



State of the City Address 2020

Delivered virtually on Thursday November 19, 2020 at 9 a.m.

Good morning everyone, thank you for joining me for this year's State of the City address. It's a privilege to once again have an opportunity to speak with the business community and provide this snapshot of how we're progressing during these uncertain times.

I'd like to start by acknowledging we're gathered on the traditional territories of the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam peoples, and we thank them for sharing this land with us. The Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Councils are key government partners for the City and I look forward to collaborating with them further on our shared priorities.

I'd like to extend my thanks to the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce for organizing today's State of the City address. I also want to thank the Port of Vancouver for sponsoring this event.

It's hard to believe two years have passed since I was sworn in as Mayor, and one year since Council adopted its first ever Strategic Plan. When we began charting our path forward, as new Mayor and Council, we never imagined the circumstances we find ourselves in today.

Council's Strategic Plan is our roadmap to making the City a better place for all people to live, work, and play. Our vision is to be "The Healthiest Small City in the World." Now more than ever before, people understand the relationship between cities and public health is an important one.

When we talk about being a healthy city, we're not just talking about physical health, but mental health, a healthy natural environment and economic health, as well. Health touches every part of our life, which is why City Council has placed it at the centre of our agenda.

Council's priorities reflect our commitment to advance the City North Vancouver as a forward thinking, ambitious, and competitive City for generations. Our shared goal is to make our community a place where residents, visitors and businesses alike consider it as **the** place to be.

Since the start of this pandemic, health of residents and core service delivery has been our top priority. Council's full attention has been on mitigating the local impact of COVID-19 and providing Dr. Leanne McCarthy, the City's Chief Administrative Officer with the policy and direction needed to fully implement business continuity plans. Going forward, my focus is supporting business resilience and the wellbeing of people.

The City will work at the intersection of health and the economy.

This past year we've all taken decisive action to bend the curve. Businesses, governments, non-profits, and others pivoted quickly, and asked how they could help. Indeed I have never been more proud of this community as its come together to lift each other up during these difficult times.

We're moving forward with a bold, strategic recovery plan. The COVID-19 pandemic has created new hurdles, but it's also created new opportunities to build back better than before.

When we talk about recovery we need to consider long-lasting positive change. Looking at this economic and health crisis through an equity lens it is clear that people have been impacted differently based on gender, race, age, ability, sexual orientation, and income.

It's true that this has been a difficult time for us all, but for some it's been harder than we can even imagine.

The people who keep our businesses open and the economy running need to be at the heart of our recovery. This pandemic 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 rebuild our economy, we must also commit to investment in this public infrastructure.

Children and young adults must be able to safely remain in school and employment. They're our future entrepreneurs, scientists, business owners and public servants. Early childhood education, K-12, and post secondary is absolutely critical for their growth and society's overall future success. Prolonged interruption to them interrupts this trajectory.

This pandemic lifted the veil on vulnerabilities within our social safety net as we saw a visible uptick in our population of residents experiencing homelessness.

The quietness of our streets, as people shifted work to home, demonstrated how we've normalized lengthy commutes to our own detriment. We know traffic and congestion is bad for us as individuals, to the environment, as well as for our businesses.

Through policy and investment, I'm committed to building a fair and equitable City for all people. We can be the City that enables healthier lifestyles while delivering a more resilient, sustainable, and prosperous future. A rising tide lifts all boats.

The essential service worker is one that we've heard praised over the course of this pandemic. But we need to understand that these workers are more than just those in our healthcare system. They're our grocery store clerks. Our bus drivers. Our early childhood educators. Our cities are dependent on these workers and valuing them means paying wages that allows them to live comfortably within our community.

Last month the people of British Columbia gave a decisive mandate to the provincial government and I look forward to welcoming a new cabinet next week. I will continue to work with senior levels of government to deliver solutions on these important needs.

I've never been the type of person to wait for someone else to bring forward solutions to today's challenges and I'm not content to stand idle and wait for the world to go back to the old normal.

This spring I convened the Mayor's Business Advisory Working Group so I could hear directly how different sectors had been impacted by the pandemic, and what they needed to recover

successfully. I'd like to thank Bill Mooney, former G3 Vice President and General Manager, for chairing this working group at my request. I conducted over a dozen roundtable conversations with businesses of all sizes and industries including the port, health and wellness, tech, food and beverage, and personal service to name a few. This engagement was crucial to how we at the City adapted, but it also informed how I advocated to senior levels of government.

I heard from numerous restaurant and brewery owners that distancing indoors was reducing their sales capacity to a threshold that wasn't sustainable. As we all know these industries often operate on thin margins. I wrote Attorney General David Eby asking the government to create a temporary outdoor seating license, which was implemented shortly thereafter.

On Council's direction, City staff created a Temporary Patio Program to provide additional service space on public streets for food, beverage and retail businesses. This September Council unanimously approved a motion I brought forward to extend the program until the end of the pandemic, whenever that may be, as well as allow for the winterization of outdoor dining to support the health of patrons and the viability of our food and beverage industry.

This was part and parcel with the City's Open Streets Action Plan which was adopted by Council to provide enhanced outdoor space for the public. The Open Streets Action Plan encourages safe walking, cycling and business operations across the City by creating more space on our streets and sidewalks. By reallocating some of our existing road space in key areas, we can provide improved access to businesses and more space for physical distancing.

Bike lanes and people-oriented streets are good for business. Research continues to show that communities that prioritize pedestrians and cyclists see more economic activity and growth. To that end Council has been focused on making our destination streets more accessible, and people-oriented. This includes the launch of B.C.'s first all electric bike share program and changes to street bylaws to allow for personal use of micro-mobility devices.

We've seen our streets activated in new ways. In collaboration with businesses, Capilano University, and non-profits we've added new public art, and parklets. All of these changes are assets to people and our business community, and ones we intend to continue forward with long after this pandemic has ended.

In response to the pandemic, the City launched the Walk and Shop Local campaign. Many small businesses were hit hard, and operating very differently as a result of the pandemic. To support them we created an interactive, crowd-sourced map where businesses can share details of their new services as well as information on takeout, deliveries and gift cards. By connecting consumers with local services and retails we're aiming to both strengthen our local economy as well as our sense of community.

The greatest pleasures for me personally to come out of this pandemic was seeing our parks this summer busier and livelier than ever before. With eighty percent of residents in the City living in multi-family buildings, our community parks should be considered an extension of their own backyards. Families and friends need space to gather and socialize that's also safe.

Our parks for many are the only place where this is possible.

I wanted our parks to be accessible, and used in new ways. In May of this year Council unanimously supported asking staff to draft a bylaw that would allow for the consumption of alcohol in designated public places such as parks and plazas, a first for a local government in Canada outside of Quebec.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, and this pilot has now become a permanent bylaw in the City. Several municipalities across the province have since followed our lead.

I've heard from restaurants, breweries, and taprooms in the community that this has led to an increase in takeout and delivery to public places such as parks. While supporting businesses was a priority when I brought this forward to Council, this was really about supporting people.

Shortly after Council adopted this bylaw, I received an email from a woman in her eighties who lives across the street from Victoria Park. She was so thankful to see this bylaw introduced because it allowed her to meet up with a friend, get takeout and a drink, and play Scrabble while still physically distancing. To her, this meant she could have a summer where seeing friends was still safe. This is what this change was all about.

When we introduce policy that addresses the needs of people and supports businesses, we're building community and we know that we're taking steps towards becoming the Healthiest Small City.

Creating space for people so they can engage with businesses and community is crucial. Over the summer, enhanced and targeted placemaking initiatives were launched to support vibrant streets in commercial areas. I'm particularly proud of the new shipping container parklets as they represent so much of our local identity as a people-focused port city and I want to thank Seaspan, Neptune, and the United Way for making these happen.

I believe as we look to recovery, medium sized cities, like us, will be the engines that drive our economy forward across the nation. So I want us to be strategic. I want all of us to shape the City's economic future with intentionality.

Our goal is to support existing businesses while attracting new talent, investment, and enterprises to the City. Which is why, one of the key recommendations coming out of the Mayor's Business Advisory Working Group is the creation of a new Economic Investment Plan which will reflect these priorities.

This new plan will build on existing strengths and investments, while exploring new opportunities. We will look to grow the economy around key strategies and industries such as the Asian Pacific Trade Corridor and the terminal operators, shipbuilding, the film industry and construction to name a few, as well as around other anchor employers in the public sector such as education, ICBC, and the Health Authority.

The City must continue attracting young people to the community. Our partnerships with institutions such as Capilano University have never been more valuable as students through internships and apprenticeships are the future of our local workforce.

The City has had a longstanding partnership with the Port of Vancouver as we recognize the value of the port in our local economy. The Metro Vancouver Board, of which I'm Vice-Chair, earlier this year approved the Industrial Land Strategy to ensure that sufficient industrial lands are protected over the next several decades. This will allow us to meet the needs of a growing and evolving regional economy.

With a constrained land supply the City will make every effort to preserve remaining industrial land, including port-supporting land and light industrial areas, to maintain a diversity of employment opportunities.

Our new development and investment plan will focus on specific areas of action that will support business start-ups and innovation, small business viability, and skill development and re-training.

When I think of small business innovation, I think of long-time City resident Saber. He and his wife Maryam started their business, Ecoation, in their one-bedroom apartment in Lower Lonsdale. Saber believed you could combine people's agricultural knowledge with the precision of machines to create more sustainable and successful food production. What started as a small team in his apartment grew into an international organization that employs growers, scientists, and engineers who merge deep biology, automation, sensing, artificial intelligence, and robotics to change the way we produce and protect food. Since those early days, Saber has become a Member of the BC Minister of Agriculture Advisory Council, and a Member of the United Nations Climate Technology Centre and Network.

When I think of small business viability I think of Wade from Elite Body Shop, a family run business of 52 years in the City who adapted their business over the last nine months to increase their online presence as well as become Toyota OEM certified. This allowed them to add new services and in turn attract new business. These are examples of local businesses that are continuously innovating not only to survive but thrive.

This is the moment where we need to support innovators, creators and dreamers. COVID-19 has shown us, our City's economy, like much of Metro Vancouver's economy, is made up of the very sectors hit the hardest during this pandemic. We must expand our local economies so that they're more diverse, inclusive, and resilient to future shocks.

I hear regularly about the high cost of doing business in the region. Although we have limited tools at the local level, there is more to do to support economic growth. I've been advocating for changes at the provincial level so that municipalities could have more flexibility in how they assess commercial property tax. Implementing a split assessment would enable local governments to set a lower tax rate for the future development potential of a property. To date the Province has not committed to moving forward with this model, but Mayors across the region, myself included, are committed to continuing our advocacy as we work with our partners in senior levels of government on a range of issues.

One of the most important of these issues being public transit and how we move people through this busy corridor. I sit at the Integrated North Shore Transportation Planning Project table, now referred to as NXSTPP, with TransLink, the Ministry of Transportation, other North Shore municipalities and First Nations, the Province, and the Federal Government. There I

have been advocating for better transit and traffic solutions to support the wellbeing of people, as well as businesses.

This past spring we saw the launch of North Vancouver's first rapid bus line. Connecting the North Shore East to West, this service increase will allow for continued growth through some of our busiest commercial and residential neighbourhoods. Similarly, just before our community began grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, we had SeaBus sailings increased to every 10 minutes, to again support the movement of people through the region. While we saw some of these increased services temporarily reduced due to the pandemic, they will be back.

Another promising step forward was the results of the Burrard Inlet Rapid Transit feasibility study. This year we've learned there are several feasible geotechnical options for creating a fixed rapid transit link to the North Shore.

An innovative and sustainable economic recovery strategy needs our commitment to the notion that transit is an essential service that builds economies. We know that commuters are traveling to and through the North Shore everyday. Congestion is a barrier for recruiting and retaining staff, it delays the movement of goods, and has a significant impact on our health and the environment.

We need progressive solutions to these challenges. The City needs partners in the business community to join the call for rapid transit and similar investments. The North Shore needs to be next, and we need businesses like yours to partner with us to help deliver that message to the provincial and federal governments.

We cannot separate our traffic and congestion from our housing crisis. The two are deeply interconnected and we need continued bold, progressive action. We know that many of the people who make up the North Shore's workforce travel here from other communities because they cannot afford to live here. We cannot accept this burden.

For quite some time we've been in a housing affordability crisis. I am committed to continue working in partnership with all levels of government on delivering on our community's diverse housing needs so that the people who travel everyday to the North Shore for employment, could also become residents if they so choose.

We need to look at new and innovative ways to deliver housing, such as mass laminated timber, rent to own, and the new co-housing model. Through the Balanced Housing Lab, an innovative partnership between the City of North Vancouver, District of West Vancouver, Squamish Nation, senior levels of government, and other stakeholders, we're co-creating diverse housing solutions that make it possible for middle-income earners at different stages of life to live and work on the North Shore.

We also need to work with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and BC Housing to invest and deliver housing to our most vulnerable. This pandemic and the call to stay home has illuminated that having a roof over your head is a basic human right that must be met.

Construction is an essential service, and key component to our local economy. Since November 2019, despite the pandemic, the City has issued 55 new residential construction

permits. These projects contain a total of 539 new units for everyone from families, to students, to newcomers, seniors, renters, and homeowners. 50 of these units are mid- or below-market housing. 10 of them are supportive housing units being operated by the Vancouver Resource Society.

Supporting people through investments in their wellbeing will stimulate our economy. One of our community assets which has long been a pillar in lifting all people up is the North Shore Neighbourhood House. Through program delivery they've worked to create a healthier, more inclusive, stronger community. Council is moving forward with a new building for North Shore Neighbourhood House.

This project represents a \$25 million investment from the City along with investments from Care BC, Catalyst and BC Housing. This new campus will include respite care for seniors, below-market housing and a partnership with Hollyburn Family Services.

There is great untapped economic opportunity for our community when we look at health and allied health industries which is why prior to the pandemic I wrote leadership at Vancouver Coastal Health about creating an Economic Health Cluster in the City, specifically around the Lions Gate Hospital campus.

We're home to a regional hospital, which opens the door to new investment. Health is increasingly becoming an economic driver.

The creation of an Economic Health Cluster could transform the Central Lonsdale area into a collection of health and technology businesses, service providers, non-profit organizations, entrepreneurs and more. By responding to the anticipated growth in healthcare and technology, we can play a critical role in both the delivery of improved care for people as well as the delivery of a new economic driver for the region as a whole.

Indeed the City is home to many regional opportunities and growth industries. One of which is film and production. The City recognizes the economic benefit of the film industry to the local community.

The last five years have seen a record high number of film permits. At least 1,000 City residents are directly employed by the film industry, and many more film workers commute here each day and spend their dollars in our community. We have amazing studios, digital media businesses, and other production services that support our local economy.

How can we support them to grow?

The pandemic had an enormous impact on the film, arts, and tourism industries across the globe. Locally, industries did the work to create feasible and safe restart plans and in many cases have resumed operations.

The arts are fundamental in a vibrant community and should be celebrated. It is through arts and culture that we can share our own story, and learn about each other's experiences. Our cultural precinct in Lower Lonsdale has continued to grow, attracting tourists as well as locals. In the span of a couple blocks is the Presentation House Theater, the Polygon Gallery, a new North Vancouver Museum, as well as the Lonsdale Quay Market.

Over the past year we celebrated the opening of The Shipyards. Offering outdoor ice skating in the winter, a spray park in the summer months, as well as event space, brings new opportunities to our community. This month our Shipyards District was featured in Air Canada's EnRoute magazine as 'one of three micro escapes to make this winter.'

Among the events we were supposed to see this year in the Shipyards District is the Rogers Hometown Hockey festival. This would have brought people from all corners of the region to our community, and would have showcased the City to the nation. Sadly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this event was cancelled in the final hour. This was extremely disappointing to me personally as a long-time hockey mom and fan, but I remain optimistic that we may one day get asked again to host such an event.

The City is also benefiting from a growing Brewery District in the Lower Lonsdale area. This year we learned that a new gin distillery, a cidery, and micro-brewery will be opening in the coming months.

Increasingly we're becoming a destination for tourists and locals as we diversify what we offer as a City.

Working strategically, we can build on this diversity, showcase our unique identity, create opportunity, and seek investment... that's what will make us **the place to be**.

In closing, the COVID-19 pandemic hit quickly and forcefully. Businesses, services, governments, all people, had to pivot quickly and adapt. The next couple months, and years, will not be easy. This pandemic is far from over, and there is more work to do.

We need to be prepared to deal with the ebb and flow of this health and economic crisis. I'm committed to leading us forward and building on that work we've done over the past two years, and by those who came before us, so that the City is a better place for future generations of families, workers, and businesses.

I know that if we continue to deliver solutions that work for all people, we will achieve our vision. But as Mayor and Council we cannot do this alone. We can only become the Healthiest Small City in the World if we have partners in the private sector, in the non-profits, in the arts community, in the provincial and federal government, in our education system, and beyond.

We need everyone in the community to be all in, so consider this my invitation. I look forward to many more productive conversations in moving this vision forward and hearing how each of you can contribute to the economic investment strategy in a constructive way.

I'm incredibly honoured to be the Mayor in a community filled with so much opportunity, and amazing people.

We're better together.

Thank you for joining me and I look forward to taking your questions.