



State of the City Address

Mayor Linda Buchanan

Delivered on June 12, 2024

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here today for my annual Mayor's State of the City address.

I would like to begin in a good way and acknowledge that we are on the traditional and unceded territories of the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. These Nations remain deeply connected to their lands and waters, and we must honour that this has been their home since time immemorial. I thank these Nations for sharing their land with us.

I extend my gratitude to the Urban Land Institute of British Columbia for hosting today's event. I also want to express my profound thanks to Polygon Homes, the presenting platinum sponsor, as well as the supporting sponsors, Cascadia Green Development and Seaspan, whose generous contributions have made today possible.

Today, I am delighted to be joined by numerous dignitaries. Welcome. Your presence greatly enriches our discussion. Allow me a moment to express my gratitude to Council. Together, we form a cohesive team, and I feel privileged to collaborate with each of you.

It brings me immense joy to see so many familiar faces, as well as some new ones. I appreciate your presence here this morning, especially as this is my first in-person State of the City address since 2019. While virtual platforms have served us admirably during the pandemic, an irreplaceable energy and connection comes from being together.

Today's gathering is an opportunity to assess our progress and celebrate our achievements. I emphasize 'our' deliberately because the progress we envision for our city is a collaborative endeavor that extends far beyond the confines of City Hall. It is only through collective efforts that we can propel our city forward into a brighter future.

Last year Council adopted our 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. Building off our previous plan, it guides our path forward and shows where we plan to take the community over this term.

As a Council, we are focused on building a resilient, welcoming, vibrant, connected, and prosperous city for all people. These are our strategic priorities that we know will advance our vision of being the "Healthiest Small City in the World."

Health touches every aspect of our lives, I believe the pandemic made this very clear to people in a new way. But the intersectional nature of health is why we have put it at the centre of our agenda.

A healthy community means a robust economy, it means a low-carbon environment, it means thriving families and seniors. A healthy city is so much more than the health of one individual — it is about the state of our shared social ecosystem.

Strong fiscal responsibility, equity, Reconciliation, and good governance guide our decision-making as we look at implementing specific policies and delivering new infrastructure within identified areas of focus.

In addition to these values, we are guided by a series of new strategies that have been in development over the past several years. Chief among these policies are our new Wellbeing Strategy, Climate and Environment Strategy, Mobility Strategy, and the Economic Development Strategy. I will spare you the finite details and actions within these documents, but I will say this:

Together these strategies represent a massive change in how we plan and govern the City.

Council has prioritized putting in place a new framework that modernizes our municipality beyond our day-to-day operations and essential service provisions. These strategies will help us be a true 21st century municipality. They were designed to interact with one another and break down silos that have long existed within the municipal governance model.

This may seem intuitive to us today, but the truth is that it is a new systems approach for local government.

Building resilient, sustainable, and engaged communities requires strategic foresight, the ability to identify signals of change, and assess global shifts. I am proud of City staff and Councils, past and present, who have been very forward looking in their thinking. I want to thank in particular Dr. Leanne McCarthy, City Chief Administrative Officer, for her leadership over these past 5 and half years.

I am particularly pleased that Council has adopted our new Economic Development Strategy. This was the number one recommendation out of the Business Advisory Working Group convened in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This strategy will guide our efforts in increasing the strength and diversity of our local economy over the immediate to medium-term, in addressing challenges the business community faces, and in leveraging opportunities we identify.

The strategy sets out four key pathways as priorities for action with a series of tactics.

Over the coming years we will look at enhancing economic spaces. The City has a small geographic footprint and competing land-use priorities so it is important we ensure there is space for business growth and expansion to meet future employment, commercial, and industry needs.

High-quality and environmentally responsible development of our employment lands will require significant collaboration.

This will include analyzing the commercial and industrial composition of existing and emerging economic precincts to help facilitate community-focused economic growth as well as incentivizing targeted redevelopment that supports mixed-use communities and specific sector scale-up.

Central Lonsdale is a neighbourhood of significance for the City and the region. It is the “Heart of our City” and one of Metro Vancouver’s 7 Regional City Centres that designates it as a priority location for higher-density housing, employment, services, cultural, entertainment and institutional uses in the years ahead.

In particular, I am pleased to see a strategic focus on growing the life sciences economy by increasing quality jobs and attracting innovative companies to Central Lonsdale, particularly around the Lions Gate Hospital campus.

British Columbia’s life sciences sector is internationally recognized for its innovation, specifically in research and development, biopharmaceutical products, medical devices and vaccine components.

Regionally we are looking at other life science sectors around the world to inform a BC-made approach to developing these companies locally and attracting global investment. We already have a growing, export-oriented life sciences industry and a large pool of highly specialized talent, making this sector a clear choice for development.

By responding to the anticipated growth in healthcare and technology, the City can play a critical role in both the delivery of improved care as well the delivery of a new economic driver for the region as a whole.

Developing a life sciences and technology innovation cluster in Central Lonsdale will give our community an incredible competitive edge while diversifying our economy, making it resilient to future shocks.

Building on the success of revitalizing Lower Lonsdale, Council has identified the Lonsdale Great Street project, which is the development of an integrated plan of action for Central Lonsdale, as a priority action for enhancing economic spaces.

Like any neighbourhood revitalization, we will focus on economic and demographic characteristics of the market and an analysis of core areas that drive real estate development and investment in today’s world.

Lonsdale Avenue is one of the most significant commercial backbones of the North Shore. It is an active main street with public art and place making, driven by a diversity of pedestrian-oriented retail units, plentiful small-and-medium enterprises at grade with numerous professional offices in second-floor commercial units, situated in a densely populated neighbourhood that is poised for further growth.

Of note specifically, Central Lonsdale serves as a vibrant and active hub for Persian culture and business, and as emphasised by Vancouver’s North Shore Tourism Association key elements of the area include ‘wonderful traditions and food experiences.’

As the Central Lonsdale area evolves, it is critical that the needs and objectives of the neighbourhood’s Iranian-Canadian community are reflected in planning and policy decisions.

Lonsdale is already a noteworthy street in the region, but we want to go further. We want Lonsdale to be the place to shop, eat, live and work.

'Great Streets' are streets that people enjoy spending time on. They are memorable and recognizable, safe and comfortable, and easy to get around by walking, rolling, and transit. They are, in essence, a physical manifestation of the community spirit and values.

When anyone visits a new city, there is always that one street, that one plaza that sticks with us. Council's goal is to make Lonsdale that street for people.

The pieces are in place, and we are now working to put them together to create an attractive urban core. This work will result in a robust economy, an attractive environment for employers and offer a high quality of life for residents. The City's currently undergoing a procurement process to select a partner in this work. With the RFP closing at the end of June, our goal is to have work begin in earnest this fall.

The second key economic development pathway for the City is easing the process of doing business. We recognize that we have an important role to play in setting the conditions that allow businesses to thrive.

Total active businesses operating in the City is up almost 10% post-pandemic, seeing continued growth in non-resident businesses as well as home-based businesses. Notably, we have also seen a 15% increase in the number of resident businesses renewing their licences since 2020. As a City, we are redesigning how we liaise with businesses — including an overhaul of our website, digital services, procedural bylaws, and more.

We implemented Gateway, our one-stop client services counter at City Hall, as part of our upgrades and we are evolving the role of our client service team to enable a City-wide implementation of an "Open for Business" approach.

In the near future we are increasing the availability of City technical staff for builders, and very much trying to reinstate the 'personal touch' service that the pandemic clawed back.

A new facilitation team is being developed to provide applicants a way to directly access the wide range of City services related to development, from early project scoping through to permits, and beyond. These facilitators will support applicants by clarifying requirements, confirming submissions, and coordinating timely reviews by internal teams.

In addition, the city is one of the first municipalities in BC to be able to accept Permit applications via a new Provincial Building Permit Portal. We are excited to be one of the communities piloting this with the province. We want to make it easier for you to work with us, and we know that means digitizing and simplifying.

Economic vibrancy and community health depend on public-realm experiences that enhance our connection with where we work and live. That is why we are creating world-class, multifunctional public places.

We are supporting the ongoing development of the Waterfront District, building on the success of The Shipyards and exploring unique commercial arrangements that encourage a mix of spaces and innovation of use in the built environment.

By now, people across the region recognize the Shipyards. Utilizing the assets of the pier and the waterfront, and working with the private sector, we created a 365 day destination for

residents and visitors alike and giving it the distinction of being named one of the best public spaces in North America.

No matter the day, time, or weather, this space is lively and vibrant. We know that amenities like the Shipyards is what sets our community and economy apart.

This summer marks the 5th anniversary of opening up the Shipyards. To celebrate this milestone, the City will be hosting a free event on Saturday July 20 with live music. You will not want to miss this party!

The Shipyards is the jewel of the City's waterfront and we want to continue to celebrate its unique character. Which is why we are creating a Shipyards Strategy to ensure this space continues to evolve as a vibrant and active spot while providing new revenue streams for the City.

Looking west, we are working to see how we can extend the Shipyards along the waterfront.

ICBC has announced their intentions to vacate their offices. While this represents a big loss of public sector jobs in our community, it also signifies a very exciting opportunity to reimagine this large parcel of land as a job generating mixed-use development.

It could serve as the site for a new business headquarters, accommodate a new hotel, and provide entertainment options.

When combined with the venues currently within the Shipyards – hotels, Lonsdale Quay, the Polygon Gallery, The Wallace, the Pipe Shop and MONOVA – this area can provide a more intimate extension of the larger convention centre just across the water.

Beside it lies Waterfront Park, offering a similar opportunity to what we experienced with the Shipyards.

With many landholders adjacent to the park, including BCIT, Translink, private entities, the Squamish Nation, and CN Rail, this presents an opportunity to unite stakeholders in envisioning the possibilities.

Together we can extend the success of the Shipyards, creating a dynamic tourist and residential destination that drives economic growth. Council has encouraged staff to think outside the box and consider as well how Waterfront Park can be a place where people can touch the water.

It is the perfect location for delivering recreation investments such as a seawater pool or float sauna. This is an ambitious vision, but ambition is what sets us apart and has helped us build this incredible community.

We are building a future-focused, resilient local economy through targeted economic programming.

Growth industries need a diversified, innovative commercial environment to attract investment and maximize future economic opportunities. The City has an abundance of potential in this regard.

I had the pleasure of meeting Peter Bach, the Chief Technology Officer at FTXT Energy Technology. Despite the cluster of fuel cell companies being located in Burnaby, they decided to open their Canadian headquarters here in the City.

Our geographic location, the quality of life in our city, and the thriving business environment we have cultivated collectively made us an appealing destination for them to lay roots.

While attracting established international companies remains a priority, we are equally dedicated to nurturing the growth of local start-ups.

Long-time City residents Saber and Maryam started their business, Ecoation, in their one-bedroom apartment in Lower Lonsdale and have now grown into an international organization that employs growers, scientists, and engineers who merge biology, artificial intelligence, and robotics to change the way we produce food. Needless to say, they no longer run their global agritech business out of their Lower Lonsdale condo.

Peter at FTXT and Saber and Maryam at Ecoation are just some of our local success stories that are deepening our shared prosperity. As we usher in a new economy and as we grow as a city, how we maintain our community identity through redevelopment is important.

Take for example Capilano Mall. We know this neighbourhood is poised for new residential and commercial growth. I believe a few representatives from QuadReal are with us today!

Master planning is underway and this redevelopment has the potential to provide a monumental gateway for the western side of the City and a significant amount of new homes.

In the interim period, it is important we keep jobs and employers on-site. Not only for the economic health of the west side, but also for residents who need a sense of community maintained.

That is where the North Shore Bike Park comes in. The North Shore Bike Park is the largest indoor bike park for MTB, BMX and dirt jumping in British Columbia. They opened an indoor park inside Capilano Mall, where Sears once was.

As we wait for the new master plan of this neighbourhood, the bike park will support economic activity for other businesses within the mall and surrounding area. It will also allow people to connect with one another and be with community. When it comes time for redevelopment, the park was designed to be able to move to a new location easily and continue serving riders.

Some malls turn into ghost towns before redevelopment, but here in the City we are proving that does not have to be the case. We can have jobs, recreation, and community in the face of redevelopment.

The City is a leader when it comes to delivering housing and we will continue to do our part because the workers who keep our economy moving must be able to call our community home.

Over the last census period, we added nearly 2600 new dwelling units. Despite the economic challenges that have forced many in the development community put their pencils down, we

welcomed the opening of new rental buildings in all corners of the City and the breaking of ground on several more.

The North Shore Neighbourhood House Community Hub redevelopment represents another massive investment in purpose-built rental.

Upon completion, the Hub will include a respite care center for seniors, 89 below-market rental homes, non-profit child care, a new three-story North Shore Neighbourhood House on the podium, and an additional 180 units of affordable rentals tailored to income levels, all situated on City-owned lands.

Addressing the need for workforce housing is pivotal in alleviating congestion and retaining skilled employees, and we are thrilled to be collaborating with our partners.

In the past year, the province has introduced a suite of new housing policies aimed at growing housing stock, particularly in transit-oriented areas.

City staff have been working incredibly hard on implementation. In parallel to this work, we do need to push the province on adequately funding the transit services that transit-oriented development requires.

As we scale up housing and immigration, we must have permanent, predictable investments in transit from senior levels of government to match that growth. We cannot have transit-oriented development without the transit.

I often hear from people that improving transportation on the North Shore is their top concern. The only way to address our congestion challenges is to deliver a new solution that enables efficient movement for everyone.

That is why I am incredibly pleased to say that Mayors' Council has officially endorsed Metrotown to Park Royal Bus Rapid Transit, or BRT as we call it, as a Tier-1 priority investment.

BRT routes will move people quickly in high-capacity buses that run frequently in traffic-separated lanes and signal priority at intersections. BRT is built in a fraction of the time, and at a fraction of the cost, compared to rail technologies.

We are thrilled to be a prioritized route, but there is more work to do. You all need to join the call for this investment. I want to shout out Seaspan and Capilano University for being vocal allies on this topic.

We have launched an online tool to make it easier for you to support Burrard Inlet Rapid Transit. Use the QR code on the screen behind me or go to North Shore Connects dot C A and send a letter of support to decision makers. It only takes a few moments.

By sharing the benefits of Burrard Inlet BRT on social media, by asking other businesses and people in your network to champion transit, by letting your employees know about this online letter tool, you are helping us advance transit solutions.

Investments in active transportation, such as the Spirit Trail and the Green Necklace, not only improves the mobility and overall health of people it also fosters stronger connections between commercial areas and surrounding neighborhoods.

This past year we delivered Esplanade Complete Street, which has improved safety and the flow of traffic, as well as updated curbside regulations to support increased passenger pick-up, drop-off, and delivery activities.

Just last month we secured provincial funding investment for the Casano-Loutet Overpass, enabling construction to commence in early 2025. This vital infrastructure project will connect the Loutet and Cedar Village neighborhoods that were literally cut off from one another when Highway-1 came to the North Shore in the 1960's.

This overpass will offer a safe North-South route for pedestrians and cyclists, including a secure path to school for numerous local students.

Earlier this year, we approved the alignment for the Upper Levels Greenway. An extension of the Green Necklace across Highway-1. This new greenway, running east west, will connect the Westview and Tempe neighbourhoods. In addition, we will be working with the Ministry of Transportation on upgrading the highway crossing at Lonsdale to improve safety and accessibility for all users.

This work will allow staff to study the feasibility of creating an Urban Land Bridge in the future. In cities such as Boston and New York, where transportation infrastructure divided communities, highways are being redesigned to put the focus on people rather than cars, all while creating valuable park space.

These investments will allow people to actively move from above the highway to the new Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre, access the commercial district in Central Lonsdale, and fuel economic development.

This past year we hit many important milestones in the delivery of the new, state-of-the-art Harry Jerome Community Recreation Centre. I am proud to say it is currently on time for opening late 2025 and importantly, on budget!

We officially opened the new Lawn Bowling greens and clubhouse at 22nd and St. Andrews, and we signed a memorandum of understanding with Flicka Gymnastics so that they can find a new home within the Mickey McDougall Recreation Centre.

As our community grows, so too will our green spaces with the addition of three new parks. Our goal is to ensure all residents are within a 5-minute walk from a park or public greenspace.

Two neighbourhood parks in Central Lonsdale, which are being delivered through redevelopment.

The changing neighbourhood of Harbourside, currently in construction, will see an improved Kings Mill Park. This master plan includes opportunities for shoreline and habitat restoration, mitigations to sea level rise, an all ages play zone and improvements to the North Shore Spirit Trail and the off-leash dog area.

The City is proud to be advancing the Mahon Park Fieldhouse and Child Care Centre in partnership with the province and we are so pleased to have the Board of Education be moving forward with a new elementary school at the Cloverley site, where the City is investing \$3.5 million dollars in before and after school childcare.

The global challenges of the fast few years — COVID, inflation, climate disruptions — has reaffirmed the importance of public infrastructure such as child care, affordable housing, and public transit, in creating more productive work lives for people.

As we reshape our economy, we must also commit to investment in this public infrastructure. Without family supporting services and infrastructure, we have no economic resilience.

The road ahead of us will certainly bring about new challenges, but I am excited to continue this work. There is so much more to do to build a more equitable and healthy community. We are positioning the City to work at the intersection of health and the economy. We will continue to be a community that anyone can call home with vibrant people-oriented places.

The North Shore is an exceptional place to live, work, and play. While we face challenges, they should not deter us. Council's priorities demonstrate our commitment to propelling the City forward, ensuring it remains forward-thinking, ambitious, and competitive for generations to come.

Our shared goal is to build a community where residents, visitors, and businesses alike consider it as the place to be.

Now more than ever, our City needs your expertise. Your creativity. Your determination. As leaders in your fields, you can help us carry this work forward. I have never been more optimistic about what we can achieve together.