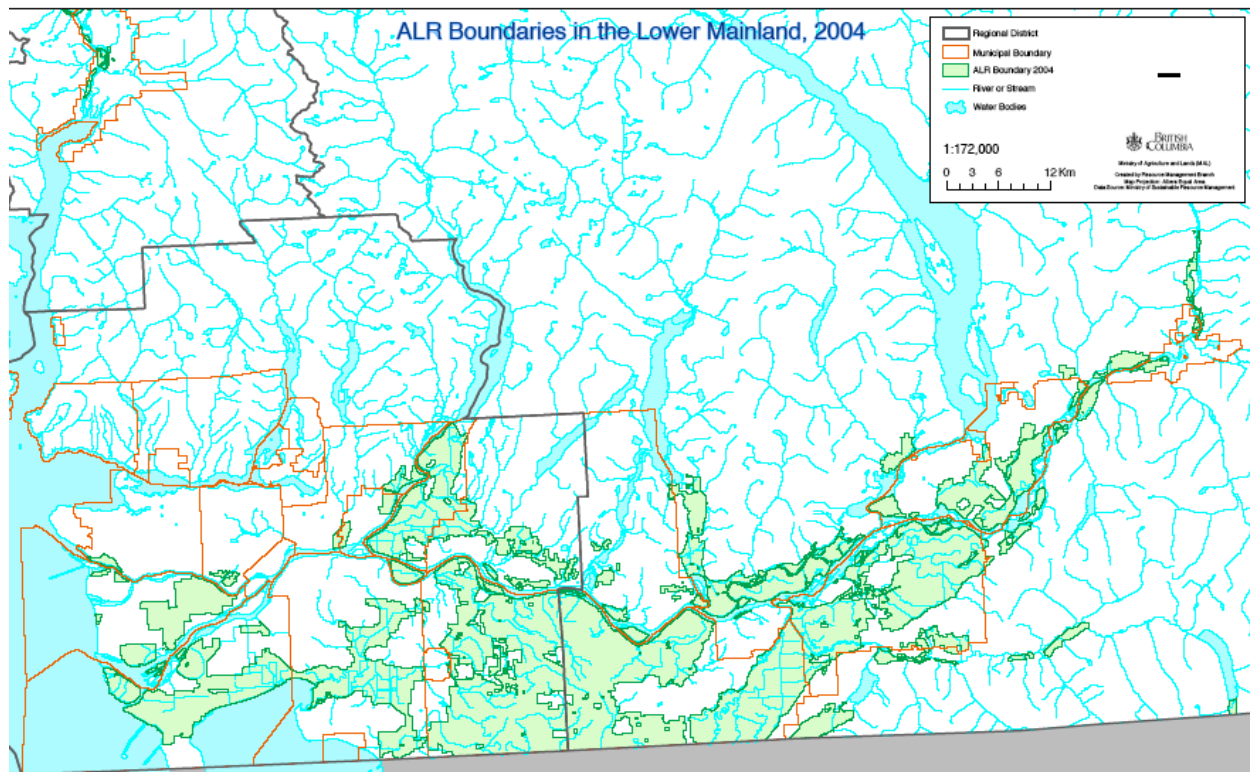
As post oil shock wakes up suburbs and other non-sustainable parts of our cities, we need to have emergency recovery strategies in place. In areas where urban triage means abandonment of homes or at least a major price decline, the population still left in the community will come to realize they have to become more self sufficient as a local community.

This paper may be a decade ahead of its time but it is important that communities and families start thinking now rather than too late, along these alternate lines of strategy for survival.

The best sites to convert to a compact urban village will need to have the existing zoning and policies thrown out if they have not been changed already. The start of people doubling up in houses in preferred locations will match the decline in areas that cannot be sustained due to being too far to commute, no transit options, houses now too big to heat with energy prices start climbing as supplies run down and get harder to find.

Gradual redevelopment of smaller lots and vertical house forms with built in shop or other work spaces will become predominant. In places where prices start to fall faster, and to a point where houses are not maintained, or are ready for demolition anyway, the community needs to act together to restructure the unworkable urban pattern, and without expecting any help from government at any level except for them to leave everyone alone.

## The Fraser Valley & the Agricultural Land Reserve



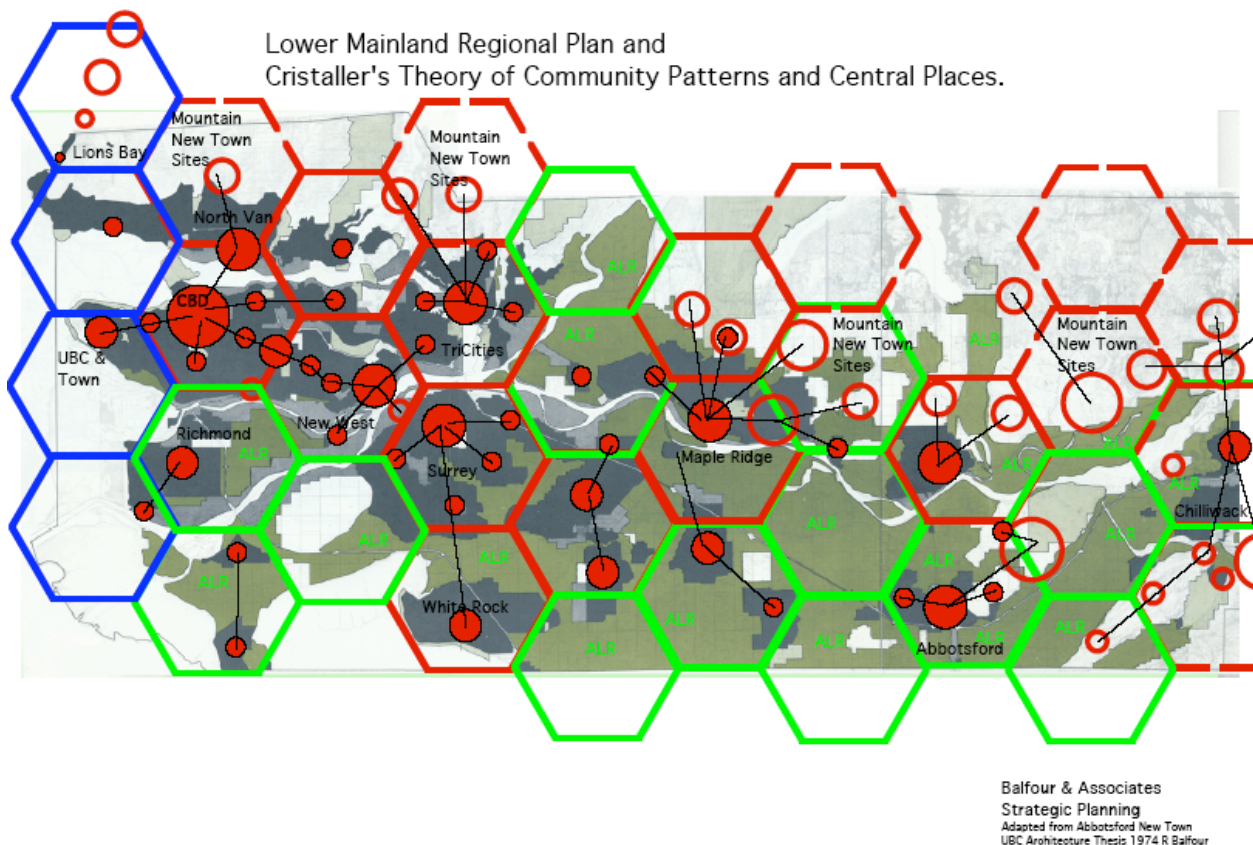
### Economic Instability Impacts:

As holes start to develop in a suburb or even an urban community, this is an opportunity for the remainder to act collectively to buy up the lots in question. This is a much better solution, to rescue your neighbour and take collective control of land that otherwise will push prices further down. It is a form of self protection in more ways than one. It is important to take this cooperative approach for self preservation as in a period of rapid change, either predator investors buy up devalued land or the banks take over properties. If the bank take overs become too much the banks and credit unions are put at risk, meaning even those not directly affected by the real estate losses will suffer through loss of their savings because such a large loss could not be covered by government protection schemes. Because we live next to the USA where mortgages are over leveraged and owners spent

new equity caused by past inflation, there is a real risk of this impacting us too.

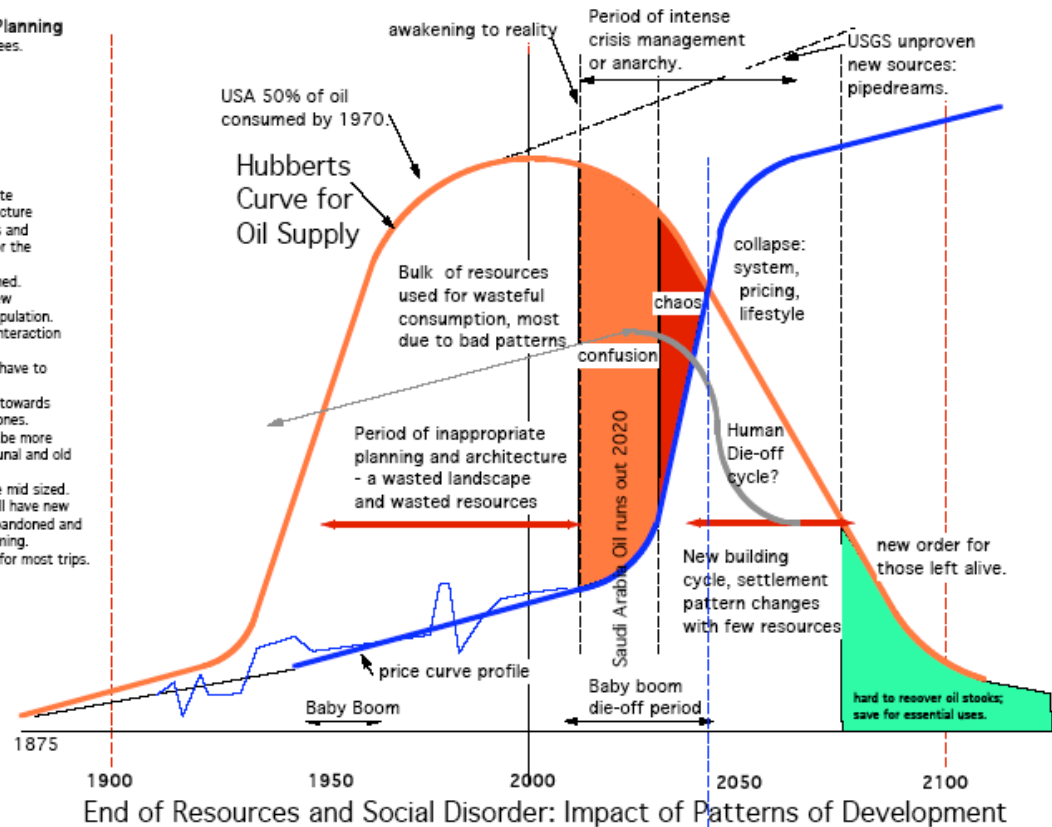
#### Mass Migration Global Impacts:

On the other hand, Vancouver may be less susceptible to the worst swings under massive instability if we are seen as an area with energy and other resources; the immigration from other places including the US means demand will most likely keep land assets valued higher here than in other places. We will still suffer urban triage however just given the sheer volume of the unworkable unsustainable buildings in a pattern of inefficient community and transportation after the cheap oil era.



PeakOil Impact: we are on the last quarter tank of the World Oil supply, which can only trigger a price acceleration in response to little supply. All we have built on cheap oil is in a pattern of the wrong things in the wrong place and this is not sustainable even in the next short term. Local self sufficiency will be the new paradigm and this includes local food production.

Conclusions:  
we have left it too late  
to design our architecture  
and our city patterns and  
our transportation for the  
new reality.  
Much will be abandoned.  
The best will have new  
concentrations of population.  
Physical long range interaction  
will be minimal.  
Food production will have to  
be localized again.  
Settlement will tend towards  
temperate climate zones.  
Rural settlement will be more  
clustered and communal and old  
fashioned.  
Urban clusters will be mid sized.  
Large urban areas will have new  
holes inside them, abandoned and  
returned to local farming.  
Mass transit needed for most trips.



## The Shift in the Pattern of Community: Benefiting from Triage

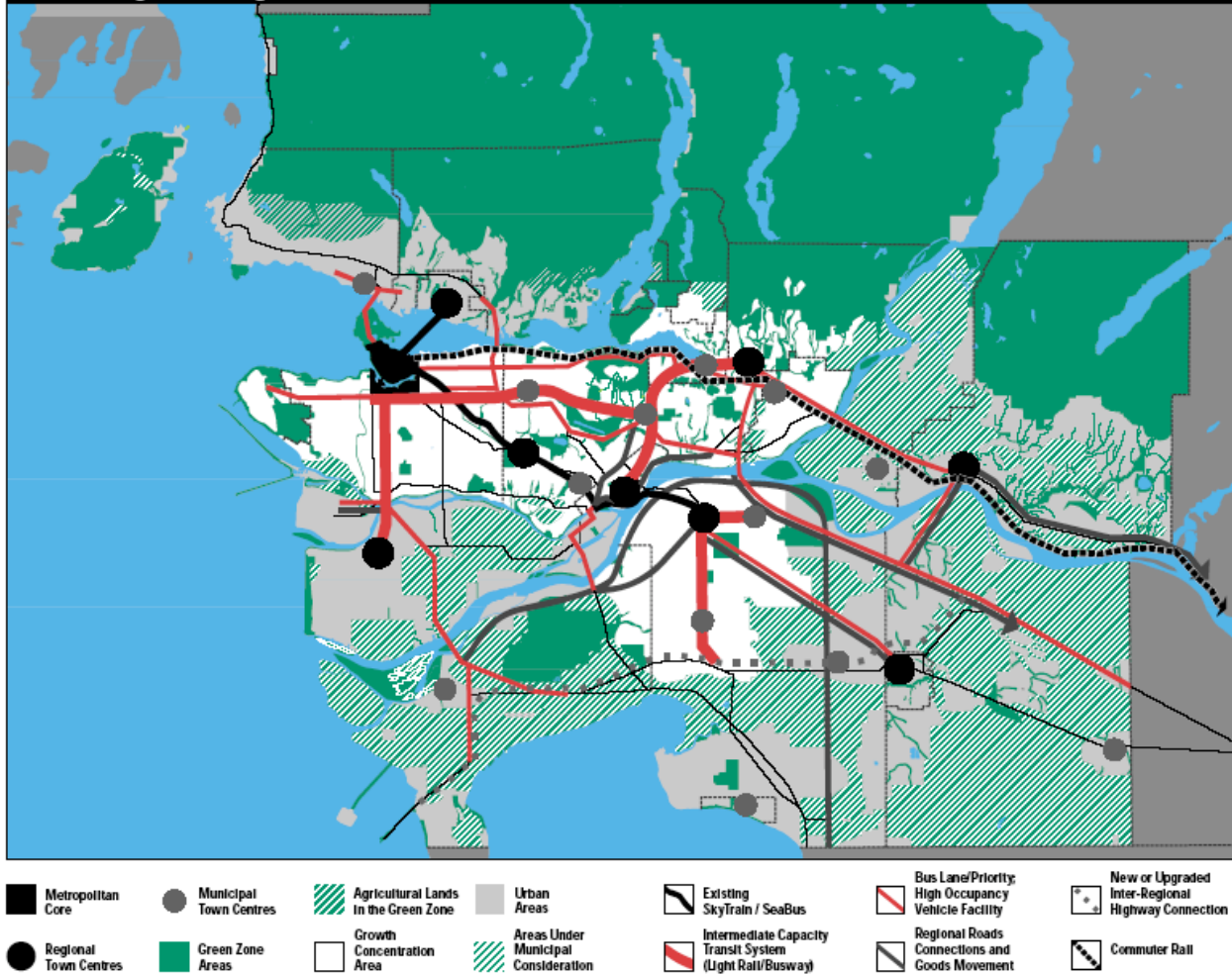
How to make the best of a bad situation.

Where soils are good, and this is in many parts of Metro Vancouver for instance, the claw back of lands for agriculture will be a new natural economic process. Where soils are more marginal these site should be used for community gardens under glass.

We are talking about a time in likely a decade where the combination of climate change from global warming and the end of cheap oil makes long range food shipping uneconomical. This may happen slowly or very quickly, and it is up to all of us to start to adapt for self sufficiency, but this is best done on a village or local community level.



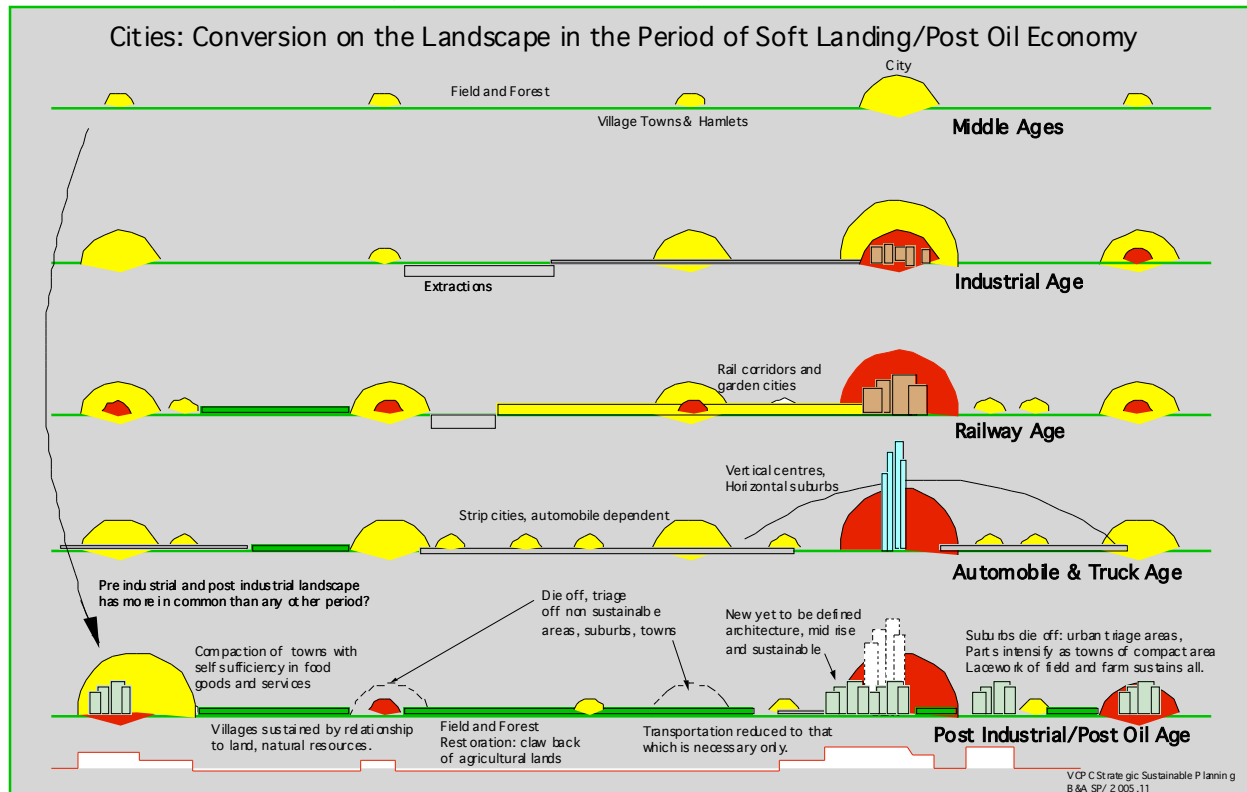
## Livable Region Strategic Plan



The resultant or evolving new pattern is more likely similar as a return to the middle ages pattern of community and farm. This will be successful and we can still retain much of our modern culture if we realize this sooner and work cooperatively to help each other survive. This is a good example of an alternate history; where we might have gone if we did not have cheap oil, if we did not build all the wrong things in the wrong places to be sustainable when the oil runs out.

Contrary to the latest planning fashion of ‘rounding out the urban area’, what is more likely to result is an opening of space between the urban fingers of land serviced by transit and mixed use urban villages. The European urban landscape for instance has these green wedges generally

between the urban fingers, giving green space, respite and access to local farming. The best examples of this are Copenhagen and Amsterdam.



The reversion of land from suburb to rural or farmland between the fingers to serve the urban fingers or villages in a rural landscape is something to be celebrated, not feared. There will be some who see this pattern as more reminiscent of dreaded urban sprawl, but the difference is the urban fingers must be much denser than suburban density; as outlined in the tax reform section below, land must be conserved not wasted.

If we are open to proper preplanning for this change, local areas could start doing this now if we can only open up the minds of political leaders and planners to a needed new reality.

If neighbours work together to double up on housing on smaller lots in a new village centre, the lower density site which now could be owned collectively could then be farmed for the benefit of all.

This now sounds preposterous to some given what they perceive as their current reality, but once the economy starts shifting, a new logic will become readily apparent. The claw back of agricultural land will become a new economic necessity.

This is a very triple rated sustainability pattern which could be kick started now and pushed along by changes to tax revisions on land. Rather than penalize farmers and reward the destruction of farmland, there needs to be a wholesale land tax review.

An alternate plan for saving the farmlands we know we will need to feed ourselves is to divide the farmlands into their own rural farm municipalities; legislated to allow only farm land uses, at most small contained rural hamelts which are farm dependent, farm services and food processing centres. This has to be put forward because the Agricultural Land Reserve has been a success until it was turned back to more localized six regions of control which is essentially giving over the power to local government to administer and control. The local municipalities have proven in most places to be irresponsible and cannot be trusted to safeguard the farms or the environment. So legal separation of farm from town is strongly recommended as a final solution to stop urban sprawl, and in fact turn it back on itself. This is also directly opposite to the trend in Ontario where wholesale absorption of rural and farm areas goes on unabated and urban sprawl goes unchecked. In Calgary and Edmonton too, there is no stopping unending annexation until the cities run into the mountains or First Nations Reserves.

Given no limits in these circumstances, the environment has no check on growth and growth at all costs interests just pray someone will find a way to



keep it all rolling. Vancouver has some layers of protection from the *GVRD Green Zone* to support the ALR and some districts like Delta have farm preservation as part of their political culture. But for the areas like Pitt Meadows/Maple Ridge, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, and the Okanagan towns, rural self government should be instituted for the benefit of the urban areas themselves and for the protection of food production for all of us. This will become even more important as this area becomes a greater exporter in an unstable world climate and economy.

### B. Tax Law Reform for Sustainability

Current tax structures actually serve vested interests who are not concerned about old concepts of land conservation, but on consumption of land as a basic right, and the environment and social impact be damned.

Some tax changes for sustainability include:

- 1 Forgive taxes on farmland. But keep an *inventory of taxes* owed but not paid; if land comes out of farming, the forgiven taxes have to be paid. This in itself will stop erosion of farmland except for the most strategic sites.

2. Consider putting all ALR lands into a separate farm district municipality which cannot have any other uses except for rural/farm and at most small limited pockets of rural villages strictly defined and industrial farm process sites, also severely limited. As services are limited, there is little to pay for. Highways would be covered by the province or regional district as in unorganized districts, and school taxes would carry on as they are now. There will be areas of now urban use after post oil shock triage which will allow a clawing back of land for farm use or at least mixed village/cottage farming once we realize we cannot ship food from California and Chile anymore.

3. Industrial lands already over supplied and under utilized need to be taxed on empty land to push for higher utilization of sites. A minimum FAR/FSR must be put in to make land work properly for the benefit of both industry and the environment.

Every excuse to take land out for industry has shown most places already have more land than they need for generations but if the land was used as intensively as it could and should, we can reclaim half our industrial lands for agriculture or better mixed urban and industrial uses, a form more traditional and to be relearned as post oil shock will reconfigure towns and industry along more traditional patterns.



75% of land used for temporary storage of vehicles.

4. Commercial land also must have a minimum FAR of 2.0, with no single use of land permitted. Only the land is taxed and with a lower tax for higher utilization. This encourages both economic use of the site and lessens community sprawl by compacting the land uses in the



community. This is another way of using a parking tax in a more equitable fashion. This equation would count parking itself as a use, thereby forcing parking into structures, or over or under them sooner, and or forcing greening of structures for aesthetic and environmental reasons. Developers will find in the end this is not more costly but they will save on both capital and maintenance costs. They will also have higher yield, and now spare land for sale for further higher utilization by another user who otherwise would be pushed to the edge of the community or desecrate another urban site.



(Barry Smith Photo of Seven Oaks in Abbotsford)

5 Suburban or single family lot taxes: A more fair tax levy should be on the land and ignore the house which is a depreciating asset anyway. Accent or accelerate the taxes on land so land taxes decline as a rate faster than lot size. For example a one acre lot with any

house would be taxed at 3% of land value per year, a tenth of an acre at 2% per sf per annum, a hundredth of an acre at 1% of land value per annum. (Taxes on services consumption would be on top of this based on actual consumption which would bring all taxes closer together for final totals for the year.

### Tax Reform and unstustainable urban densities.

This would now enforce an “ability to pay” equation, forcing better land economy, changes of density to make sites more affordable and to reduce the footprint of the community as a whole. Right now, given that land is valued less per square foot the larger it is, but in indirect relationship, even a flat tax on land means the large lots are being relatively subsidized by the other lots and higher density uses.

When a 6x multiplier on commercial space is calculated in, this only worsens the effective subsidy of large lot residential land. The large lot, urban sprawl patterns are subsidized by all uses, as is industrial land, mostly for fear of loss of a local economy. The result is the more sustainable land forms are being punished and used to subsidize land waste.

Below is an example showing flat tax impac which on per square foot basis is subsidized taxation, a corrective exponential tax correction example, all before adding fees for basic services like water, garbage collection, and sewers.

Tax changes: example keeping the mean example steady for comparison:

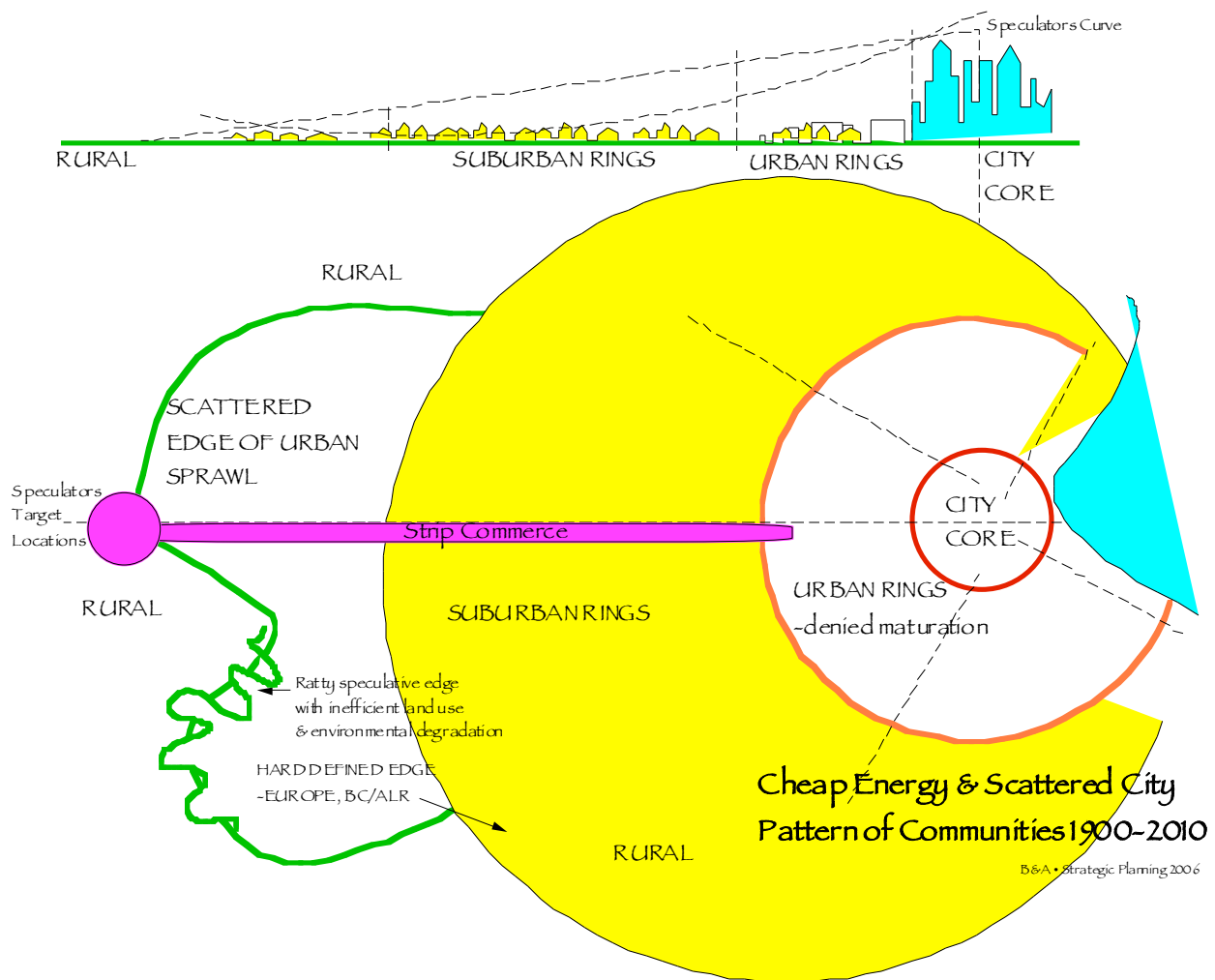
area:	1 acre lot	0.1 acre lot	0.01 acre 'lot'
land value	\$5,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$200,000
0.4%	\$20,000 tax	\$4,000 tax	\$800 tax

per sq. ft=	\$0.50	\$1.00	\$2.00
.5/.4/.3	\$25,000 tax	\$4,000 tax	\$600 tax
per sq. ft=	\$0.62	\$1.00	\$1.50
.6/.4/.2	\$30,000	\$4,000	\$400
per sq ft=	\$0.75	\$1.00	\$1.00

As the transition kicked in, many large lots could be kept by community purchase for open space, needed community gardens and other public facilities that compact, dense urban villages will need close at hand as fuel prices deny extensive travel we are now used to. Community gardens held in common would be classed as non taxable but with a running total kept just like farmland, for payment if the land reverts to non farming or communal public benefit space.

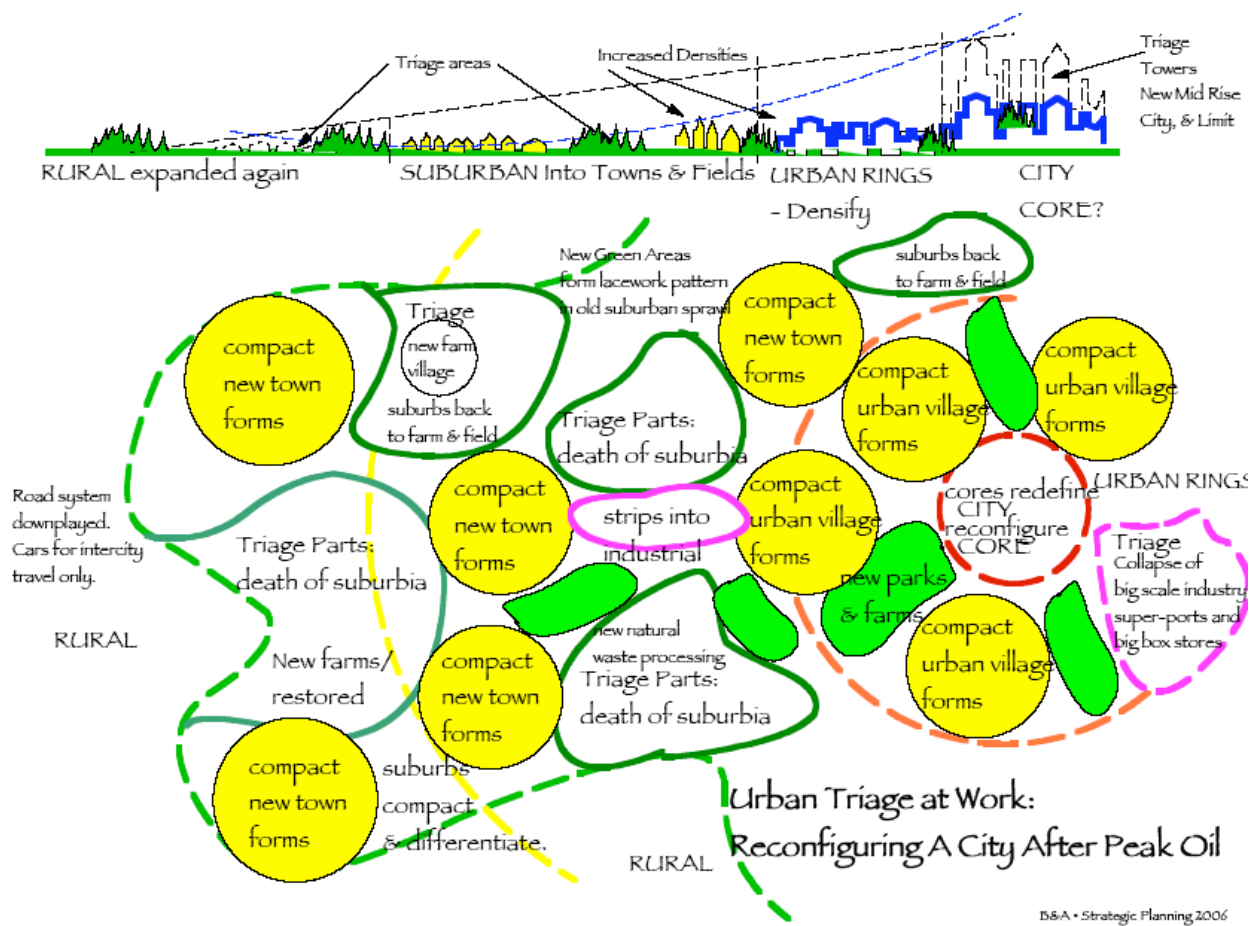
### C. The Changes to the Pattern of Community; on the Ground

The following diagram indicates how global impacts on local economy and individual or family actions will shift changes on the land. For the most part these are not to be feared but embraced. These are patterns for a planned soft landing and the preservation of our culture. These are ways we should have developed and if we did not have the benefit of cheap energy in the past.

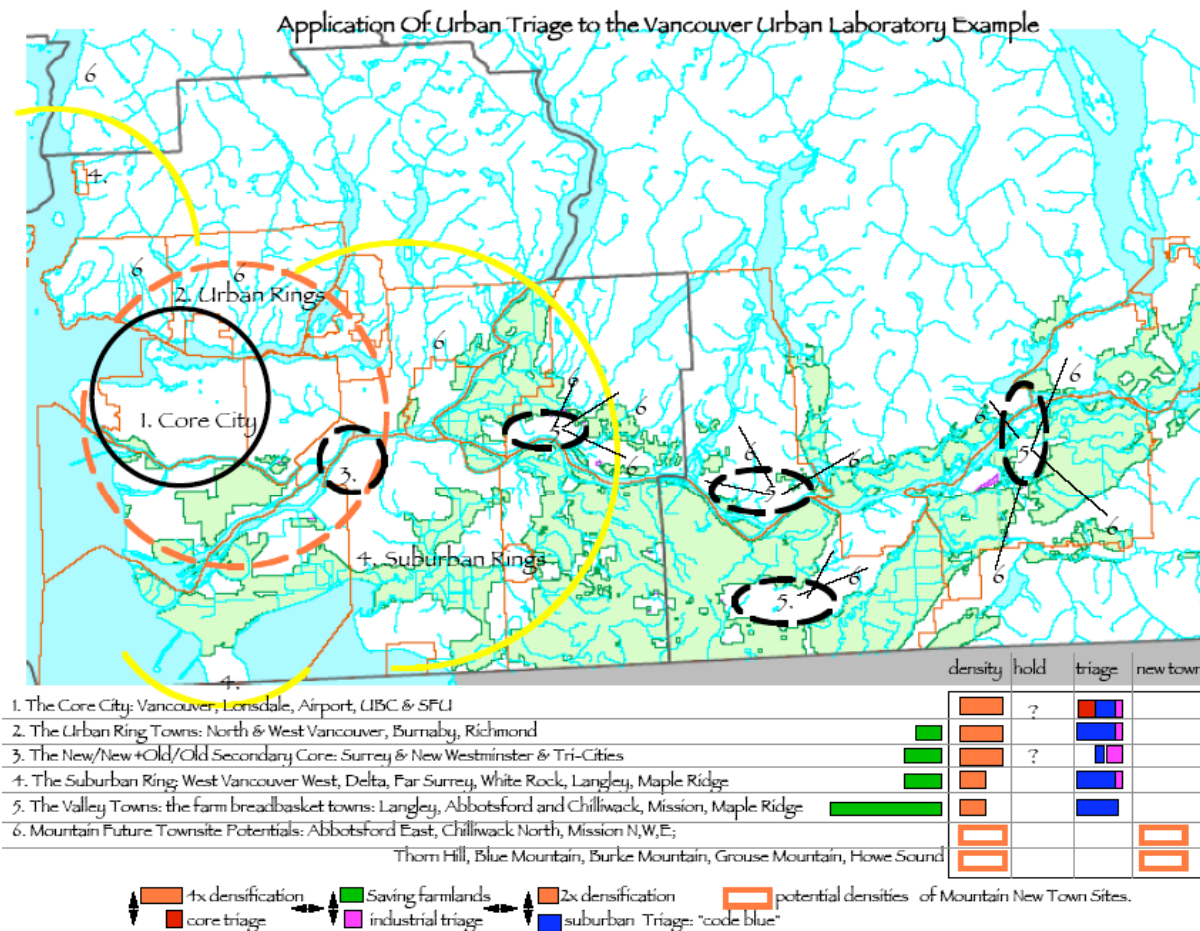


The current typical car oriented cities we have created during the era of cheap energy. As we wake up to realize this pattern cannot be sustained, new shuffling of land uses and radical rethinking of transportation will cause areas of Triage. These are areas potentially to be abandoned or redeveloped to work in a new paradigm of energy at its true cost.





Footnote and a word of Caution for the eternally optimistic Oil Guzzlers;  
 Even if our wasteful consumption of land and oil is permitted to continue from some rescue such as gas and oil from coal for instance, we should start to make the conversions envisioned here. Any continued waste solutions in the time horizon of our whole species is still short lived, if we find ways to make gas and oil, we still need to save them, hoard them for future generations. So in that sense, we must accept the changes of patterns of community towards sustainability no matter what, perhaps with less pain and at a more leisurely pace.



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## How to Buy and Act Strategically (Think globally, act locally).

Many people who can afford nothing better or are not yet offered livable sustainable options are going to be hit hard by the changes coming. Who wants to admit that the suburban dream home cannot be heated, you cannot afford to commute to work, the schools are too far away and so are the stores, that nobody wants to buy your house?

We can only hope that the pressures that affect change, cause abandonment of suburbs, high rises and strip malls allow for a graceful adaptation. If not, the purpose of this paper is to ask everyone to think communally in order to protect all of us. As land is abandoned or converted, other members of the same family will find their relatives now doubling up with them. The hope outlined here is that families and friends, villages and

communities can work together to go through this painful adaptation as we abandon the dreams of Henry Ford and tract housing developers. If buying rural land, consider sites that can themselves be self sufficient in water, soil, solar access, good climate so that when the time comes a family or village unit can subsist in that place.

Helping our descendants:

The new amorphous pattern that appears out of the new decisions made by individuals will ideally be a better world, and more sustainable. If we can get everyone to take a longer view through time as to the impact of their decision, the footprint of our community, and starting now, can we turn our communities around to be truly sustainable, self sufficient and an example to others? This will be hard to accomplish because even though those with vested interests will see the greater public benefit they will not admit it as they fight to preserve their own wasteful but privileged positions.

This is where the community must really start acting as a family to save our culture and our planet.

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