

Building an Affordable, Sustainable Richmond



Annual Address by
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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2024

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As we emerge from the challenges posed by the pandemic, 2023 was another busy and successful year for Richmond. Although the economy experienced stubbornly high inflation and interest rates, Richmond showcased an active year with a robust, stable economy.

Housing and Affordability

Housing has been the issue dominating public, media and government conversations over the past year, particularly as it relates to affordability. Despite the many challenges, ensuring stable and affordable housing for all residents remains a top Council priority.

Last year, Council issued Development Permits for two significant rental housing developments:

1. Phase 1 of Polygon's *Talisman* project at the northwest corner of Garden City and Cambie Roads, consists of 156 Low-End Market Rental (LEMR) units and 120 Market Rental units in two six-storey, wood framed, stand-alone buildings. Once all phases of this project are complete, you will find a total of 10 buildings containing 1,357 units comprised of 156 LEMR units, 171 Market Rental units and 1,030 strata units.
2. The Pathways Clubhouse residential project at the north foot of the No. 2 Road bridge will soon provide 80 rental units with many of these units featuring rental rate and household income restrictions to support low or moderate-income households. This project is expected to break ground in early March with occupancy late next year.

During the year, Council also completed the public hearings for the rezoning of a number of other multi-family projects. These developments include over 1,000 townhouse and condominium units built across the City. Almost 300 of these are affordable rental units whereby occupants pay no more than 30% of their gross income towards housing costs. Almost 200 are permanently secured for market rental.

Housing affordability provides the focus for the targeted review of Richmond's Official Community Plan now underway. Along with a detailed assessment of Richmond's housing market, the study will review and analyze housing policies from around the world to discover how those policies might usefully apply in the local context. An assessment will be

undertaken to discover how even more affordable housing can be incorporated into areas well-served by transit, community and commercial services.

These and many other initiatives were well underway when the Provincial Government enacted legislation targeting municipal development processes and planning. The Provincial approach may significantly impact neighbourhoods and infrastructure in the City, especially with the “one size fits all” aspect to planning throughout British Columbia.

All cities have unique elements – in Richmond, they include our floodplain geography, airport-related height and noise restrictions, as well as our past program of increasing our affordable housing together with the development community. Generally, the new Provincial Legislation is mostly focused on simply increasing housing supply – it does not address such issues as how to increase the supply of affordable housing, how to effectively use density bonuses for this purpose nor how to adequately support the added density with infrastructure and services. More information on the legislation will come soon.

Directly related to the issue of housing affordability is the effort by all levels of government to assist the increasing number of those who have no home. Many factors such as mental health, social issues, drug addiction, substance abuse and the toxic drug supply make the needs very complex. Last year, Council approved a number of significant initiatives to assist the increasing number of individuals who are unhoused. In addition to the housing units generated by BC Housing at Aster Place and Alderbridge, there are four basic programs that are currently providing respite so no one is turned away:

1. The Richmond House Emergency Shelter is in the Ironwood area operated by The Salvation Army. This shelter provides 45 year-round shelter spaces plus at least 10 additional Extreme Weather Response spaces;
2. The South Arm Warming Centre – until April 15th the centre will provide 21 overnight winter warming spaces with added capacity during extreme weather events;
3. The Brighthouse Warming Centre – until April 15th the centre will provide 16 overnight warming spaces; and
4. The Brighthouse Drop-in Centre and Shower Program is open from morning until night to complement the Warming Centre hours.

As the result of these programs and many others such as the community meals provided by many groups, a Richmond resident without a home should receive shelter, food and additional supports. To assist with the effort, two outreach workers will be hired by the City this year.

As part of the City's Homelessness Strategy and 10-year Collaborative Action Plan to Reduce and Prevent Poverty in Richmond, the City led community dialogues to reduce stigma and promote understanding. The goal is to take what steps we can as a City to reduce poverty and homelessness.

Richmond continues to add other housing projects to provide safe and stable housing for residents in need. For example, vulnerable women and their children will directly benefit from the affordable rental Rapid Housing Initiative project to be built at Steveston Highway and Railway Avenue in conjunction with senior governments. With the City providing the land, Richmond received over \$9 million in federal funding for the 25 unit three-storey modular housing building expected to open later this year and operated with the benefit of Provincial funding.

A further example of this approach is the recently-announced Federal government's Housing Accelerator Fund whereby \$35.9 million will be applied to eight internal initiatives meant to reduce barriers and expedite development approvals, thus resulting in more affordable housing.

Business Sector

Our diversified business sector attracted significant investment and growth. Overall, the City's award-winning Resilient Economy Strategy supported sustained job creation and maintained Richmond as having one of the strongest job-to-worker ratios in the region. Over 13,000 Richmond businesses employ around 125,000 workers across the City.

With the availability of industrial land being so limited and a key constraint to economic growth, Richmond is intensifying its use through the Industrial Lands Intensification Initiative. There are many examples of how this provides flexibility. Some have used space initially designated for retail uses for on-site manufacturing in industrial buildings. Others have co-located manufacturing space with much-needed employee and community services such as childcare. Industrial building heights may be increased to provide efficiencies. These

strategies will maintain Richmond for many years as a regional growth leader in industrial land redevelopment and intensification initiatives.

Across 20 Metro Vancouver municipalities in the 2023 NAIOP Awards, based on Richmond's strategic commitments and relatively low development costs, the City was named the Most Business-Friendly City. NAIOP stated:

The City of Richmond has consistently supported industrial development projects over the past decade. In addition to scoring high in multiple categories of the Cost of Business Survey, Richmond has become known for taking a pragmatic approach to development applications and keeping development cost inflation low. This has attracted industrial developers to find sites in Richmond, creating a significant industrial development pipeline at a time when it is much needed for the region.

Generally, in the development sector, Richmond has experienced an upward trend since 2021 in the issuance and construction value of building permits. Last year, the City issued building permits with overall construction value exceeding \$900 million while accruing development revenue at over \$11 million.

Major residential construction projects started over the past year include the first phase of the \$500 million Richmond Center development, which promises to deliver over 1,100 residential units along with additional retail space in the midst of the City Centre.

Last year, the City understood that in order to make our processes more effective, the issuance of permits needed to be streamlined. The City then launched the online *MyPermit* portal as part of the Permit Optimization Project. Through a self-service option, permit types such as plumbing and gas can be submitted, processed and approved without visiting City Hall. This will expedite the current annual issuance of 3,000 – 3,500 permits for the trades based entirely on submissions made anytime day or night from anywhere. By expanding this portal in the future to include permits applied for online but also involving staff review, a marked improvement in delivery times and customer service can be achieved.

A Safe and Prepared Community

Richmond prides itself on being safe and prepared. Over the years, community safety has been another important priority. The effort to keep the residents and businesses safe utilizes our responsive infrastructure as well as our investment in emergency services.

The Richmond RCMP continues to keep our City safe through targeted enforcement and education. Throughout the year, the RCMP led a number of campaigns focusing on road safety issues such as impaired driving, speeding, distracted driving and enforcement near school zones. Community outreach programs such as Fail to Stop, Speed Watch, and Distracted Driving emphasized how to keep Richmond's roads safe.

City Council at a public hearing also approved a development in the Hamilton neighbourhood which will incorporate a long-awaited Community Policing Office. Space will be provided for crime prevention programs and deployment of policing resources in this east Richmond neighbourhood.

For the Mitchell Island industrial area which has seen a number of extensive fires in recent years, Richmond Fire Rescue staff continued to lead the multi-disciplinary Mitchell Island Fire Prevention Taskforce. By working with City staff in Economic Development, Bylaw Enforcement and Environmental Sustainability departments, the business community should have safe and sustainable operations in the future.

Preserving safety in Richmond takes more than just having skilled and well-equipped teams for protection in case of emergencies. It also includes taking a proactive, sustainable approach. We need to be prepared to meet all challenges. Factors such as extreme weather and climate change make the challenge more difficult.

One of our biggest long-term infrastructure projects is the upgrade of the City Works Yard on Lynas Lane. To be completed in multiple phases over the next decade, this important facility will be improved to post-disaster design standards thus allowing it to function notwithstanding a major seismic or flood event.

The City completed a number of utility upgrades last year, including:

1. The Burkeville multi-phased utility upgrade project to reduce local flood risks by increasing the storm system capacity. Almost 1,000 metres of watermains and 800 metres of drainage mains were upgraded to improve safety and service for local residents.
2. Using innovative trenchless construction technology, the City installed almost 500 meters of pipeline to address a failed gravity sanitary sewer pipe. This approach minimized construction impacts and costs while extending the lifespan of the sewer system;

3. City crews also replaced about five kilometres of the old Asbestos Cement water mains with new PVC piping in order to minimize unplanned maintenance and improve fire protection;
4. Building on the previous work to successfully reclaim over 825 metres of the Horseshoe Slough canal, City staff completed four kilometres of canal reclamation on the Woodwards drainage catchment. This project will increase capacity, improve water flow, and further reduce flooding risk to the lower levels in our community.

Built on a floodplain, Richmond has one of the most comprehensive flood protection systems in the Province. It is designed to withstand high water events such as spring freshets and King Tides. It will also keep us safe during the remote but ever-present possibility of a major flooding event.

Overall, our existing 49 kilometres of dikes hold back the waters, while 539 kilometres of drainage pipes, 61 kilometres of culverts, and 155 kilometres of man-made watercourses take the water away. 39 pump stations located around Richmond are capable of discharging 1.4 million US gallons of water per minute – the equivalent capacity of over two Olympic swimming pools. Real-time data on river levels, rainfall and storm water drainage is provided by sensors. To stay ahead of projected long-term sea level rise, the City is committed to raising by over one metre all the dikes surrounding the City.

Of course we need to keep people and goods moving. Over 1,000 lane kilometers of road and paving upgrades were completed along the City's Major and Non-Major Road Network in 2023. The result was the application of almost 19,000 tonnes of paving material, allowing the City to maintain a high level of service for businesses and residents, while also minimizing maintenance costs.

Keeping roads and transit routes open during winter can be a challenge. Last year, Richmond experienced one of the worst winters in more than two decades. City crews worked around the clock to brine, salt and plough almost 97,000 lane kilometres of roads – the equivalent of driving from Richmond to Halifax and back eight times. City crews are always ready for any emergency situation that might arise.

Sustainability

The City of Richmond also remains an acknowledged leader in environmental sustainability thanks to many years of investment, foresight and innovation.

One example of a sustainable approach is our commitment to circularity whereby at the end of the useful life of a product, the item or its constituent parts will be repurposed rather than discarded. Last April, Council adopted a Circular City Strategy to form the guiding framework for environmental action. Outlining six strategic directions and 84 actions, the strategy is the first of its kind to be adopted by a local government in Canada and will set Richmond on a path to achieve 100% circularity by 2050. Recent examples of a circular approach would include our innovative recycled paving program as well as the award-winning electric vehicle and energy conservation initiatives.

For paving the roads, Richmond was the first local government in Canada to use an innovative blend of recycled asphalt and recycled plastic flake as a binding agent. This blend was first used when repaving a portion of the Recycling Depot on Lynas Lane. A total of 160 tonnes was used for this project in anticipation of potential future use on roads and pathways.

The Recycling Depot continued to succeed throughout 2023 as there were over 270,000 visits by residential and commercial users who dropped off material every day of the week. This is equivalent to one user every 43 seconds.

Water remains a precious environmental commodity to be protected. Richmond continues to lead in water conservation through our water meter and demand management programs. Richmond has 100% coverage in water meters for single family homes. Though encouraged, multi-family complexes have been slower to join the program. Last year, \$1.2 million was spent to assist Strata developments to install water meters. Supplemented by initiatives such as the provision of rain barrels and toilet rebates, our efforts have resulted in annual savings of \$15 million in water purchases.

Our commitment to environmental sustainability is further evident in our vehicles through initiatives such as our Community Energy & Emissions Plan and Green Fleet Action Plan. Richmond relies on a fleet of vehicles to maintain our infrastructure and provide essential services. The Green Fleet Action Plan guides the City in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fuel consumption.

For instance, the City recently acquired four fully-electric Ford F-150 Lightning trucks and two E-Transit vans. These are in addition to our existing Green Fleet of 15 fully electric vehicles, 32 plug-in hybrid, 25 hybrid and one hydrogen model, all of which make up around 20 per cent of the fleet vehicles.

To support the growing general community use of electric vehicles, the City now has installed 53 Level Two and four Level Three charging stations throughout Richmond. Last year on average, these charging stations altogether enabled around 5,000 sessions per month, reinforcing the value of this infrastructure to users as well as the environment.

Over the past year, the City's Zoning Bylaw was amended to require the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure for non-residential parking spaces in new developments. When added to the previously-enacted charging infrastructure requirements for residential development, drivers have an ever-increasing range of locations at which to recharge vehicles.

Richmond also became one of the first communities in the region to offer an e-scooter sharing program. Over 60,000 shared e-scooter or e-bike trips occurred throughout Richmond last year as this form of active transportation became increasingly popular.

For active transportation, following approval in 2023, construction is underway on the first phases of the Steveston Highway Multi-Use Pathway. The four-kilometre stretch between Shell Road and No. 2 Road will eventually provide a protected, shared, separated, safe walking and cycling path along the south side of Steveston Highway. This section of work is expected to be completed this year. A further phase extending the pathway to the Railway Greenway will complete in 2025. The hope is to later extend the eastern portion from Shell Road to the Highway 99 overpass and Steveston Interchange.

Our multi-award-winning Lulu Island District Energy program continued to deliver low carbon energy to almost 6,500 residential units and 30 buildings throughout the City. Two buildings were added to the grid in 2023, with an overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of almost 4,000 tonnes for the year. Providing heating, cooling and domestic hot water from geothermal sources, heat pumps and interim energy centres, Lulu Island Energy is on track to reduce approximately one million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

In another innovative approach, Council adopted the Zero Carbon Step Code for new residential, commercial, office, retail and hotel use. Integrating with existing code requirements, the Zero Carbon Step Code will accelerate the transition to zero emission

energy sources in new buildings. This will prove important to meeting our 2030 (50%) and 2050 (100%) GHG emission reduction targets.

Additional sustainable approaches are also being adopted within the City. For instance, in 2023, the City received a \$1 million grant from the Provincial Ministry of Agriculture and Food toward development of a new commercial food hub as part of the BC Food Hub Network. This funding provides the opportunity to better understand Richmond's current strengths in the food and beverage processing sector while identifying how a Food Hub could fill some of the gaps to benefit our economy. The aim is to help move the City toward a strong and innovative food system that provides opportunities for local growers, fishers, processors, and creators. This Food Hub is consistent with the City's rich agricultural history.

Building Community

Richmond remains a vibrant, resilient, and active community that welcomes people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures. Adequate support services must be provided for a growing population.

To attract new residents with young families, affordable, accessible and available childcare remains important. Last April, the City opened the Hummingbird Child Care Facility to provide 37 new, licensed childcare spaces in the City Centre, secured through a Community Amenity Contribution and leased to the YMCA. There are now 13 City-owned childcare facilities and Early Childhood Development Hubs, which altogether provide a total of 620 spaces of licensed childcare. These are in addition to 801 spaces of licensed childcare in the City community centres. Throughout Richmond since 2016, more than 2,500 new childcare spaces have been created – a 44% increase.

In July, City Council adopted a Youth Strategy 2022–2032 confirming the vision that “all youth in Richmond are safe, valued, respected and have the supports, opportunities, and resources to live rich and fulfilling lives”. The Youth Strategy will help build connections and encourage younger residents to be more engaged with each other and their community.

Generally in 2023, recreation programs in our many community centres and elsewhere continued to expand. Almost 700,000 people registered last year for in-person programs at City facilities with another 1.6 million drop-in admissions at various locations. Recreational and day camp programs were attended by over 64,000 children and youth.

Richmond's many parks and trails remain popular. Parks staff planted over 2,300 new trees around the City last year in addition to the 1,200 trees planted through development. Our residents' commitment to the environment was apparent when over 500 young trees were sold within hours to local residents at the City's second annual Community Tree Sale.

To enhance the outdoor experience, the Minoru Lakes were re-opened in 2023. Included in this \$10.6 million project is new site furniture and a boardwalk. There are also enhanced viewing areas around the fully reconstructed and redesigned lakes. An important new feature of the park is the waterfall, which also serves as an important ecological bio-filter for stormwater runoff. Native plantings throughout the lakes provide rich habitat for our wildlife.

The South Arm Community Park playground was also revitalized in 2023 to provide a unique and updated play experience. Completed in partnership with the South Arm Community Association, the playground also includes zip line and tower features, which quickly became favourites among park users.

A revitalization of the three-acre heritage London Farm along picturesque Dyke Road was also completed to create an even more welcoming, relaxing and educational experience for visitors.

Richmond is also proud of its vibrant arts and heritage community. The annual Street Banner contest attracted almost 400 submissions, while a number of artwork and mural displays were unveiled throughout the City. Also unveiled was the large-scale signature artwork *Typha* on the dyke near the Richmond Olympic Oval as well as artwork on columns along No. 3 Road.

To add beauty and interest in Richmond for residents and visitors, a call was made for artists to paint colourful murals on select City sites. From 22 applications, five were chosen, including:

- the [Leaping Home](#) mural at the Richmond Animal Shelter;
- the [Journey Home](#) and [Gillnetter At Night](#) murals in Steveston; and
- the [Movements That Make Us](#) at Mitchell Elementary.

To bring the community together and honour our rich cultural heritage several City events returned in 2023. These included:

- a) Over 75,000 visitors attended the 76th annual Steveston Salmon Festival which was staged in partnership with Steveston Community Society;

- b) More than 40,000 people celebrated the 20th anniversary of the two-day Richmond Maritime Festival;
- c) Over 5,000 people attended the Children's Arts Festival and a similar number enjoyed the Cherry Blossom Festival; and
- d) 17,000 participated in the ever-popular Doors Open.

Largely, as a result of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games and the reputation of the world-class Richmond Olympic Oval, our City is now recognized internationally as a major sports event destination. Over 80 major sporting events were hosted in 2023 including the Canadian Adult Recreational Hockey Association (CARHA) World Cup. Following postponements due to the pandemic, this competition alone attracted over 1,600 participants from 11 countries. The World Wheelchair Curling Championships highlighted more than 100 athletes from 17 nations competing for international honours.

Engaging the Community

Keeping citizens connected and informed is essential if Richmond is to be a strong and resilient community. The past year saw initiatives undertaken to engage residents in feedback opportunities as well as embrace their culture and identity.

Our *Richmond Stories* video series shared some of Richmond's fascinating stories through a blend of archival film, photographs and new images. If you have not seen them, I encourage you to visit our [You-Tube channel](#) to take a look. The videos provide an important glimpse of our history and City-shaping events over the years.

A new City website was unveiled in 2023. More user-friendly, it is customer-focused and offers new features including a translation tool to embrace residents seeking information in a non-English language. The City website now receives around four million views annually.

There are many other examples of our engagement with our residents last year including:

- a) City Council and members of Richmond's Sikh community unveiled two interpretive signs at King George Park, near Cambie Community Centre. The signs provide information about the history of Sikhs in Richmond including their connection to the infamous 1914 Komagata Maru incident;

- b) For the first time, a Pride Flag was displayed at City Hall during Pride Week as a symbol of support for Richmond's LGBTQ communities. It was another example of Council's inclusion of many diverse groups in the City;
- c) Community input was ongoing during the year through the online *Let's Talk Richmond* platform and other strategies. Over 30 different engagement sessions took place in 2023 on subjects ranging from flood protection and housing to dog parks and pickleball;
- d) Our City's presence on social media was apparent with thousands of views and followers on various platforms.

Conclusion

Looking back on 2023, City Council and staff can take great pride in our accomplishments as we work together to strengthen our economy and our community.

Looking forward this year, we expect to see:

1. Completion of major infrastructure projects including the Capstan Canada Line Station and Minoru Cultural Centre Arts Annex, as well as continued progress on projects such as the City Works yard upgrade, Steveston Community Centre and Library and the Lawn Bowling clubhouse;
2. More housing approvals, including affordable and market rental units of all types with involvement of the City along with government and other partners as we revise Richmond's Official Community Plan;
3. Further progress on the development of Duck Island, the largest infrastructure project in Richmond's history. Located in North Richmond along the Fraser River, the mixed-use development promises to showcase new hotel, office and commercial floor space along with many acres of City parkland and publicly-accessible open waterfront areas throughout the site;
4. Commencement of the Lulu Island Park project with staff starting the Request for Proposal process as well as the Master Plan;

5. Various partners are being urged to work together to facilitate the dredging of the secondary channels of the South arm of the Fraser River in Steveston to keep our vital fishing industry and other maritime services moving.

Richmond has always been a civic leader as our City Council has enacted bold, innovative, sustainable programs and strategies for the benefit of our residents and businesses. The City is well-supported by staff, partners and its many volunteers.

To ensure that Richmond remains a safe and resilient city, the many achievements during 2023 will improve the civic environment and quality of life for all. We are confident the future of Richmond will remain strong for future generations.