

Richmond: Emerging from the Pandemic



Annual Address by
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2023 promises to be a very good year for the City of Richmond. After the long Covid-19 pandemic, our City Council feels very confident about our future and takes great pride in the many achievements realized over the past year.

2022 saw a number of significant changes in senior governance and local administration. Long-standing Councillors Harold Steves and Linda McPhail retired after years of dedicated leadership in the community for which we are very grateful. Each made a lasting mark on the City. With the elections last October, Council welcomed Laura Gillanders and Kash Heed as new members who have strong, diverse backgrounds. I look forward to working with all of Council as we meet the challenges we face.

The City also introduced long time Richmond Staff member, Serena Lusk, as our new Chief Administrative Officer following the retirement of long-serving CAO George Duncan. Fire Chief Tim Wilkinson, retired and was replaced by Jim Wishlove. The RCMP appointed Chief Superintendent, Dave Chauhan as the new Officer in Charge of the Richmond detachment following the promotion of the OIC, Will Ng, to the position of Assistant RCMP Commissioner. We thank these retiring staff for their dedication over the years and their leadership in making Richmond a great city.

Generally, the City is engaged in a period of transition highlighted by the post-pandemic economic challenges and the increasingly forceful impacts of climate change. Throughout 2022, through policies and actions, City Council worked tirelessly to support our 230,000 residents and almost 14,000 businesses. Richmond continues to be a safe, strong, active and resilient city thanks to wise investments, sound management and innovative action.

Economic Recovery & Investment

With the effects of the global pandemic decreasing in intensity, much of the current focus is on our economy which features some of the highest inflation and interest rates in decades. As the result, many are stretched to afford even the basic requirements.

The pandemic emphasized the importance of sustaining a **resilient and diversified business sector** to allow us to overcome economic shifts. During the pandemic, sectors such as aviation

and tourism experienced closures with many resulting job losses. Conversely, there was growth in others such as logistics, e-commerce, and hi-tech.

Business investment and growth supported by implementation of the City's **Resilient Economy Strategy** have resulted in sustained job creation. Richmond businesses now provide around 130,000 local jobs. With one of the strongest jobs-to-worker ratios in the region, the city continues to be an important employment center. In 2022, there was an increase of almost 20% in new business licences issued over the previous year, creating jobs and strengthening our economy. However with industrial space vacancy of less than 2%, efforts are being made to use the industrial land more intensively.

With the City constantly **upgrading technology**, last July an online business licencing portal was launched called *MyBusiness*. This will provide to new and existing business owners the ability to conveniently apply for, update, and renew their business licences at any time day or night, seven days a week. With over 20% of businesses currently registered, we have an ever-increasing group of businesses signed up to use *MyBusiness*.

Though limited by geography, Richmond provides one of the largest **industrial land inventories** in the region with more than 45 million square feet of built industrial space. Policy and bylaw changes adopted by City Council serve to encourage more productive use of our industrial land and the related economic development. For example, Council in 2022 approved a rezoning application for an additional 180,000 square feet of phased industrial space in East Richmond.

The pandemic changed how the City interacts with many in the community. More **services are now available online**. Despite many businesses embracing more remote and hybrid work models for employees, demand for office space has continued to be strong - particularly in the City Centre, where the vacancy rate is less than 5%.

Construction and development are emerging from the challenges posed by the pandemic shutdowns, labour shortages, increased costs and supply chain delays. The City has been refining the planning process through the **Permit Optimization Project** which optimizes the use of technology, industry best practices and user feedback. The result is an enhanced application experience with more convenience, time efficiency, quality control and cost effectiveness for the applicants and City Staff.

Building permits were issued for over \$926 million in construction value in 2022. Several significant projects were opened or announced over the past year. For example:

1. Keltic Paramount: The **Keltic Paramount** development at the intersection of No. 3 and Cook Roads with its stunning First Nations-themed façade and artwork. Included are:
 - a. Approximately 530 residential units, including 27 affordable housing units; and
 - b. A large city-owned childcare hub which has drawn many accolades and awards.
2. Richmond Centre: Having originally been rezoned in the 1980's, the phased redevelopment of the southern portion of the **Richmond Centre** shopping mall site is well underway with revised OCP guidelines. Along with retail and entertainment districts as well as a publicly-accessible plaza, nearly 2,300 homes including approximately 200 market rental units and over 140 affordable housing spaces will eventually be found in the project.
3. Steveston Community Centre & Library: City Council and the community broke ground on the long-awaited \$95 million replacement **Steveston Community Centre and Library**. The three-storey, 60,000 square foot facility will include a double gymnasium, fitness centre, active studio, and many gathering spaces. The extensive library will showcase enhanced collections, child and youth spaces plus educational program rooms.
4. Luxe by Townline: Construction has started on a mixed-use project at **Lansdowne and No. 3 Roads**. Across the street from the Lansdowne Canada Line Station, it will include 360 residential homes including affordable housing units as well as office space, not-for-profit organizational space and retail along with the linear parkway.
5. Hamilton: Approval was also given for another development in the midst of the emerging **Hamilton Village Centre** at the corner of Westminster Highway & Gilley Road featuring 223 residential units including affordable housing, and approximately 25,000 square feet of commercial space.

To reflect the overall values and development patterns across Richmond, the City has embarked on a review of the City's **Official Community Plan (OCP)**. When complete, the OCP outlines the long-term planning and coordination of the City's sustainability and land-use interests. Included are the City's vision, goals and objectives for future sustainability, development and servicing. There are also many policies and urban design guidelines needed

to realize the vision. Public and stakeholder engagement will help to shape the City's direction for future generations through this process.

While we envision the future, it must be remembered that planning and development does not only involve the commencement of completely new and exciting projects. The extreme weather events of the past two years vividly remind us how essential it is to plan and prepare. Fundamental to our safety and well-being is the maintenance and extension of our complex infrastructure. As the result, there have been a number of infrastructure initiatives including:

1. **Flood protection** works provide an example of how the City partners with other levels of government to protect our residents and businesses. The City raised 1.5 kms of dike last year, while new drainage pump stations were constructed on No. 3 and Gilbert Roads south of Steveston Highway.

Facilitated in part by a \$13.8 million Infrastructure Canada: Disaster Mitigation Adaptation Fund grant, these projects tripled the pumping capacity to meet the future drainage requirements of a wide area. Through maintenance and renewal programs, Richmond has one of the most comprehensive flood protection systems in British Columbia.

2. Last year, to assist residents during **extreme weather events**, the City undertook several initiatives including enhanced maintenance and upgrades to the City's drainage system and an extended communications program. For instance, in Burkeville alone last year the City upgraded over 1,270 feet of water mains, 2,200 feet of sanitary mains and 1,400 feet of drainage. There, more than 2,700 feet of new drainage piping and laneway paving was installed.

To keep our roads clear and safe near the end of 2022, our **snow and ice response** crews pre-treated or de-iced over 65,000 kms. This is the equivalent of driving from Richmond to New York City and back seven times. We now take a more environmentally-friendly approach to winter weather by reducing the direct application of road salt and increasing the use of brine. Over the past three years, the City has reduced the amount of salt spread onto our roads by over 6,400 tonnes.

Overall, these examples demonstrate City Council's commitment to support Richmond residents and businesses in adapting to future periods of change and growth.

Supporting our Community

One of the most significant challenges currently facing Richmond along with every city in the Province is **housing supply and affordability**. Despite careful planning and investment, housing starts in Richmond and across the region somewhat declined in 2022 due to supply chain issues, labour shortages, higher interest rates and escalating material costs.

Among those directly impacted by market uncertainty are those who have no home or are at risk of becoming homeless. To support these vulnerable residents, the City partnered with BC Housing to open Aster Place in replacement of the Emergency Response Centre. This three-storey, purpose-built 40-unit modular building with inclusive services complements the similarly-sized Alderbridge Supportive Housing complex. Also open are the emergency spaces at the Shelter in South Richmond, the warming centre at South Arm Community Centre as well as the Drop-In Centre and Shower Program at Brighthouse Park Pavilion.

In partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health, the **Fox 80 Mental Health Car** provided its third full year of operation. This program kept busy a mental health nurse and a trained RCMP officer. The number of mental health-related calls declined slightly in 2022, suggesting that ongoing efforts by the City, police and health professionals to support those experiencing such challenges seem to bring positive results. In addition, expected for 2023 is a similar type of program focused on vulnerable youth.

Recognizing the ever-increasing need to assist, City Council increased the amount of **rental housing** included in major developments. In large multi-family developments with over 60 units located in the City Centre, a minimum of 15% of residential floor area is now provided as affordable rental housing units. Additionally, 15% of the floor area in these larger projects citywide will be dedicated to market rental units.

Overall, several **rezoning applications** for a total of approximately 2,500 multi-family units received initial approval by Council during 2022. Of this total, over 40% are rental units at market, below market and Low End Market Rental rates. The largest projects include:

1. Talisman Park at Cambie / Garden City Roads specifies almost 1,350 homes including 156 affordable housing units and 170 Market Rental in addition to limited street-oriented retail space. All the affordable housing units and 120 of the market rental units will be delivered in the initial phase of development. A key feature of the project is a new city park located along Cambie Road;

2. A **large-scale mixed-use project** on Sexsmith Road was approved at Public Hearing in December to provide an additional 392 multi-family units, including 49 Low End Market Rental and 20 market rental units. The project also provides over 30,000 square feet for a church and childcare facility, in addition to the preservation of the Herrling Residence heritage home;
3. Two other projects – Cook Road / Citation Drive and Azure Road – are **fully rental projects** with a combined 670 units. Together, these two projects include 176 below market rental units and 50 Low End Market Rental units.

The offering of **childcare** is another important service to support young families. This forms part of our commitment to making Richmond an active, engaged and family-oriented community. To ensure the supply of available, affordable and accessible options for Richmond families, the City now works with community operators to provide the locations for almost 600 licensed childcare spaces. Included in this overall total, *Sprouts* at Capstan Village and *Seedlings* in Brighthouse Village are Early Childhood Development Hubs opened in 2022 with almost 200 spaces combined. Another such centre in the Oval Village will provide additional childcare spots when it opens in March.

Innovation & Sustainability

Over the past year, City Council has taken sustainable action and invested for the benefit of future generations. Critical factors are how we adapt to **climate change** while reducing its impacts. Our Community Energy and Emissions Plan envisions a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050. This mandates the City to innovate in environmental sustainability through its actions, policies and programs.

To date, for example:

1. Richmond has become a national leader in advancing **Circular Economy** concepts for the extended use of resources in our operations. City Council recently endorsed the draft Circular City Strategy. Following public consultation, an approach will be created for a civic transition to a fully circular economy by 2050.
2. Implemented in partnership with Corix Infrastructure Inc, our multi-award winning **district energy** initiative remains a global success story. Last year, the City secured \$175 million in long-term funding from the Canada Infrastructure Bank for the expansion of the Lulu Island District Energy City Centre Utility project.

The utility now provides low carbon energy for the heating and cooling of over five million square feet of residential and commercial development space in the City Centre. Ultimately this innovative technology will be employed to heat and cool over 50 million square feet. At capacity, it is expected to reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions by over 1 million tonnes.

3. In alignment with our **zero emission strategy**, almost half of all City vehicles replaced last year were plug-in hybrid electric or full-battery electric vehicles. Our Green Fleet strategy has reduced fleet emissions by almost 30% over the past decade.

Richmond was the first to receive Canada's only municipal E3 Platinum Rating Certification in the national E3 Fleet program. This recognizes our excellence in fleet management and environmental performance.

With many being installed using wheelchair-accessible standards, there are a total of fifty-three Level 2 and four Level 3 EV chargers for public use throughout the community. In 2022 alone, the City installed 35 Level 2 chargers along with all the Level 3 fast chargers. At Garry Point Park, you will find the City's first solar-powered Level 2 EV charging station.

4. Richmond is among the first to adopt a ban on the commercial use of **single-use plastics** with a bylaw which came into effect in September. In preparation, city staff visited hundreds of businesses to educate and support compliance efforts. Few businesses remain challenged to meet the requirements which aim to eliminate the commercial dispensing of plastic straws, bags and foam containers.
5. Richmond continues to demonstrate leadership in **water conservation** through our water meter and water demand management programs. These improve equity among water users, promote water conservation and reduce wastage. In the 20 years, since the inception of the water meter program, Richmond's total water consumption has decreased by 14% despite a 26% increase in population. The result has been savings of \$10 million in water purchase cost.

The City water program also continues to offer toilet rebates, rain barrels and water conservation kits to residents. In 2022, almost 500 toilet rebates and over 200 rain barrels were provided to Richmond residents to encourage water conservation.

6. Richmond was again recognized for its commitment to **functional, energy-efficient buildings**. For instance:
 - a. The **Minoru Centre for Active Living** (“MCAL”) received the Recreation Facilities Association of British Columbia’s Outstanding Facility Award reflecting its innovations in design, energy management, operations, revenue generation and services.
 - b. International Athletic Business also named the MCAL one of North America’s 10 Facilities of Merit for 2022 for setting a new standard for wellness-oriented facilities. It was noted that the Centre balances the needs of traditional aquatic uses while integrating a wide variety of other amenities that encourage healthy lifestyles, especially for older-adults.

The expanded and updated **Richmond Animal Shelter** for stray and abandoned animals opened in 2022. Operated in partnership with the SPCA, the state-of-the-art shelter accommodates dogs, cats, rabbits and other small animals.

Connecting the Community

Richmond is known internationally as a tourist destination. City Council is very pleased to see the post-pandemic rebound in the **tourism and hospitality sector**. Whether it be our rich maritime heritage, the culinary delights of many restaurants or the beauty of our many trails and dikes, we are fortunate to have so many options. Richmond also has one of Canada’s most culturally unique and diverse populations who provide a welcoming environment to all.

Our international airport continues its operational recovery to bring passenger volumes closer to pre-pandemic passenger levels. This is good news for Richmond’s 26 hotels, the occupants of which provide revenue to support further growth in our tourism sector.

Richmond is committed to supporting **parks and trails** with over 140 parks comprising 871 hectares (2,153 acres), 136 kms of trails and 87 kms of on-road cycling paths for walking, rolling and cycling. The past year saw several new parks opened to provide even more recreational options. Officially unveiled were Alexandra Park in the east Cambie neighbourhood, phase two of Aberdeen Neighbourhood Park in the Capstan area and Tait Riverfront Community Park in Bridgeport. Similarly, the newly re-named Bark Park off-leash dog park at the south foot of No. 3 adjacent to the newly-strengthened dike gives vibrant outdoor opportunities for all residents – even the four-legged ones.

To support the environment, the City provided a range of **trees** for planting by residents at minimal cost. Almost 500 trees of various sizes were taken almost immediately.

Our natural beauty and excellent location makes Richmond attractive to the **film industry**. Over the years, many popular series and movies have been filmed in and around the city. Emerging from the shutdown, approximately 75 permits were issued in 2022 yielding over \$250,000 in service and location fees. 2023 promises to bring increased activity for local filming.

Richmond was named **BC's Most Active Community** in the *2022 ParticipACTION Community Better Challenge*. This nation-wide physical activity initiative recognizes our community's activity levels along with the creative ways that the community is engaged to become more physically active.

With the easing of pandemic restrictions, 2022 also saw almost a 50% increase in **recreational and day camp program registration** with over 20,000 children and youth signed up. Also, based on the return of many opportunities post-pandemic, **volunteer hours** rose over 150%. This is a tribute to the depth and commitment of so many dedicated volunteers in our community.

The **Richmond Olympic Oval**, a lasting legacy of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, remained a magnet for recreational use and elite athletes throughout 2022. It rebounded last year with significant increases in almost all aspects of its operations including the number of events hosted, visitation for sports and events as well as programs, youth sports camps, training sessions and more. Remaining strong are the financial contributions for operations provided by the Games Operating Trust legacy funding.

City Council also re-energized many community traditions with the return of several **major festivals and events in 2022**. These celebrations showcase Richmond and provide to residents and visitors of all ages the opportunity to come together for memorable experiences. For instance:

1. The 2022 **Cherry Blossom Festival** virtual presentation attracted over 66,000 social media visits and 7,400 video views. This year it will be staged in person.
2. The **Steveston Salmon Festival** finally marked its 75th anniversary. It hosted thousands in person to enjoy the cultural shows, visit many heritage sites and generally enjoy the annual Canada Day celebrations.

3. In order to experience maritime-themed exhibits, roving performances and step aboard the assembled wooden and working boats, 40,000 visitors attended the **Maritime Festival** in August. Also included in the offerings were several locally-significant, restored heritage vessels.

Keeping Richmond Safe

Another top priority of City Council is to keep our residents and businesses among the safest in the Province. Richmond always supports investment in resources to protect our community and embrace diversity.

Last April, the 10,000 square foot **City Centre Community Police Office** finally opened to the public. This facility will enable the public to engage policing services in the City Centre along with improved police response times.

To make the community safer, last year saw the Richmond RCMP welcome the final 16 of 91 additional police officers in keeping with Council's **Safe Community Program**. These positions enhance operational response capability and make our streets safer. The increase also facilitates a more robust frontline police presence and specialized investigative services.

RCMP Workforce diversity is visible in the local detachment. Approximately half of the Richmond detachment members are non-Caucasians - 56% of them speak as a second language at least one of the 40 languages and dialects spoken in the City.

Among their many duties, through communications in multiple languages, RCMP investigators now target complex cyber fraud as well as reminding the community about online safety. The success of this education can be seen in the number of fraud cases which dropped almost 10% in 2022.

Last year, **Richmond Fire Rescue** department welcomed an unprecedented 27 new firefighters to strengthen the local complement. Over 10% of our active firefighters are women and many self-identify as First Nations, Asian and Middle Eastern, making Richmond among the most diverse departments in the Province.

Generally **promoting diversity and fostering inclusiveness** has been an ongoing theme for City Council. For instance, it led to support for initiatives to celebrate Pride and the LGBTQ+ community as well as the RCMP renewing its fight against hate-related incidents through the

"Hate Has No Place" campaign. This campaign encourages victims and witnesses to report hate-motivated incidents in order to assist the efforts to combat such crimes.

In November, as a resource for newly-arrived residents, the City launched a **Newcomers Video Series**. Found at www.richmond.ca/newcomers these highlight different ways that newcomers can experience our city. They are available through our website and subtitled in Chinese, Punjabi, Ukrainian, Arabic and Farsi. Additional offerings that tell the civic story are the **Richmond Stories** videos. The first in a series of 10, *Growth of a City*, is available at www.youtube.com/CityofRichmondBC.

If you search online in the coming weeks, you will discover that **Richmond's website** (www.richmond.ca) has undergone a major redesign. It is now a more efficient and user-focused resource for its 3.4 million visits yearly. Located on the newly-designed home page will be a new feature of a multilingual translation tool that enables users to access content in over 50 languages with the click of a button.

Conclusion

Looking back on the past year, Richmond City Council and staff can take great pride in our accomplishments as we work together to emerge from the challenges of the pandemic.

Looking forward this year, we expect to see:

1. Progress on more infrastructure projects including the Capstan Canada Line Station, Capstan Community Centre, the Steveston Community Centre and Library as well as conversion of the Minoru Cultural Centre Arts Annex.
2. More housing including rental units of all types with involvement of the City along with government and other partners.
3. The formal development application for Duck Island, the largest infrastructure project in Richmond's history. Located in North Richmond along the Fraser River, the latter commercial mixed-use development envisions the creation of almost 4 million square feet of new hotel, office and commercial floor space along with 12 acres of City parkland and publicly-accessible open space throughout the site.

4. Work with other levels of government and partners to achieve success. City Council will push for continual progress on the long-overdue replacement of the George Massey Crossing along with the upgraded Steveston Highway and Highway 99 interchange. We will also urge various partners to work together to facilitate the dredging of the Steveston channel on the South Arm.

5. Continued advocacy for the new hospital tower.

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 volunteers. To ensure that Richmond remains a safe and resilient city, the many achievements during 2022 will improve the civic environment and quality of life for all. We are confident the future of Richmond will remain very strong for future generations.