

Surrey Mayor Doug McCallum's 2022 State of the City Address

Good morning.

After two years of virtual gatherings, I am extremely happy that we are holding this event in-person and I am so glad to see you here today for the 2022 State of the City address.

COVID turned the world upside down and presented challenges on numerous fronts. For the first time in our lives, we were faced with quarantines, lockdowns and something called social distancing. Overnight, alcohol wipes and masks were on the top of everyone's shopping list, and we learned how to stay together by remaining apart. Thanks to the swift development of vaccines and a high vaccination rate, we are steadily emerging from the pandemic.

I am happy to report that the City of Surrey has not stood still the last two years. A testament to this City and its people, Surrey not only adapted but we learned how to thrive during this turbulent time. Led by City Manager, Vincent Lalonde, the work of the City never stopped. Vincent, I want to thank you, the senior management team, and all City of Surrey staff for your outstanding work that has allowed Surrey to hit the ground running in 2022, and beyond.

Despite the challenges from the COVID pandemic, Council never strayed from the goals we set at the start of our mandate. The vision of what Council wanted to achieve in four years was ambitious and demanding. It required massive change, not for the sake of change, but for what is best for Surrey. There has been no shortage of critics, doubters, and naysayers. I have always said you need a thick skin to do this job, and to the Council members who have stood fast, I thank you. The promises we made to the people of Surrey, we have kept and we have delivered.

The Surrey of today is unrecognizable to the Surrey of when I was first elected Mayor in 1999. Back then, Surrey was indeed a bedroom community of Vancouver. Highrise buildings were instant landmarks because there were so few of them. The same can be said of the lack of high skilled, well-paying jobs located in Surrey.

Today, you only need to look at the City Centre skyline to see how far Surrey has come. New construction cranes are continually popping up throughout the city. The Surrey Langley SkyTrain line will be the first rapid transit this city has seen in 28 years. While Metro Vancouver is faced with a shortage of industrial land, the opposite is happening here. Not only does Surrey have space but we are making even more land available for industrial and commercial use with the newly approved South Campbell Heights Industrial area.

Surrey's progress and rise in prominence has not gone unnoticed. Senior levels of government are investing in our city, from funding new housing to rapid transit expansion, from replacing an aging bridge to a new hospital, Surrey *is* on the radar.

That comes as no surprise when you consider the tremendous growth we are experiencing. The latest census data shows that Surrey grew by nearly ten percent from 2016-2021, which is the fifth highest growth rate in all of Canada during this period. Surrey is now the eleventh largest city in Canada.

Whether it is for work, affordability or lifestyle reasons, more and more people are choosing to make Surrey their home. To accommodate this growth, Council has made available a wide spectrum of options throughout Surrey. Whether it be a single-family home, condo, or townhouse, whether you are in the market to buy or to rent, there are a variety of housing choices available.

In fact, in 2021, Surrey led the way with the highest number of new home construction for the Metro region. Housing starts in Surrey totaled over 5,800 last year, which is 6% more than Vancouver. The decision to build here is proving to be the right call because the demand is there. Case in point, the Radley development in City Centre. In early April a presale was held and within 48 hours, all 193 units were sold out.

In 2021, building permit values totaled more than \$2 billion. Not only was this achieved in the midst of a pandemic, but it also marks the second highest recorded value in the City's history. The all-time record was set in the pre-pandemic year of 2019, where \$2.3 billion in building permit values were recorded.

At City Hall we are doing our part to ensure the development process is not bogged down with delays. Not knowing when a building permit will be issued has been a point of frustration for builders. Surrey's Guaranteed Permitting Timelines program brings a level of certainty. Since it was introduced last October, the latest data shows that we are exceeding our targets. At the end of 2021, the average processing time for a single-family permit was nearly 15 weeks. The target set out in the Guaranteed Permitting Timeline is 10 weeks. Thanks to the work of our dedicated staff in Planning & Development, the wait time is now averaging 8.9 weeks. Council's implementation of a guaranteed timeline will result in less idle time for builders and more accurate completion dates for people looking to move into their new home or business. To further help with the permitting process, Council has extended City Hall's opening hours to 8pm once per week.

Despite two challenging years of the pandemic there has been a surge in businesses setting up shop in Surrey. During this time, 1,500 new businesses opened up bringing the number of active businesses operating in Surrey to 21,000. The efforts of the City's Intergovernmental and Investment Department has helped bring 2,500 new jobs and over \$100 million in private capital investments since 2019.

The days when Surrey was a feeder community have fallen by the wayside. Along with traditional industries, Surrey is now attracting advanced enterprises such as clean tech company Delta Controls, electric vehicle maker Damon Motorcycles, plant-based meat alternative companies such as Nanak Punjab Foods and Boosh Foods. Established businesses

have also relocated here. In April, Walmart officially opened its 300,000 square foot, \$175 million facility in Campbell Heights. This new state-of-the-art grocery distribution centre is the provincial hub that will supply all 45 Walmart stores located in BC.

For a city to thrive, I believe we all share a responsibility to better the place we live and work in. There is no question that starts with Council. Our task is to deliver what we said we would do if elected. To make sure the promises we made, are kept, and delivered.

The transition from RCMP to a city police started three and half years ago, and in this short time the Surrey Police Service has evolved from a motion in Council to Surrey Police Service officers patrolling the streets. To date, 85 uniformed SPS officers have been deployed to work alongside RCMP. That number will increase to 295 SPS officers in the next 12 months. The first class of new recruits were sworn in last month and are currently in training at the Justice Institute Academy.

A transition of this magnitude has never been done, but it was time for a city closing in on a population of 600,000 people to have its own police service. The rationale for the switch is to bring governance, accountability, and decision-making to the local level. Which are the same reasons cited by the Provincial Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act in their recommendation to switch from the RCMP to a Provincial Police Service. I want to acknowledge Surrey RCMP Assistant Commissioner, Brian Edwards and Surrey Police Chief, Norm Lipinski for their efforts on this massive file.

The progress we are making in the transition has allowed us to create the Community Services Department. A major component of this new department is dedicated to enhancing our approach to supportive housing. Like any big city, Surrey has the social challenge of homelessness. The seemingly endless cycle of going from shelter to the streets and back again simply isn't working. That's why Council has made it a priority to build supportive housing that provides the individual a space where one can feel safe and be treated with respect.

In partnership with all levels of government, the City of Surrey is delivering on this type of much-needed housing across our city. In 2021, a total of 139 Supportive Housing Units opened in Surrey. This year, another 387 Supportive and Transitional Housing Units will come on stream. I am also proud to say that the provinces new complex care model was put into service first in Surrey at the Foxglove Supportive Housing Facility. This new care model connects residents to nurses, social workers, and other health professionals under one roof.

The other pillar of our frontline emergency services is the Surrey Fire Service. A key focus of the Surrey Fire is fire prevention education. The Home Safe program canvasses door to door to ensure homes have working fire alarms, while the Community Property Safety Team works to reduce fire risk in distressed properties.

During the pandemic, the men and women of Surrey Fire also stepped up to play a significant role in the vaccination effort. Many of our firefighters were trained to give the shot to support

Fraser Health's vaccine drive in Surrey, and the departments Mobile Command Post and Training Van were redeployed as mobile clinics.

While public health and safety are key components, other elements need to be in place to ensure the overall well-being of the city. The capital investments we have made shows the importance we have placed in improving the high quality of life in Surrey.

Twenty-one capital projects have been approved by Council under the \$428 million Surrey Invests program. The projects range from a new Athletics Centre at Bear Creek Park, the new Newton Community Centre with an Olympic size pool, Indigenous Carving Centres, the Cloverdale Sport and Ice Complex to smaller scope enhancements like new pickleball courts, bike parks, new playing surfaces for soccer and field hockey pitches.

I also want to make note of the new projects that have come on stream prior to the Surrey Invests program. Last October, the Clayton Community Centre officially opened. Built to use 90% less energy, Clayton is also home to the newest branch of Surrey Libraries. 14,000 square feet of library space has been made available to one of our fastest growing communities. Also of note, with the support of the City, Surrey Libraries has eliminated overdue fines. This will remove a barrier for many members of the community and Surrey Libraries is looking to reach even more people by launching a mobile library service next year.

I can tell you that Council and City Staff takes immense pride in ensuring our residents can enjoy a healthy lifestyle, regardless of income or ability. We know that active and engaged citizens result in strong and healthy communities. I am proud to say that Surrey is the first city in Canada to commit to building all new city facilities to meet the gold level of the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification.

A thriving city requires a transportation network that balances transit with the demands of a well-maintained road network.

With funding secured from all levels of government, the \$4 billion Surrey Langley SkyTrain will be built in one phase. Constructing the new SkyTrain line all at once will create a savings of \$500-\$600 million and will see the Surrey Langley SkyTrain delivered two years earlier. I think we can all agree that new rapid transit is long overdue in Surrey and the need for it has never been greater. According to TransLink two thirds of transit trips are into or within Surrey, leaving only one third of transit travel going out of this city. That pattern has remained steady since 2019.

Equally important are the maintenance and upgrades to the roads and bridges we use to get to work, school, a yoga class, a hockey game, or a soccer match. In many cities, maintaining or improving roads is an afterthought. Potholes go unfilled season after season and aging roads remain in a constant state of dis-repair.

Council understands the value of a well-maintained and updated road network that cars, buses, and transport trucks rely on everyday. \$10 million in road paving contracts was recently approved by Council and a total of \$116 million has been budgeted to upgrade Surrey's transportation network.

A few projects of note:

In South Surrey, the widening of King George Boulevard and the replacement of the Nicomekl River Bridge with a new 4 lane crossing.

In Newton, a much-needed new east-west route is being added. The 84th Avenue connector will help reduce congestion on 88th Ave. At King George Boulevard, this intersection has the dubious distinction of being the most dangerous intersection in BC.

The City of Surrey has already begun early work in advance of SkyTrain construction. Working with the province, the City completed improvements to Fraser Highway between 96 Avenue and 148 Street through Green Timbers with more improvements to come.

This year has also been a busy one for our maintenance crews. The long and cold winter resulted in 4,000 requests for pothole repairs. That is more than double a typical season. I am happy to tell you that all the reported potholes have been filled on a temporary basis and crews will now work on permanently filling the potholes through the summer.

The number of projects and initiatives we have launched are numerous, and I am especially proud to say that we have been able to do all this without raising property taxes. For four straight years, Council has kept the residential property tax rate at 2.9%, which puts Surrey in the bottom third in all of Metro Vancouver. Only Port Coquitlam, the Langleys and Pitt Meadows are lower.

The work that is being accomplished by City Staff is impressive. Council fully recognizes your contributions and the pride you take in your job. Your efforts are why the City of Surrey is recognized for a wide range of awards from financial reporting, corporate culture to excellence in parks and facilities -- the accolades continue to roll in. I have said this before, and I will say it again, Surrey has the best and hardest working staff in all of Metro. Thank you for the great job you do day in and day out.

The health of our city can also be measured in how we care for our natural spaces. To be a thriving city, is to be a green city. The geography of Surrey has already given us a head start. The City's Green Infrastructure Network comprises of 3,900 hectares of green corridors, forests, wetlands, rivers, and shorelines.

As blessed as we are to have so much green space, we can always do more to better the environment. Since November of 2018, City Council has committed over \$45 million in new parkland acquisition resulting in 225 acres of new parkland in Surrey. Council continues to look

for opportunities to create more green space. Our last parkland acquisition was in March with the purchase of a 9.3-acre lot in Redwood Heights.

Increasing Surrey's Urban Tree Canopy goes hand in hand with new parkland. Last year, the City planted 10,272 trees on public property. In 2022 we have increased the number of trees planted to 12,300 trees.

The City's Tree Sale events are also contributing to even more trees planted in Surrey. Four times a year residents can buy a maple, dogwood, or assorted fruit trees for \$20 each. 1,000 trees are available at each sale and they quickly sell out. In total, 4,000 new trees are added to Surrey's urban canopy from the city's tree sale events.

The work we are doing on this front is getting noticed. For the third year in a row Surrey has been recognized as a member of the Tree Cities of the World. Other Tree Cities of the World include Barcelona, Stockholm, and New York City.

Surrey also has the distinction of being the first city in Metro Vancouver, and the largest city in Canada, to implement a plastic bag ban. I am glad to see that this ban has spurred major retailers, such as Walmart, to ban plastic bags across Canada.

This next initiative really strikes a nerve in this time of sky-high gas prices. With each passing day, we are seeing more plug-in hybrids and electric cars on the road. When 39% of emissions in Surrey coming from gas cars, the switch to electric is a very good thing and Surrey is doing its part to help get more electric cars on our roads.

One of the big barriers for many thinking about buying an EV is range. That's why Council has been rapidly expanding Surrey's public electric car charging network. Starting with 6 chargers 10 years ago, Surrey will have close to 100 public EV chargers throughout the City by the end of the year. We won't be stopping there because our aim is to have the largest public charging network in all of BC.

I want to turn now to my favourite thing about Surrey. The people. Everyday I go out and talk with our residents and business owners. While we may have our differences, we all share an immense pride for our City and a willingness to help. When the Fraser Valley flooded last fall, volunteers at one of Surrey's Sikh temples came together to send 3,000 plus homemade meals to people who were stranded in Hope. The Love Where You Live program, which I launched 3 years ago, has seen residents and businesses routinely step up to make their community better. Last year participants contributed 1,700 volunteer hours, cleaned 208 km of Surrey roads, organized 75 community cleanups, and over 200 people committed to the weekly 20-Minute Clean Up Challenge.

Without question, each of us are doing our part to elevate our City. To say that I am optimistic about Surrey's future is an understatement. As you have just seen and heard, we have made good on the big to-do list that this Council started out with almost four years ago. We knew we

had an ambitious agenda, and that there would be bumps along the way. I never said it would be easy, but the bottom line is -- what Council set out to do, we have done. The promises we made, we have kept and we have delivered. With what this Council has accomplished, Surrey has rightfully taken a seat among the major cities of Canada. But the work is not done. There are new heights to be reached and we are only just beginning. Can you imagine where Surrey will be another four years from now? From my vantage point, the sky is the limit. Together, we can and will take Surrey to new heights. So, let's get right to work in writing the next chapter of our great city!

Thank you.