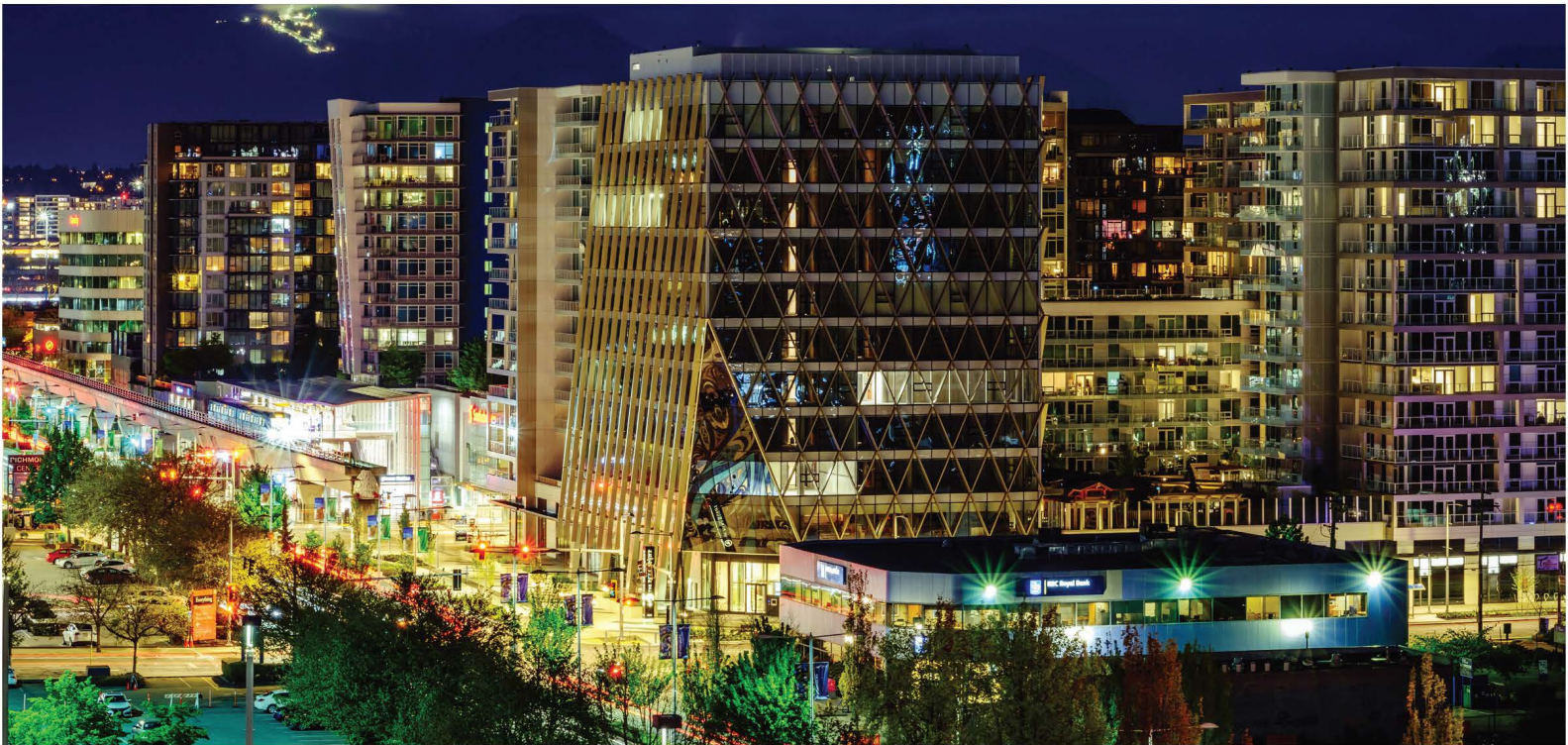


Building Resilience, Embracing Growth: Richmond's Roadmap to Sustainable Success



Annual Address by
Mayor Malcolm Brodie

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Building Resilience, Embracing Growth: Richmond's Roadmap to Sustainable Success

The past year has been memorable in many ways. Housing and affordability dominated the discussions although the economy and safety were also among the major topics of concern.

Sadly, this was also a year that took away a number of our prominent leaders including:

- Former City Councillor and School Board Trustee, Linda McPhail;
- Former Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney;
- Former Member of Parliament, Chuck Strahl;
- Senator and First Nations leader, Murray Sinclair;
- Former BC Premier, John Horgan;
- Community Members: Greg Walker, Hans Havas, and Frances Lorenz.

A Provincial election was held in the Fall and we now turn toward the upcoming Federal election. With stubbornly higher than usual rates of interest, inflation and unemployment, international political uncertainty and the ongoing threat of a mutually-destructive trade war with Canada's largest trading partner, our business sector continues to face many challenges.

Economic Outlook

Unlike the slower BC economy, Richmond's overall economy has remained relatively robust and stable. With signs of optimism for this year and beyond, Richmond continues to benefit from its well-diversified business sector in meeting current economic pressures. Ultimately, we foresee slow but steady growth in Richmond in 2025.

After a long period of record lows, industrial property vacancy rates in the region are around 3%, the highest in almost a decade. Though Richmond's vacancy rate is slightly lower at almost 2%, that has not deterred others from setting up new operations here due to our location, strong community environment and proactive economic strategies. With reductions in the rates of interest and inflation, many existing Richmond businesses are now looking to grow in the coming year.

Over 14,500 Richmond businesses support around 125,000 jobs – a six percent increase compared to the same period last year.

New construction activities also provide a confirmation of economic confidence. In 2024, staff issued permits with construction values of over \$1.2 billion, thus eclipsing the billion-

dollar mark in this category for the first time. This volume of activity demonstrates the confidence felt by Richmond's development community for investments in both retail space as well as multi-family development.

Another example of our business strength is in our local film sector. Last year, despite the residual impacts of the labour strikes in the industry and growing international competition, Richmond remained a popular filming location. Over 50 city-issued film permits resulted in over \$175,000 in service and location charges last year. Many local landmarks are evident in US network series such as Tracker (CBS), Superman & Lois (CW), Under the Bridge (Hulu), Yellowjackets (Showtime) and Avatar: The Last Airbender (Netflix).

Infrastructure Investments and Finances

To keep residents and businesses safe and well-served, City Council has always proactively supported infrastructure maintenance and upgrades.

In 2024, Council approved the expenditure of almost \$200 million for the advancement of 86 capital projects including:

- the redevelopment of the Lynas Lane Works Yard;
- construction of the new Steveston Community Centre and Library;
- heritage renewal at the Britannia Shipyards;
- various facility, arena and HVAC upgrades totalling almost \$10 million; and
- the replacement of almost five kilometres of watermain in Burkeville and elsewhere to ensure the safe, reliable delivery of water, as well as to prepare us for the new legislated requirements for small-scale, multi-housing units across Richmond.

In operations, City staff continually review programs and services to identify improvements and cost reductions. Any related fees need to be consistent with the current market. Council directed staff to reduce the City's operating budget by reallocating existing resources to reflect changing and emerging needs. Because service levels should not be compromised, the 2025 budgeted tax increase of 5.86% is among the lowest in the region. This translates to an actual impact of about 35 cents a day extra for the average Richmond household. The City is then able to maintain our high-quality programs and services, cover negotiated contracts with our unions, make further investments in community safety and meet our funding obligations.

In 2024, before the atmospheric river dumped 170mm of rain over three days, Public Works crews successfully completed Phases 6 and 7 of the Burkeville storm and sanitary utility upgrades, along with laneway upgrade projects elsewhere. Residents have expressed their

appreciation for how the city team completed the work while minimizing disruptions to parking and traffic – common challenges with large projects. Team members delivered successful outcomes, installing 1,930m of storm/sanitary mains, 17 catch basins, 140 lawn basins, 25 manholes, and paving 1,210m of road. With these enhancements and thanks to staff efforts, there was minimal property damage from the heavy rain. These initiatives highlight the City's long-term commitment to strengthening infrastructure and protecting the entire community from atmospheric events.

The City's Circular Economy Strategy has borne results in reducing our carbon footprint. For example, City crews implemented an expansion of our innovative Reclaimed Asphalt Pavement (RAP) program. More than 2,300 tonnes of 40% RAP was successfully used to pave Westminster Highway between No. 3 and Gilbert Roads.

Council approved the construction of another 4.7 kilometres of dedicated cycling and pedestrian pathways at various locations. These included construction of a portion of the new multi-use pathway on the south side of Steveston Highway as well as along No. 2 Road between Steveston Highway and Williams Road.

Meeting the Housing Challenge

For decades, Richmond has planned for growth through increased density in our city centre and along the arterial roads. Now because of many factors such as the state of the economy and federal immigration policies, the need for more housing has never been greater nor have housing prices been higher. To specifically address the need for housing, Council has created a dedicated City Housing Office. This unit will focus on opportunities and initiatives to add housing, especially including expanded affordable housing and rental options.

In 2024, Council issued Development Permits for approximately 1,935 new dwelling units including 200 market, 130 Low End Market (LEMR) and 110 below market rental units. Council also granted preliminary approval for rezoning applications involving approximately

1,500 new dwelling units including 160 market rentals and 150 LEMR units.

Included in these numbers:

- a) Council issued a development permit for a significant 100% rental housing development located at 6071 Azure Road that includes 330 rental units, of which 50 are LEMR units, 110 are moderate-income rentals and 170 are market rentals; and

- b) City staff are working with BC Housing to redevelop the Rosewood Village site at No 2. and Blundell Roads to provide a 100% rental housing development with 830 units.

Council continues to push for more housing to meet the growing demands of our community. Since the adoption of the Affordable Housing Strategy in 2007, the City has supported the delivery of 665 units through provision of land and/or financial support.

As part of the strategy, Richmond also established the LEMR Program under which almost 550 units have been built to date for low and moderate-income households. Our overall target is to build more than 1,700 LEMR units in the years to come. These figures will continue to expand as new developments come forward in the future.

Richmond has become a leader by partnering with all levels of government to secure funds for housing. As partnerships with senior governments and others are now so important, the City secured a \$36 million Housing Accelerator Fund grant from CMHC to expedite delivery of housing and affordable units. The focus of this fund is to improve processes – if the civic approval process is improved, more housing will be built more quickly. Consequently, these funds will support implementation of a fast-track review process for purpose-built rental housing applications. Accelerated online processes will also be supported for development applications and the issuing of building permits. A portion of this fund also enabled Richmond to launch the Housing Priorities Grant program to increase the supply of below market rental housing units by offsetting developer costs.

Contributions by all levels of government have supported construction of Harbour House, 25 units of affordable rental housing for women and women with children at Steveston Highway and Railway Avenue. Ready for occupancy soon, the City secured \$7.2 million from the Federal government as well as operational funding from BC Housing to add to local funding for this project.

Provincial Influence

Although Richmond has been supporting increases in affordable housing since 2007, the Province has imposed its approach to housing in the City. The Province enacted housing Bills 44 and 47 in 2024. Bill 44 mandates that Council rezone over 27,000 Richmond single-family and duplex properties to allow higher density Small Scale Multi-Unit Housing. Unfortunately, under the legislation, no provision has been made for infrastructure improvement nor required on-site residential parking. Also eliminated are the Public Hearings for most projects. Bill 47, which further provides for increased density and height in Transit Oriented

Areas ie. locations within 400 metres of frequent bus service and 800 metres of a Canada Line station, also does not require on-site parking.

Besides stating our general concern about the housing legislation and lack of any public consultation, Council's actions included:

1. Obtaining a five-year extension from Bill 44 to complete essential infrastructure upgrades in the Steveston residential townsite; and
2. Excluding 11 lots from rezoning in the Burkeville area which, under Bill 47, would have allowed higher buildings and greater density. Though technically within 800 metres of the Aberdeen Canada Line station, the river prevents direct pedestrian access to these Burkeville properties from the Canada Line. Actual walking distance is 2km.

One of the most prominent housing projects in Richmond was the proposed six-storey, 90-unit supportive housing building for those who are homeless, located at Cambie and Sexsmith Roads. Funded by the Ministry of Housing through BC Housing, the project on City land would have provided housing for those residents now residing in the Alderbridge and Aster Place complexes after the leases expire in 2027. Suspended before the election, the controversial complex was reinstated by the Province in late January 2025. Though the details have not been revealed, the Province says that five alternate sites were examined. Unfortunately, with the inconsistency in Provincial process and the resulting discussions the project had to be cancelled.

Keeping Richmond Safe

Another key element for maintaining a vibrant community is public safety. Though Richmond remains one the safest cities in Metro Vancouver, this takes constant attention. Over 40% of the annual operating budget is specifically devoted to public safety including the RCMP, Richmond Fire Rescue and Emergency Services.

As measured last October and compared to the same time in the previous year, the rate of property and violent crimes remained below the regional average thanks to Richmond's long-term investments. Council budgeted to add six new RCMP officers to the local complement in 2025.

Richmond Fire Rescue remained steadfast in keeping residents and businesses safe, responding to about 12,500 calls for assistance last year. Of these, about half were medically-

related. By promoting diversity in the workforce, three of the additional 12 firefighters recruited in 2024 were women and four were fluent in a language other than English.

Council also led in community and road safety by initiating a pilot project involving the installation of high-definition public safety cameras at 10 busy intersections. Law enforcement investigations will obviously benefit from the enhanced image quality that will assist in identifying and apprehending offenders after capturing licence plates and potentially the facial features of personnel in the intersections. Despite the reluctance of the Privacy Commissioner to approve the program, City Council persevered and believes these cameras will be a major step forward in public safety and law enforcement.

Providing affordable housing options is an important component of keeping our community safe. Some of those who live on the streets face personal challenges related to mental health and addictions. Richmond maintains programs and services in place to keep them and others safe. Last year, these included:

1. As Richmond RCMP noted a 3% increase in mental health-related incidents, the Fox 80 Mental Health Car operated in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health for its fifth full year. The team, comprised of a mental health nurse and a trained police officer, handled almost 3,100 files and calls for service during 2024.
2. RCMP officers in the Vulnerable Persons Unit (VPU) continued to conduct outreach to those without a home. RCMP worked alongside staff from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. This team made over 1,650 proactive checks on the well-being of affected individuals in the past year while providing information on different support services.
3. Richmond RCMP, in collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, also continued to operate the Yankee 30 Youth Partnership Car. This joint initiative involves officers from Richmond RCMP's Youth Section working alongside youth probation officers and social workers to support at-risk youth. The team handled over 1,100 files and calls in 2024.

Over the past year, Council supported several initiatives to generally assist those without a home including:

1. Funding an additional 10 beds at the Salvation Army Emergency Shelter on Horseshoe Way, thus increasing its capacity to 35 men and 20 women.

2. Expanding the daytime Drop-in Centre in Brighouse Park. The Centre provides access to basic services such as showers and laundry along with connections to other necessities. Leveraging funding from a \$3.35 million UBCM Strengthening Communities' Services Program grant, the City was able to provide clinical support programs, food, public information sessions, and more for many of those in need.
3. Adding a Richmond Homelessness Outreach Team to provide community-based street outreach to residents experiencing homelessness who do not travel to a centre or shelter.
4. Operating together with BC Housing, overnight emergency shelters at Southarm and Brighouse Parks for individuals in need.

Recognizing that proactive engagement is crucial, the City implemented a series of Community Services Pop Up sessions to link residents with lower incomes to a variety of community-based resources and supports. So far, these sessions have connected over 1,750 participants to assistance and resources, leading to program recognition at the 2024 UBCM Community Excellence Awards for innovative community engagement.

Technology

The City of Richmond is recognized as a leader in many areas thanks to Council's commitment to improving the customer experience through innovation and sustainability.

To ensure Richmond maintains strategic, sustainable growth, City Council has invested in technology aimed to improve efficiency, reduce bureaucracy and enhance the customer experience. The technology is helpful in many ways including:

1. Last year saw the expansion of the *MyPermit* system. With hundreds of trade permits issued so far, this online portal enables 24/7 online issuance of trade permits for plumbing, gas and fire suppression sprinkler systems. It also now enables Servicing Agreements and Tree Permit applications to be processed. The system will soon expand to include Building Permits for Single Family and Duplex renovations in addition to Rezoning applications.
2. A refreshed *Richmond.ca* City website that continues to grow. It now receives over 4.5 million page views and 1.8 million visits annually. The built-in translation tool that offers 59 languages is proving increasingly popular, especially for the Chinese language in both simplified and traditional versions.

3. Around 47,000 people follow news of the City by viewing social media channels such as Instagram, Facebook, X (Twitter), YouTube, LinkedIn and now Bluesky. With a 16% increase in followers last year, the numbers continue to grow.
4. Using the City's online engagement platform called Let's Talk Richmond (LTR) approximately 6,500 people actively communicated online with the City in relation to almost 40 different projects. In use for over a decade, this is the highest recorded LTR engagement level and demonstrates the community impact. The City added features for users last year including additional feedback tools and language translation.

Overall, the City takes a measured approach to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). While this powerful technology has shown benefits in data analysis, planning and engagement, City staff have adopted AI guidelines to address concerns about privacy and accuracy of content.

As an example of the use of AI, Richmond Fire Rescue is piloting equipment using the technology to track and alert drivers as to the proximity of emergency vehicles. By receiving the alert in their vehicle in real time, drivers may avoid a potential conflict. The tool has the potential to dramatically reduce the possibility of traffic accidents and the incidence of personal injuries during emergency response.

There are further uses of AI technology where it is used such as for cyber security, short-term rental bylaw enforcement and service requests. The City looks forward to the expanded use of this technology with appropriate safeguards.

Partnerships

As mentioned, the key to much of the City's success is the direct result of working with other levels of government on many important initiatives to enhance our community. City Council assertively pursues external grant funding opportunities to support programs and offset operating costs. In addition to what has been mentioned previously, there are many examples of this approach in the past year such as:

1. Richmond received almost \$16 million in grants and funding contributions from senior levels of government and other stakeholders for issues ranging from disaster mitigation and emergency preparedness to climate adaptation and active transportation;
2. Richmond and TransLink finally opened the Canada Line Capstan Station, funded through an innovative partnership with the development community. As the result of

contributions from developers, the City was able to provide \$32 million towards station construction. Long-envisioned for the Canada Line, the Capstan station adds an important transportation hub to the growing area of the northern City Centre;

3. A further \$1.8 million was provided by the Provincial and Federal Government to support the second phase of the Minoru Lakes upgrades. These funds are dedicated to canal enhancements, storm water management and pathway improvements in Minoru Park;
4. The City received a \$24,000 BC Healthy Communities Child and Youth Mental Wellness Initiative Grant to increase licensed school-age childcare in Richmond. This is consistent with the Council-adopted Richmond Child Care Action Plan and the Child Care Strategy;
5. Through an \$82,500 grant from the Rick Hansen Foundation, accessibility improvements at Minoru Centre for Active Living were completed in late 2024. Improvements included the installation of automatic door openers and hearing loops to assist those with impaired hearing; and
6. In March 2024, the City received a \$25,000 federal New Horizons for Seniors Program grant to facilitate two additional Age-Friendly neighbourhood groups in the Cambie/East Richmond and Hamilton neighbourhoods. These groups promote connections among neighbours and provide the opportunity for seniors to identify factors that support healthy, safe and equitable aging at the local level.

Because of the important potential of tourism, the City continues to work with Tourism Richmond on a long-term Tourism Master Plan that will reflect current and future demands. Ultimately, that plan will outline a shared vision for tourism along with a comprehensive analysis of key goals to align tourism with economic development and community culture in our city.

Our Home, Our Community

Richmond remains a vibrant, resilient and active community. Residents are among the healthiest in Canada with the highest life expectancy on average. The City was again named British Columbia's Most Active Community last year.

Being a healthy community takes real commitment. It requires many levels of investment in programs that support our local economy and provide a range of jobs. The City needs to offer first class facilities and programs to meet diverse needs as we build a sustainable future.

2024 registration exceeded 102,000 people for recreational programs and activities ranging from dance to pottery to gardening and much more. An increase of almost 5% from the previous year, paid visits for fitness, aquatics and other activities exceeded 1.7 million.

Because Council believes income should not be a barrier to good health and fitness, the Recreation Fee Subsidy Program continued to provide a low-cost facility pass for eligible individuals and families. Over 3,900 residents purchased a subsidized recreation pass in 2024. Subsidized pass holders used them almost 115,000 times in total, with 60% of subsidy program registrations being for children.

The Richmond Public Library branches remain important community hubs. Over 152,000 library card holders and more than one million library visits were recorded in 2024. Of the 2.7 million items that were checked out, 30% were digital versions.

With construction continuing in Minoru Park, the Bowling Green Community Activity Centre for lawn bowling and community activities promises to provide an exciting addition to the City's recreational infrastructure. In keeping with the City's commitment to environmental sustainability, the previous clubhouse was deconstructed last year. The majority of building materials were recycled and diverted from the landfill. Over 28,000 pounds of lumber from the original clubhouse has been donated to Habitat for Humanity for reuse in various community projects.

The Lulu Island Energy Company achieved another milestone in delivering reliable service and competitive energy rates for heating and cooling without using fossil fuels. Last year, the award-winning energy company connected over 430,000 square feet of floor area in the first phase of the Richmond Centre development to provide residents with low carbon heating, cooling and domestic hot water. Overall, the City-owned corporation now services 31 buildings comprised of almost 7,000 residential units across Richmond and has reduced over 20,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions to date.

Also, in keeping the theme of environmental responsibility, the City's Recycling Depot at Lynas Lane remains a core resource for recycling and waste recovery. Operating seven days a week, the depot assisted almost 250,000 users last year, equal on average to one user every 47 seconds. Among the products diverted from the landfill, the depot received 216 tonnes of electronic devices, 200,880 litres of paint and 1,691 tonnes of yard waste.

We estimate that over 230,500 people currently call Richmond home. Sixty per cent (60%) of residents are immigrants. Richmond's Cultural Harmony Plan – the first of its kind in Canada – provides a foundation for bringing us together and is one of many strategies to make Richmond a welcoming community. Because of growth and the desire for information by new residents, the City's Newcomers' Bus Tour program resumed last year. It introduced hundreds of new residents to City facilities so they could learn more about civic programs and services.

City Council was able to support the community in many other meaningful ways. For instance:

1. Health, Social and Safety grants of approximately \$713,000 were awarded to local non-profit community service organizations to enhance the well-being of Richmond residents through a wide range of programs and services;
2. Pride Week was again celebrated with numerous events and the raising of the rainbow flag at City Hall;
3. Amidst our open commitment to acceptance and diversity, reports of hate crimes and incidents continued to decline. No hate crimes were reported in 2024 and only 11 hate incidents came forward – a 57% decrease since 2022. Council will maintain its commitment to do everything it can to stamp out hate. Unfortunately, certain hate incidents such as anti-semitism remain too prevalent;
4. The City continues to advance Truth and Reconciliation as it identified opportunities for Richmond to work towards reconciliation with First Nations communities. For instance, City Council met with the Musqueam Indian Band Council to discuss common priorities and cultivate a working relationship;
5. Many major events were hosted by the City and our partners. For example, the 77th annual Steveston Salmon Festival entertained over 80,000 residents and visitors. The 21st annual Richmond Maritime Festival welcomed more than 35,000 people. Council endorsed a five-year event plan to support expanded opportunities for community involvement and celebrations in the year ahead. Farm Fest at the Garden City Lands returns in 2025, while staff are exploring ideas for a new multicultural festival in the future;
6. Richmond was pleased to showcase our 140 parks that feature 871 hectares of land and provide a wide range of sport and recreation opportunities. We continue to work towards the establishment of a large new City Centre Park bordering the middle arm of the Fraser River; and

7. During this past year alone, City staff planted over 28,000 seasonal plants, 68,000 bulbs, and 2,339 trees to keep our city green and enhance our natural environment. Council receives many compliments on the various plantings in the City.

Conclusion

With these achievements and despite the challenges facing all communities, City Council continues to look ahead to identify opportunities. As examples:

1. \$152 million is projected for 2025 capital expenditures including:
 - \$27.5 million for flood protection upgrades to our dikes and pump stations;
 - \$5.3 million to replace four frontline Richmond Fire Rescue trucks;
 - \$7 million to expand EV charging stations across the city; and
 - the popular installation of four new pickleball courts at South Arm Community Park.
2. The sufficiency of transit and other infrastructure funding remains a growing concern as demand, costs and public expectations grow. Rising supply chain challenges and labour pressures mean infrastructure costs increase and construction deadlines become more difficult to achieve;
3. Mandated provincial housing – including Bills 44 and 47 – will dramatically change communities and neighbourhoods in Richmond and across the region. Higher densities without improved infrastructure, parking requirements and public input will be evident in many neighbourhoods.
4. Construction of the new Steveston Community Centre and Library continues for completion expected in late 2026;
5. We look forward to the dredging of the Steveston Channel with Federal and Provincial support;
6. Projects built with partners such as the 80 unit Pathways Clubhouse residence as well as the 25 unit Harbour House project for women and children at Railway and Steveston Hwy are expected to be open soon; and
7. Procurement and environmental assessment processes for the \$4.15 billion Fraser River tunnel crossing are underway. The Steveston Highway Interchange project is proceeding well towards completion as one-half of the ultimate structure is now open.

Through short and long-term strategies focusing on sustainable economic resilience, infrastructure development, public safety, affordability and community welfare, the City remains committed to maintaining its position as a civic leader. Our committed volunteers and residents continue to enhance City functions. Our strong business sector will overcome the various obstacles that will be encountered. Richmond is the envy of many. Together, we are building a community that current and future generations are proud to call the place they work, play and live.

