

ANNUAL ADDRESS

By Mayor Malcolm Brodie
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RICHMOND: LOOKING AHEAD WITH OPTIMISM

In the beginning...

Twelve months ago, there was a strong sense of optimism in Richmond about the coming year. After all, our business sector was active, support for residents was strong and Richmond's financial position was very solid.

On New Year's Day 2020, we added to our extensive inventory of facilities the recreational component of the new Minoru Centre for Active Living. As one of Canada's healthiest communities, it reinforced Richmond's commitment to good health and well-being through regular activity. Already open was the Seniors Centre, though completion of the aquatic component was further delayed.

In January, our ongoing leadership as a sustainable and environmentally-conscious city was reinforced when City Council endorsed eight climate-action strategies:

1. Retrofit existing buildings;
2. Transition to zero emission vehicles;
3. Carbon neutral new buildings and energy systems;
4. Complete communities;
5. Active mobility for all;
6. Support frequent transit;
7. Enhance green infrastructure; and
8. Transition to a circular economy.

These directions set Richmond on an accelerated path to achieve carbon reduction targets in line with the United Nations' response to global warming.

Perhaps nothing elevated our spirit of pride and optimism as much as celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Olympic Winter Games in February. We were reminded how a decade ago, we vividly showcased the City to the world as one of the Olympic host venues. The Richmond Olympic Oval revived many of those memories with community celebrations. Residents took advantage of the opportunity to participate in Olympic/Paralympic sports and public skates while they reviewed speed skating demonstrations and the Olympic Experience. They also met visiting Olympians and took photos on the 2010 podium.

Though no one could imagine how 2020 would unfold, serious concerns were emerging in the new year about a potentially life-threatening virus spreading unchecked around the globe. As became evident during Lunar New Year celebrations in January, many in Richmond began to avoid large public crowds and voluntarily wear facemasks. Many residents were vividly reminded of the outbreaks of SARS and other deadly viruses.

Then, the pandemic...

After Canada's first reported case of COVID-19 in late January, case numbers across Canada began to surge in March. Businesses closed while large-scale entertainment and travel were curtailed as residents stayed home and worried about the existential threat posed by COVID-19. How would this impact individual lives, families and businesses?

Public Safety and Security

In this uncertain atmosphere, public safety and economic security became more concerning than ever. Beyond the obvious impacts on revenue and jobs, active lifestyles were dramatically affected.

To enable the City to quickly and effectively address emerging pandemic-related issues in the best interests of the community, an unprecedented resolution was passed by City Council on March 19:

“That Council, to address the pandemic spread of COVID-19 in the City of Richmond, declare that an emergency exists and authorize the making of staffing adjustments and working at home arrangements, and with the approval of the Mayor, the exercising of all powers necessary to deal with the emergency including the closing of public access to City Hall and other City facilities, and the full closure of City Hall and other City facilities....”

Temporarily closed were community facilities including City Hall, the Public Works Yard, community centres, arts, culture and heritage sites, as well as park and sport amenities. Where possible, programs and services were transitioned online to meet community needs. Life in the City of Richmond had swiftly changed in ways no one could have predicted.

Maintaining Services

Though the path forward was uncharted, the City was able to transition quickly and effectively.

A Financial Resiliency Plan was established as a multi-level effort to reduce the pressure facing residents and businesses during the emergency period. Discretionary spending ceased as pandemic-related costs were tracked to clearly identify areas of real need and set the stage for cost-recovery when government support ultimately became available. Many financial strategies were adopted in the effort to reduce hardship. For example:

- Large remittances to other agencies were deferred where possible;
- Utility bill payment deadlines were postponed and the property tax penalty date was delayed to the end of September; and
- Council reduced the expected 2020 property tax increase by slightly over 2%, largely by deferring a transfer to building reserves and delaying the addition of RCMP officers. With a final 2020 residential tax increase of 2.76%, Richmond residential property taxes were again among the lowest on average in Metro Vancouver.

Protecting Our Economy

To keep the sector strong, business owners told us that it was vital to receive timely information. Especially with the onset of the pandemic, all needed to hear accurately the decisions being made and resources available to assist.

The City's Economic Development Office launched an online *Business Support Centre* to provide a one-stop resource for accurate and timely information for local business. This Centre facilitated timely access to programs and resources from all levels of government as well as other agencies. The Business Support Centre shared information on a wide range of subjects – from job opportunities for displaced workers to a directory for Richmond-made PPE and other safety supplies.

The hard-hit restaurant and hospitality sector benefitted from the City's online *Expedited Temporary Outdoor Patio Program*. Restaurants, cafes and pubs could apply to expand outdoor seating onto private property, parking lots and even space on City sidewalks. In addition to maximizing space while adhering to physical distancing requirements, the program challenged many to rethink their service model and find creative ways to continue.

To further support local business, the City also partnered with Tourism Richmond and the Richmond Chamber of Commerce to create the online hub "*wearerichmond.ca*". The website is an "Open for Business" marketplace that compiles resources for all and collects virtual experiences for people to enjoy from a distance.

[Keeping Our Community Healthy](#)

As preserving the health of our community is so important during a pandemic, the City and Vancouver Coastal Health opened a drive-through COVID-19 Assessment Centre adjacent to the Tennis Club on Gilbert Road. Several thousand tests were conducted at the site before it was relocated in November to a higher-capacity location near the airport.

A *Community Ambassador* outreach program was launched mid-summer. Redeployed from across the City, staff working as ambassadors assisted with the patrolling of parks, outdoor facilities and businesses to emphasize common sense approaches such as the need for physical distancing and to provide accurate information on Provincial Health Orders.

Many merchants were concerned that safety requirements like physical distancing would limit access for customers. Temporary road changes were implemented over the summer in the popular Steveston Village to provide increased space for physical distancing. Added signage, electronic display boards, wayfinding kiosks and planters all played a role in keeping Steveston open for business.

Eventually, the City faced the difficult task of re-opening facilities gradually, safely and cost-effectively. In May, City Council endorsed the carefully-planned *Restoring Richmond Plan* for programs and services. The Plan guided the restoration of programs and services along a

continuum based on risk, health outcomes, financial realities, and public expectations. With cities in the region approaching their re-opening differently, Council moved with caution to protect public safety and reduce the incidence of COVID-19.

In September, after considerable delays due to construction and the pandemic, the City opened the new state-of-the-art aquatic centre at the Minoru Centre for Active Living. This new 45,000 sq.ft. aquatic centre includes a 6,800 sq.ft. leisure pool, a Mega Drop Bucket, a flowing Lazy River, a slide and an Errant Rain Cloud shower. Two 25 metre pools provide a variety of opportunities for recreation including 14 lanes for swimming and aqua fit classes. An over-water rock-climbing wall, drop slide and diving board allow multiple options for water lovers of all ages. To welcome this new facility into the City's inventory of high-quality recreation centres at such a challenging time underscores City staff's commitment to serve the community as well as our ongoing focus on community safety, health and well-being.

Generally, Richmond was able to shift quickly to virtual approaches to keep people engaged and active during the pandemic. The *Richmond Connects* platform became an online centre for activities and resources for people of all ages and interests. For instance, programming included live-streaming of fitness classes with a workout, music lessons, preschool programs, workshops, webinars, conversation groups, and films.

In March, the Richmond Olympic Oval launched its own online fitness program, *OVALfit at Home*, to provide live virtual workouts led by Oval fitness instructors via social media. Almost 140,000 people have accessed the free workouts.

[Celebrating Richmond](#)

As the unfortunate result of the pandemic, the City was forced to cancel or adjust a number of popular annual events. Most prominent was the unprecedented loss of the Steveston Salmon Festival and Canada Day celebrations. To compensate, the City and Steveston Community Society developed an online *Canada Day at Home* program featuring a national anthem sing-a-long, "how to" videos to inspire at-home celebrations, virtual fireworks and a Home Parade contest on Instagram. Over 16,000 people enjoyed this content on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and the City's website, while there were over 8,000 views of the related videos.

Richmond was also one of the first BC cities to shift from in-person to virtual Youth Week activities in May when we introduced a new *@CityofRichmondYouth* Instagram account to connect with younger residents.

Although the Cherry Blossom Festival and FarmFest were cancelled, the annual Doors Open Richmond event hosted by the Richmond Museum Society that traditionally welcomes visitors to

behind-the-scenes experiences at various cultural sites across the City was held online this year. Originally presented over a weekend, it became a two-week virtual review of City sites. Almost 40 partners took part by sharing 135 virtual experiences over Facebook and Instagram platforms that drew over 20,000 views.

To celebrate the community's rich maritime history, the Richmond Maritime Festival was delayed until early-September due to COVID-19 restrictions. The reimagined eleven day online event drew almost 50,000 people to its sites.

The *#RichmondHasHeart* campaign became another initiative to build community spirit and bring people together during uncertain times. Participants engaged social media to highlight community-based stories of encouragement. As part of this, there was a public art call for a series of artist-initiated projects that explored meaningful ways to ensure community connections. City Hall itself was illuminated with hearts.

One of the many lasting benefits resulting from initiatives created in response to COVID-19 is found in the new Parks, Recreation and Culture system. Program registration, admissions, facility bookings, memberships and point of sale transactions are now completed more efficiently and in a way that can assist with contact tracing if necessary.

[Services for All](#)

COVID-19 has impacted everyone regardless of culture, geography, socio-economic status or age. Notwithstanding the challenges posed by the pandemic, it is crucial that we ensure that everyone can access appropriate resources in order to keep our community strong.

Social isolation is always a concern and more so during the pandemic. With COVID-19, the need to self-isolate and/or stay within defined bubbles meant many seniors could no longer rely on routines important to their health and well-being. Adding to this was the pandemic-caused closure of the new Minoru Seniors Centre.

Following shut down, a number of new services were launched to reach vulnerable and isolated seniors. A *Seniors Resource Guide*, online information, virtual engagement opportunities, wellness and support calls in addition to one-on-one technology support were all created especially for our older residents and their families.

The Richmond Public Library also became an important resource when their staff implemented some creative ideas to serve residents. Cardholders even received deliveries of materials during closures. The *Curbside Holds Pickup* service and Quick Pick bags of books for people to safely and effectively obtain books were introduced.

[An Informed Community](#)

To inform the community in a timely way and to protect public safety, a number of measures were introduced, including:

1. The City launched *@RichmondBC* as its first Instagram account to provide a channel for public inquiries concerning City programs and services;
2. Richmond Fire-Rescue launched a new website, *firerescue.richmond.ca*, to highlight resources of interest to the public, such as performance statistics, safety awareness campaigns, fire prevention tips and career information;
3. The RCMP also unveiled a Community Safety app early in the pandemic. The app informs residents on crime prevention program resources, criminal activity maps, news releases and emergency alerts. With the pandemic, the RCMP-delivered DARE program continued with virtual presentations when schools remained closed; and
4. Throughout the pandemic, staff worked closely with Vancouver Coastal Health to ensure the City's essential information, resources and guidelines were fully aligned with directions from health authorities.

[Maintaining our City](#)

Many facets of the civic services provided by the City could not be offered in a virtual manner. While adjustments were needed to allow for physical distancing and other safety protocols to carry out essential City work, our City crews made sure that progress was not impeded. As an example of the extensive work completed in 2020, over 12 kilometres of watermains, sanitary sewers and storm sewers were constructed. This helped to ensure adequate capacity to support future civic growth.

To reduce our City's ever-present flood risk, Richmond was awarded \$750,000 through the Union of BC Municipalities Community Emergency Preparedness Fund. A further \$150,000 came through Provincial funding to support our Flood Protection Program.

Work on the South Dike Upgrade Project between Gilbert Road and No.3 Road was also completed last year. The dike was widened and raised almost 2 metres to protect us from climate change-induced sea level rise.

With LaFarge Canada's support of a National Zero Waste Council initiative, the City paved a stretch of four lanes along No. 5 Road using 40 per cent recycled asphalt. This innovative pilot project may have significant implications for the use of recycled asphalt in future pavement applications. With conventional paving using a maximum of 10 per cent recycled content, the implications are very positive for more sustainable road paving approaches in the years to come.

Looking to the future...

As we focus on moving past the pandemic, we find that COVID-19 has encouraged so many changes.

Keeping Us Safe

Richmond City Council was among the first in BC to mandate the wearing of masks in all City-operated buildings. Other centres soon followed and the Provincial Health Officer ultimately made a similar requirement for all indoor locations across British Columbia. The wearing of masks is bound to be a fact of life for some time to come.

Physically, City facilities have changed, as have the ways our residents and businesses connect with us. Plexiglass barriers, wayfinding safety signs, enhanced cleaning and sanitizing are all expected for City-operated buildings and many others.

The City has reduced high-traffic touch points in many facilities to prevent the spread of the virus and ensure good hygiene. In addition to City Hall, such improvements were made at various Community Centres, Fire Halls, Police Offices, Libraries and Aquatic amenities to enable safer use by all.

Building Infrastructure

As we continue to emerge from the original lockdown last spring, we see many positive signs. For instance, our local film industry has grown while working within strict new safety protocols. Richmond is now home to six film studios – three that are permanent and three being temporary, including two of which were developed by entertainment giant, Warner Bros. And worth annually over \$500,000, the City approved 78 film permits at a wide variety of locations, particularly as COVID-19 restrictions eased.

To meet future needs, civic infrastructure is constantly improved across the City. An example is the building of a new, larger animal shelter to replace the existing 42-year old building. When

completed in two years, this new facility will enable more interaction between the public and the shelter for the wellbeing of the animals in care. While drawing on a wealth of experience in addition to a province-wide network of resources, the BCSPCA will now provide shelter and animal control services for our benefit.

To improve safety and usability for patrons, upgrades are now complete at the Recycling Depot on Lynas Lane. Now open seven days a week, there is an ever-expanding list of acceptable recyclable products. The Depot supports our strong rate of diversion and adds to our environmental record. It accounts for close to 10 per cent of the City's overall 79 per cent single-family residential recycling rate with over 4,000 tonnes of materials received each year.

[An Active and Thriving City](#)

Within the limitations of the positive safety protocols, outdoor activity remains essential for good mental and physical well-being.

Complementing the new running track, the artificial turf at Minoru Park was replaced with a new sports surfacing system. The aging rubber infill material was replaced with an innovative shock-absorbing base layer to improve the play experience as well as long term durability.

Long-expected plans for the replacement of the Steveston Community Centre and Branch Library continue. Council has approved the site and building massing to be followed by a community consultation on the design. There will also be a complete review of the construction budget for this \$100 million facility.

Also set for replacement is the aging lawn bowling facility. The concept design phase included development of the building layout, form and character to ensure an appropriate fit within the existing character of Minoru Park. With over 4,000 sq.ft. of programmable space, the Bowling Green Community Activity Centre will provide a centrally-located, active space to support many community groups.

For the business sector, the City launched the *Richmond Business Resilience Program* to offer free training for local entrepreneurs to adapt their businesses and re-emerge better positioned to withstand future economic shocks. The Program offers tools and resources from experts, bi-weekly live webinars, an online community of local business owners and one-on-one support from the City's Economic Development Office. With over 70 participants from a wide range of sectors, including food manufacturing, baby products, event production, digital marketing and technology, the program has been very successful.

One Community Together

The pandemic has encouraged us to come together as a community in how we live and work.

When early signs showed that some cultural groups were being blamed for the onset of COVID-19, the City acted swiftly. In May, City Council endorsed a statement against racism and violence, as follows:

"In Richmond, we are a community that celebrates a rich history of culture, diversity and heritage linked to the arrival and influence of immigrants that began over a century ago. The City of Richmond does not – and never will – condone or tolerate racist behaviour in any form. Such attitudes and actions do not reflect our community's cultural diversity or the spirit of inclusion that we are all proud of. Events of the past few months have created uncertainty, frustration and fear for some. But that is no excuse to cast blame on others. COVID-19 should not be blamed on any single culture or country and it is certainly not the fault of anyone in our community. Now, more than ever, we must stand together and be true to our shared values of diversity, inclusion and respect. Racial and discriminatory responses and actions have no place in Richmond. They have no place in our society."

Later, the Richmond RCMP distributed posters throughout the community urging residents to reach out to police upon witnessing hateful behaviour. While the "Hate Has No Place" poster originated as a result of such cultural challenges, it also addresses other forms of hate-motivated incidents.

Overall, Richmond's rate of crime remains among the lowest in Metro Vancouver thanks to a strong and supported community safety program. For instance:

1. There were notable reductions in almost all crime categories in 2020, including a 14 per cent overall reduction in property crime, 35 per cent decrease in robberies, 18 per cent decrease in thefts from automobiles and a 21 per cent decrease in residential break and enters. The property crime rate in 2020 declined by 12 per cent and mental health-related incidents decreased 17 per cent.
2. The Fox 80 Mental Health Car (Fox 80) successfully concluded its first year. As a collaboration between the Richmond RCMP and Vancouver Coastal Health, Fox 80 provides a joint response to mental health-related calls. A mental health nurse and police officer work together in responding to calls where mental health is a concern. The program provides appropriate referrals, conducts proactive engagement for client care and assists frontline policing units by conducting wellness checks and police apprehensions under the Mental Health Act.

3. The new City Centre Community Police Office (CPO) at Gilbert and Granville is now operational to enhance the deployment of police services in central Richmond. After the pandemic, it will officially open to the public.

Strength for the Future

Overall, Richmond continues to grow with a strong local economy despite the challenges of COVID-19. The City's relationship with the development sector provides others with a successful model for building strong, safe and healthy communities.

To augment a new park secured through redevelopment in the area, design and implementation of the new \$35 million Capstan Canada Line Station moved ahead in 2020. Additional park space was also secured as part of the Lansdowne Road linear park as envisioned in our OCP as well as our Parks and Open Space Strategy.

City Council is supporting the Pathways Clubhouse Society's proposed 80-unit purpose-built affordable rental housing building located on the west-side of the No.2 Road Bridge. This development represents a partnership between Richmond, Pathways Clubhouse and BC Housing to provide stable, affordable housing unit options for people at various income levels.

Despite challenges posed by the pandemic, the construction sector still enjoyed a busy year. Almost the same number of development applications of all types were received in 2020 compared to the previous year. Over \$1.0 billion in combined construction approvals and anticipated building permits were provided. Permit applications for single-family homes and multiple-family dwellings increased over 2019. Approximately 1,600 dwelling units, including 150 affordable housing and 150 market rental units, were approved along with more than 460,000 sq.ft. of new commercial and office floor space. Almost \$50 million in development cost charges was collected or anticipated, while a further \$6 million in Community Amenity Contributions was secured through rezoning applications following Public Hearings under the City Centre Area Plan. With large projects like Lansdowne Centre, Duck Island and Polygon's Talisman Park in the works, this trend is expected to carry forward this year.

To conclude...

Though many challenges remain, we hope the worst of the pandemic-driven disruption is in the past. There still remains much to accomplish.

The final building solution for the Highway 99 / George Massey Tunnel project remains in limbo. The City's position has always maintained that an eight-lane immersed tube tunnel is the most cost-effective, efficient and environmentally-friendly replacement option.

Richmond's single-use plastics bylaw was provincially approved, opening the door to remove annually over 35 million or 660 tonnes of food service containers, plastic straws and checkout bags from the waste stream. Regardless of its importance to our environment, implementing this new strategy must be done carefully. We need to understand the impact that the change may have on many businesses still feeling the ill effects of the pandemic. The timing for when the bylaw will be in force is indefinite as the federal government is also considering such a prohibition.

And with a year so heavily dominated by COVID-19, we must look at our health care. The pandemic highlighted how vital it is for the Province to replace our out-dated hospital built in the 1960's. A new, long-overdue Richmond Hospital acute care tower appears to be on the horizon. The revised concept plan doubled the previously-projected floor space and increased the scope of services eventually to be offered. Credit must go to many in the community for generously donating to help make this much-needed facility a reality.

In addition, we owe a debt of gratitude to the doctors, nurses, health professionals, support staff and leaders at the hospital and Vancouver Coastal Health for working tirelessly to protect the community and save lives during the pandemic. It is also important to think of those who lost their battle with COVID-19 despite the best efforts of all to protect them.

We look ahead with optimism to 2021 being the Year of the Ox. Richmond's entire pandemic strategy met with success as we continue to have amongst the lowest COVID-19 case numbers in the Province. With a COVID-19 vaccine becoming available, immunization programs are now underway. This does not mean the pandemic is over, but it does give hope that we are soon over the worst.

Few will soon forget the year 2020. Fortunately, the City of Richmond remains well-positioned thanks to the strong leadership of City Council, sound management by our staff, great volunteers, vibrant businesses and caring residents.



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