

AGENDA ITEM NO: 7.11

MEETING DATE: March 11, 2025

**STAFF REPORT – COVER SHEET**

SUBJECT: Po Lam Buddhist Association  
Agricultural Land Reserve  
46372 Prairie Central Road DATE: February 27, 2025


DEPARTMENT: Planning Department  
ALR00432 PREPARED BY: Sean Roufousse / rk

**1. SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

The applicant is seeking approval for a 'Non-Farm Use' in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) to remove a condition from a previous 'Non-Farm Use' approval to facilitate the retention of an existing single detached dwelling within the subject property.

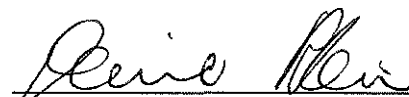
**2. RECOMMENDATION:**

Recommendation that application ALR00432 for a 'Non-Farm Use' within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), with respect to property located at 46372 Prairie Central Road, be forwarded to the Agricultural Land Commission "with support". (Presentation)

  
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Gillian Villeneuve  
Director of Planning

**3. CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION/COMMENTS:**

Supports recommendation.

  
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David Blain  
Chief Administrative Officer

## STAFF REPORT ON AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE APPLICATION ALR00432

PREPARED BY: Sean Roufosse DATE: February 27, 2025  
POSITION: Planner I DEPARTMENT: Planning Department

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### 1. BACKGROUND/PROPOSAL:

In 2008 a 'Non-Farm Use' application was approved by the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) to permit the construction of a Buddhist Meditation Centre and associated facilities on the subject property. As part of the ALC approval (Resolution No. 660/2008), a condition was included to require the removal of the existing single detached dwelling to provide more land for farm use. Though the owners originally leased their arable land to outside farmers and did not require the single detached dwelling, the farm has since retained a full-time migrant farm manager who would like to reside in the existing home on site. As such, a new 'Non-Farm Use' application has been submitted to remove the condition of the previous approval.

### 2. FACTORS:

#### 2.1 Zoning/2040 OCP Designation/Land Use

Current Zone: 65% AL (Agricultural Lowland) Zone  
35% OR (Outdoor Recreation) Zone

OCP Designation: "Agricultural"

Existing Land Uses: Meditation Centre, farm area for crop and flower production, and a single detached dwelling.

#### 2.2 Technical Issues:

Floodplain: The subject property is located within the protected floodplain and subject to the regulations of the Floodplain Regulation Bylaw. As the subject dwelling is existing, a floodplain covenant is not required.

Watercourses: *Semiault-Prairie Central Diversion*, a Class "A" watercourse, is located along the northern property line. The siting of the existing dwelling is not affected by this watercourse.

Geotechnical Issues: The property is not subject to any known geotechnical hazards or earthquake related risks.

**Soil Classification:** According to the ALC’s soil capability mapping, a majority of the property is situated in a mineral soil area composed of 40% Class 3 soil (with excess water) 30% Class 2 soil (partially with excess water, and soil moisture deficiency) and 30% Class 2 soil (with soil moisture deficiency and challenges related to topography) having the potential to be composed of 40% Class 2 soil (with excess water), 30% Class 2 soil (challenges related to topography) and 30% Class 1

A small portion is a mineral soil area comprised of 80% Class 3 and 20% Class 2 soils (both with a soil moisture deficiency) with the potential to be composed of 60% Class 1 40% and Class 2 (with challenges related to topography and soil moisture deficiency)

For reference, the ALC’s Soil Classes are outlined below:

- Class 1 lands are capable of producing the very widest range of crops, resulting in easy management.
- Class 2 lands have minor limitations that require ongoing management practices or slightly restrict the range of crops, or both.
- Class 3 lands require moderately intensive management practices or restrictions in the range of crops.
- Class 4 lands require special management practices or severely restricted crop selection.

### 2.3 Neighbourhood Character

The subject property is primarily surrounded by small to medium sized agricultural properties within the AL (Agricultural Lowland) Zone to the east and south, as well as 16 single detached dwellings along Velma Avenue which are also in the AL (Agricultural Lowland) Zone.

### 3. AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

The Agricultural and Rural Advisory Committee (ARAC) reviewed this proposal on February 26, 2025 and made the following recommendation:

*That the Agricultural and Rural Advisory Committee supports the proposed ‘Non-Farm Use’ application within the Agricultural Land Reserve for property located at 46372 Prairie Central Road and recommends Council forward the application to the Agricultural Land Commission “with support”.*

As part of the Committee’s rationale, it was noted that by retaining the existing home for a farm manager, the potential for meaningful agricultural production on the property will likely increase. The Committee also noted that due to the location and size of the existing residence, removal is unlikely to lead to the restoration of agricultural land or increase production. The Committee also made recommendation that the ALC consider requesting a restrictive covenant be placed on title of the subject property as a condition of approval to limit occupancy of the house to farm workers only.

**4. RECOMMENDATION AND SUBSTANTIATION:****Recommendation**

Recommendation that application ALR00432 for a 'Non-Farm Use' within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), with respect to property located at 46372 Prairie Central Road, be forwarded to the Agricultural Land Commission "with support". (Presentation)

**Substantiation**

Retention of the existing home for a farm manager to live on site has the potential to increase meaningful agricultural production on the property. Due to the location and size of the existing residence, removal is unlikely to lead to the restoration of agricultural land or increase production. As such, the proposal is considered to be in the best interest of agriculture.

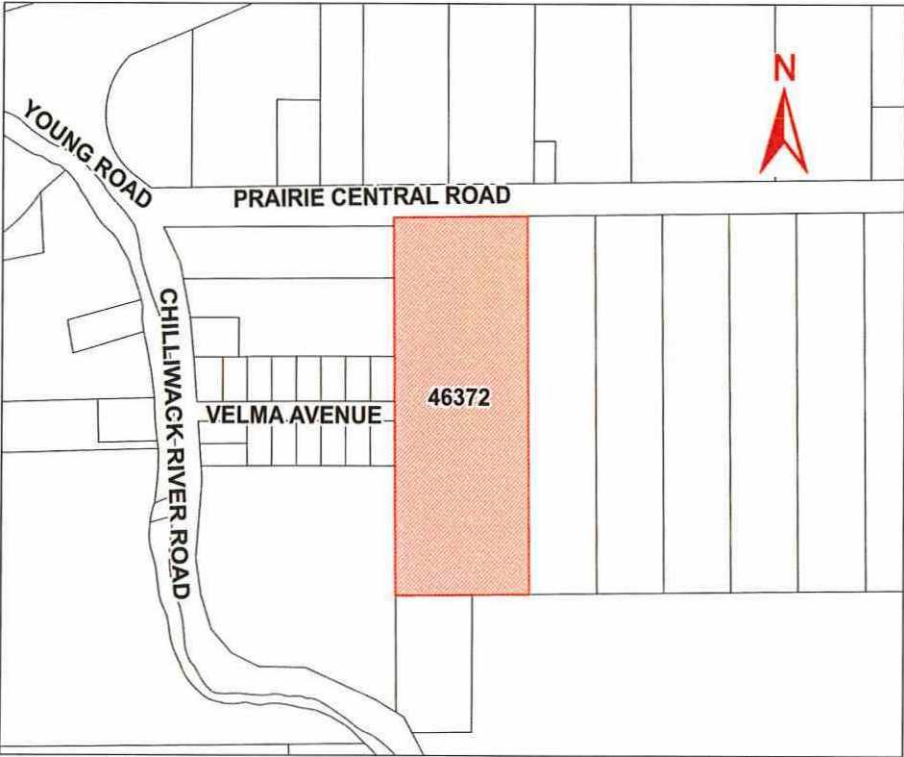
**5. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:**

- ALC Applicant Submission (ID101388) – July 18, 2024
- ALC Applicant Submission (ID102734) – November 18, 2024
- ALR Application (ALR00432) – July 18, 2024
- Development Application Review Team (DART) Minutes – October 17, 2024

**Attachment**

- Schedule A: Applicant's ALC Submission (ID 101388) – July 18, 2024

**Location Map**



**Ortho Map**



**Proposed Site Plan (as submitted by the applicant)**



House subject of Application for retention

**Schedule A**  
**ALC Application Submission**



## Provincial Agricultural Land Commission - Applicant Submission

**Application ID:** 101388  
**Application Type:** Non-Adhering Residential Use within the ALR  
**Status:** Submitted to L/FNG  
**Applicant:** Po Lam Buddhist Association  
**Local/First Nation Government:** City of Chilliwack

### 1. Parcel(s) Under Application

#### Parcel #1

**Parcel Type** Fee Simple  
**Legal Description** LOT 1 DISTRICT LOT 340 GROUP 2 NEW WESTMINSTER DISTRICT PLAN EPP66276  
**Approx. Map Area** 4.1 ha  
**PID** 030-142-652  
**Purchase Date** Nov 19, 1996  
**Farm Classification** Yes  
**Civic Address** 46372 Prairie Central Road, Chilliwack, BC, V4Z 1A1  
**Certificate Of Title** title-1899066.pdf

Land Owner(s)	Organization	Phone	Email	Corporate Summary
SIK Yin Kit	Po Lam Buddhist Association			Authorization to Transition (01253600xC4756)_signed.pdf



## 2. Other Owned Parcels

**Do any of the land owners added previously own or lease other parcels that might inform this application process?** Yes

**Describe the other parcels including their location, who owns or leases them, and their use.**

LOT 12, PLAN NWP30313, DISTRICT LOT 340, GROUP 2, NEW WESTMINSTER LAND DISTRICT

PID: 003-117-499. This property is also owned by Po Lam Buddhist Association and consists of 7.9 acres, of which approximately 5.5 acres is leased to a local farmer organization for the production of organic vegetables. The parcel is leased by Forstbauer Family Natural Food Farm, Chilliwack, BC.

LOT N, PLAN NWP15462, DISTRICT LOT 340, GROUP 2, NEW WESTMINSTER LAND DISTRICT. PID: 010-089-331. This is a non-agricultural residential property owned by Po Lam.

## 3. Primary Contact

**Type** Land Owner  
**First Name** SIK  
**Last Name** Yin Kit  
**Organization (If Applicable)** Po Lam Buddhist Association  
**Phone**  
**Email**

## 4. Government

**Local or First Nation Government:** City of Chilliwack

## 5. Land Use

**Land Use of Parcel(s) under Application**

**Describe all agriculture that currently takes place on the parcel(s).**

The farm at PID: 030-142-652 contains 4 main farming sections (A1 to A4 - see diagram) with area ranging from 0.8 to 1 acre, each. The other 2 areas are for harvest cleaning, packaging, storage, equipment repair, and maintenance workshop and an orchard. This area is about 0.9 acres including the house at the front. The orchard is about 0.4 acres. The remaining 1 acre is for a floral garden and recently about 1,000 Lavender plants were planted in this area. The farm also grows strawberries. In 2024, Section A-1 will grow melons/squash/sweet corn, beets and lettuce; Section A-2 will grow kale, carrots and cabbage; Section A-3 will grow potatoes, tomatoes and lettuce; Section A-4 is idle, growing cover crop in rotation.

**Describe all agricultural improvements made to the parcel(s).**

Improvements include: 1) A well was drilled on the property by the owners to provide an irrigation water source; 2) replacement of a single shared access with the landowner to the east with two separate approaches off Prairie Central Road to facilitate dedicated access to Po Lam and maintain the integrity of access to the parcel to the east.

**Describe all other uses that currently take place on the parcel(s).**

The Po Lam Buddhist Association (Po Lam) is housed in a meditation building that was recently completed (2024). As the temple was constructed, the nuns in the Association have been living in the original residence at the north end of the property .

The ALC gave permission in 2008 for non-farm use in the ALR (Resolution #660/2008), allowing the construction of the temple under certain conditions including: 1) that the remainder of the property would be farmed and 2) that the original residence be removed.

In 2013, The ALC made adjustments to its conditions stipulating that access from Prairie Central Road be restricted to farm access in response to requirements by the City of Chilliwack respecting emergency response. As well, the ALC accepted that the demolition of the original residence could be delayed until after the occupancy in the new structure by the nuns was practical.

**Land Use of Adjacent Parcels**

**Main Land Use Type**

**Specific Activity**

**North**

Agricultural / Farm

The uses of these parcels are a mix of rural residential and land used for the production of forages by large scale nearby dairy operations .

East	Agricultural / Farm	Small scale fruit and nursery
South	Agricultural / Farm	Forage production
West	Agricultural / Farm	Forage production

## 6. Proposal

**Selected Subtype:** Additional Residence for Farm Use

### **What is the purpose of the proposal?**

As part of the original approval obtained by Po Lam to build a temple/nun's residence/cultural academy, it was required that the land continue to be farmed under a supportive lease structure. To that end, Po Lam entered into a 10-year lease with a local farmer. Due to complications, the leasee was unable to continue farming and Po Lam took on farming itself, with several nuns working the field and with volunteer labour from the Association members. This set-up was not ideal due to the limited experience of the participants and the amount of work required.

Over the last 3 years, Po Lam has organized its agricultural operations within system that relies on a combination of nun labour, contract work by a local farmer, and employment of a full-time migrant farm manager. Use of migrant workers is widespread in the Lower Mainland as local workers are not available. One of the challenges of employing migrant labour is the need to provide accommodation, preferably on the farm.

Once the nuns are able to move into the new accommodation, the pre-existing residence on the property will be vacated and become available for farm use. Given the positive experience in operating the farm with the assistance of a full-time farm manager, Po Lam considers that the pre-existing residence should be repurposed to provide accommodation for the migrant farm manager, rather than being demolished. In any case, there is a farming need for an additional residence for farm use, which could be satisfied by either using the existing residence or applying for an additional new residence for farm use. Accommodating the farm manager in the temple is not a realistic option.

Having an experienced farm manager to operate the farm has improved the efficiency and productivity of the farming. The relatively small scale of the operation has generated an average of \$35,000 in gross farm gate sales over the last 3 years, in addition to produce consumed by the nuns accommodated on the property. The operation not only contributes to the local food supply, but provides employment, produces high-value produce,

and maintains valuable arable land in a productive state. The gross revenue generated by the farm amounted to \$8,750 per acre in production (including the field rotated into cover crops each year).

**What is the total floor area (m<sup>2</sup>) of the proposed additional residence?** 148

**Describe the necessity for an additional residence for farm use and how it will support agriculture in the short or long term.**

In 2023, the production record from 28 varieties of produce grown was: 10.4 tons of vegetables/melons; 520 dozen corn; and 240 heads of lettuce. Weather conditions conspired to lower crop quality and the day-to-day farming requirements were rigorous. With the more severe climate last year, requiring more intensive management, losses would have been more substantial if a dedicated farm manager had not been present. In addition, an organic operation requires a greater level of attention to control pests, disease and wildlife.

The farm manager carried out mechanized planting and field operations and supervised harvesting, end-of-year field preparation, storage and marketing activities - there were all activities which the nuns could not carry out or did not have sufficient knowledge to carry out on their own. Having the farm manager near the farm on an adjoining property highlighted the necessity of having appropriate farm knowledge and management capacity close at hand. Should the farming operation require it in the future, the residence has the capacity to be used to house more than one worker without consideration of additional housing on the property.

**Describe the rationale for the proposed location of the additional residence.**

The proposed additional residence would involve the repurposing of the pre-existing farm residence to a farm purpose. It is located near the north property line in an area that includes access, yard and septic field.

**Provide the total area (m<sup>2</sup>) and a description of infrastructure necessary to support the additional residence.**

The footprint of the farmyard is comprised of the pre-existing residence, a repurposed machine shop for handling and storage of produce, farm outbuilding, a barn, and the yard, which includes septic field. The total area of the footprint is 0.9 acres

**Describe the total floor area (m<sup>2</sup>), type, number, and occupancy of all residential structures currently located on the property.**

Pre-existing residence - 148 m<sup>2</sup>  
Meditation Centre and associated non-farm use - 3.5 acres (see Appendix D - Agrologist report)

**Proposal Map / Site Plan**

Diagram Po Lam Farming Area distribution with House.pdf

**Do you need to import any fill to construct or conduct the proposed non-adhering residential use?** No

### 7. Optional Documents

Type	Description	File Name
Other files that are related	List of Land Holdings	Land Acquisition.pdf
Professional Report	Need for worker housing	Zbeetnoff Opinion Report Jul 16 2024 with Appendices.pdf
Other files that are related	Organic certification	CertBC-PreciousForest_2024.pdf