

June 27, 2025

Hon. Lana Popham  
Minister of Agriculture and Food  
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Hon. Ravi Kahlon  
Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs  
HMA.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Popham & Minister Kahlon,

***RE: Soil Management Challenges in British Columbia***

We were pleased to receive your request for a roundtable meeting with the Urban Development Institute (UDI), along with representatives from the Canadian Home Builders Association BC (CHBA BC) and BC Construction Association (BCAA), to discuss the growing problem of illegal dumping of construction waste on farmland in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). As your letter acknowledged, it is also critical to *"address the need of homebuilders to have additional options for safe, effective and affordable disposal of soil as we work together to solve our housing crisis."*

You state in your letter that *"illegal dumping on farmland is generally conducted by those trying to avoid the fees associated with the disposal of soil from construction excavations at designated sites"*. While we acknowledge that this is indeed a contributing factor to the growing problem of illegal dumping of construction waste, another arguably more significant contributor to this issue is the lack of available soil sites to relocate clean fill and mixed composition soils throughout the Province. Lack of opportunity for legal soil relocation is pushing illegal soil dumping into rural areas – whether on the ALR or otherwise. If left unaddressed, this problem has high potential to worsen as the volume of soil being moved continues to increase as projects get larger (and require more extensive excavations), and development accelerates in response to efforts to meet provincial targets for housing and density.

All levels of government are in the business of delivering new housing supply, which will have soil relocation and fill needs of their own – this is not a challenge unique to private sector development.

Aside from the fees associated with legal disposal of soil, there are two key challenges that are important to address to resolve the issue of illegal dumping:

- A lack of legal clean fill and mixed composition soil sites; and
- Streamlining multi-jurisdictional approvals related to landing of import materials.

## **Key Challenges & Opportunities**

### ***1. Lack of legal and reliable clean fill and mixed composition soil relocation sites***

There is an acute need to provide additional sites to relocate both clean, as well as mixed composition soil. It is extremely costly to transport fill to designated dump sites – which can be up to one hundred or more kilometres away from where development is taking place. For example, in both the Central Okanagan and Southern Vancouver Island there is limited availability of dump sites for materials excavated from development sites near growth areas (<20km). In instances where legal disposal requires transportation over long distances, there is often slow travel (due to narrow or uphill routes, and heavy traffic). This results in higher transportation costs and adds delays to project timelines. For example, in the Okanagan hauling costs have more than doubled since the pandemic, and can be as much as \$250 per hour (truck and pup trailer), in addition to significant tipping fees.

Based on a UDI survey of members active in the Central Okanagan and Southern Vancouver Island, this issue affects nearly every project. For example, in the Central Okanagan, to move excavated materials from a tower project with underground parking to a centrally located dump site located 30 minutes away could cost over \$650,000.<sup>1</sup> If no centrally located site was available and the material had to be relocated to a site further away (i.e., Brenda Mines outside of Kelowna), the costs would more than double. In the Capital Region there is extreme need for a location on the south end of the Island, but one that avoids using the Malahat Highway. In the Okanagan, there is extreme need for a location on both sides of the bridge – on the north and south side of the lake. Another example is a custom single-family home in the Fraser Valley, where moving 800 loads of soil has put relocation costs at close to \$1 million.

These significant additions to project cost ultimately contribute to increases in the cost of delivering new housing supply, exacerbating affordability challenges already faced by prospective renters and homeowners. If left unaddressed, this issue could dampen or limit development opportunities due to high costs and delays. It is also worth noting that the amount of greenhouse gas emissions generated by transportation over long distances (i.e., from Victoria over the Malahat to Duncan or Nanaimo) is not aligned with the Province's own emissions reduction efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> Assumes total excavation volume of 30,000m<sup>3</sup>, and relocation costs of \$22/m<sup>3</sup>.

Below we have highlighted suggested opportunities to take steps to address the challenges outlined above:

- Explore and identify additional land for soil and material deposit and management.
  - The Province should work with relevant Regional Districts and municipalities to identify suitable locations for new soil management sites in closer proximity to development hubs.
  - They could be located on Crown Land (registered or unregistered) and private sites.
  - Soil banks on Crown Land could potentially be managed by the appropriate First Nations, creating jobs and funding. [Orca Sand and Gravel](#) in Port McNeill is an example of soils and aggregates being utilized as an economic benefit in partnership with First Nations.
  - In the future, these sites could still be transitioned into other uses such as open park space, industrial lands, housing, and potential for creating additional agricultural lands, if a reclamation and restoration plan was developed. Selection of these soil bank site locations might consider longer-term “closure plan” enhancements. For example, on ALR sites, a shutdown and decommissioning plan might involve transitioning into large contiguous and enriched agricultural properties.
- There is further opportunity to use these sites for material processing and soil washing, to support the reuse and repurposing of mixed composition soil material. Having the ability to process and classify material on site (i.e. into clay, sand, gravels, blast rock, and topsoil) creating opportunity for checking-in and checking-out of materials to avoid double-hauling, cutting down on cost and carbon emissions by eliminating the need for multiple trips. This may also create business opportunities through increasing the value of mixed composition soil once it has been separated out and “cleaned” into separate materials.

## **2. Streamlining multi-jurisdictional approvals related to landing of import materials.**

It is generally permitted to relocate clean fill to sites within the ALR, so long as fill placement will “*aid the farm/farming activity*” and/or “*the rehabilitation of agricultural lands severely impacted by past fill activities or other activities that have degraded agricultural land, whether permitted or not permitted*”. However, there remain challenges surrounding the minute volume of soil that triggers the need to enter a Letter of Intent process which can result in delays. Without a fast track permitting system, the soil will go somewhere else, either on ALR lands or other illegal dump locations.

Timing issues are not necessarily related to a lack of demand for clean fill within the ALR either. In the Lower Mainland, there is high demand by farmers in the Fraser Valley for topsoil to bring their field levels back up following the extreme weather and flooding events in 2021. Demand is also high in the City of Richmond, where farmers need to maintain higher field levels to be able to use the land for agriculture, due to proximity to sea level and the resulting naturally occurring levels of salinity in soils. There is also a major benefit to expediting relocation of clean fill into the ALR, as its relocation contributes to making non-arable land agriculturally usable once more in situations where the soil quality has depleted.

The current process can also be complex due to the layered nature of approvals involving Regional Districts and/or municipalities as well as the ALC. Permits can be required from the ALC, the Ministry of Transportation, as well as local governments and Regional Districts that have their own soil dumping & relocation bylaws. The need for multiple permits from different jurisdictions results in confusion and delays when relocating soil that has already been approved by the ALC.

Below we have highlighted suggested opportunities to take steps to address the challenges outlined above:

- For ALC approvals, establish an additional category, or a less rigorous Letter of Intent process, for moderate volumes of soil that are larger than what is currently permitted without triggering the full Letter of Intent process.
- In situations where the ALC has permitted relocation of materials onto ALR sites, municipal and Regional District regulations should be limited to transportation-related issues, to avoid duplication of regulatory efforts.

### **Related Issue - Ministry of Environment and Parks**

In March, UDI [submitted a letter](#) to the Ministry of Environment and Parks to request exploration of further changes to the implementation of *Protocol 19* that would allow more flexibility for proponents and their Qualified Environmental Professions to recognize naturally occurring minerals when determining thresholds for contamination. Particularly in the Capital Region, soils have salinity levels higher than the regulatory limits and thereby require special disposal. This issue compounds challenges related to large volumes of soil requiring relocation. We would like to note that UDI will be meeting with the Environmental Policy and Initiatives Branch in the Ministry of Environment and Parks on July 3 to discuss this issue. We hope to collaborate with the Ministry on a solution and will update you as those discussions progress.

We hope this additional information helps set the stage for our roundtable discussion on July 2, and look forward to collaborating on solutions to address these soil management challenges.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Anne McMullin', with a stylized, flowing script.

Anne McMullin  
President & CEO, Urban Development Institute