



Metro Vancouver's

BEST Kept Secret



Put simply, the City of Langley is one of the best kept secrets of Metro Vancouver. The British Columbia city enjoys close proximity to Vancouver as well as a rich history, a strong sense of community, and all the amenities of a major urban centre.

Written by Claire Suttles

The City of Langley also has roots as a major hub of trade, transportation and commerce – a history that is reflected today in the city's thriving economy.

Today's City of Langley is located within just ten square kilometres, contains attractive suburban residential neighbourhoods, a natural wetland of regional significance, and boasts a unique pedestrian-oriented downtown core, a high-end fashion shopping centre, a farmer's market, as well as a Kwantlen Polytechnic University campus conveniently located right in town. There are over 300 acres of scenic parklands, and an active arts community. The City of Langley is proud of its heritage and very excited about the future as a vibrant community.

In fact, the number of jobs in the City of Langley exceeds the size of its resident labour force and the city enjoys one of the highest ratios of jobs to population in the entire Metro Vancouver area. The City of Langley is actively working to keep – and improve – this impressive business climate. These efforts were recently acknowledged when the City of Langley won the B.C. Small Business Roundtable's Open for Business Award for being one of the most business friendly communities in the Province of British Columbia.

The city's goal is to maintain a job growth rate of approximately 1 percent, or 200 jobs per year, which would add 6,000 new jobs by 2041. Small business is valued in the City of Langley, and the City is particularly invested in promoting its growth and success. With the help of Colliers International, Langley has developed an effective business recruitment and retention strategy and a Downtown Business Action Plan to support this sector. These strategies aim to broaden the city's commercial mix, extend active business hours, and attract new consumer markets as well as more contemporary industrial business. The city is also looking for new, innovative ways to maintain its competitiveness long term.

Development

The City of Langley recognizes the long term, positive impact of redeveloping underutilized land and revitalizing its downtown core. As a result, the city has created a Downtown Master Plan to guide redevelopment over the next 20 years. The award winning

plan will encourage investment and act as a catalyst for economic activity.

Developers and investors want to see a clear roadmap before committing to a new development, and the Downtown Master Plan provides this certainty and creates a predictable development and investment environment by clearly communicating how, where, and when the city will grow. Not surprisingly, the plan has created quite a buzz among developers, investors, and business owners, and has already generated \$160.8 million in new construction.

Brownfield redevelopment is also a major focus of the City of Langley. Brownfield sites are under-utilized industrial or commercial properties that may have been contaminated by previous uses. Redeveloping these sites brings a host of economic and environmental benefits for everyone involved – the local governments, the land developers, and the broader community. ▶▶



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The City of Langley has great potential for future developments, but even the greatest opportunities can be crushed by the weight of red tape. The city recognizes this fact, and has been hard at work to make it easy for developers to get their work underway. For starters, the City of Langley has recently further streamlined the approval process, saving developers time, money, and frustration. The results have been so impressive that the City of Langley is now known for having the fastest, most efficient approval process in all of Metro Vancouver.

► In addition to the benefits inherent in any local construction project, brownfield redevelopment typically improves local economic growth, enhances local land values, increases local tax revenue, and acts a catalyst for surrounding development.

Just as importantly, brownfield redevelopment makes a positive impact on the environment by improving air, water, and soil quality. It can also facilitate sustainable development patterns within the local community, which may lead to the protection of cherished green spaces and agricultural land.

However, developers are often hesitant to get involved in Brownfield redevelopment, despite the potential economic benefits. To encourage developers to take the leap, the City of Langley has addressed their concerns through the Brownfield Redevelopment Strategy. The progressive strategy is the first of its kind in British Columbia, and has already generated more than \$192.2 million in construction revenue and 850 jobs.

Local government believes that this is only the beginning. Interest in brownfield redevelopment continues to grow, and the City of Langley is proudly revitalizing a number of prime real estate sites. In fact, the Brownfield Redevelopment Strategy has been so successful that the City of Langley was awarded in last year's Urban Land Institute Brownie Awards, which recognize leadership and innovation in urban planning and economic development.

In fact, the local government recently processed and approved a development permit application for a 40,000 square foot new Porsche dealership in just 13 days. The process included an inter-department review, Advisory Planning Commission Review, public consultation, and council review and approval. Most applications aren't approved quite this quickly, of course, but the average time to process a Development Permit is still a very impressive four weeks.

The City of Langley is also making it easier for developers to overcome development challenges by considering plans that fall outside of the norm. The city is committed to encouraging innovation, and local government understands that this requires flexibility and an open for business attitude. For instance, the City

of Langley recently approved the development of an underground air space parcel, which was built beneath a city road in order to create more parking for an adjacent condominium development. The innovative parking solution generated \$1 million in revenue for the city while facilitating upgrades to infrastructure.

The city also recognizes the importance of coordinating land use and transportation when planning for the future. The City has supported the Gateway Program road improvements contributing to the Roberts Bank Rail Corridor Project and is committed to improving public transportation. Most notably, a new rapid transit line to downtown Langley is in the works.

Tourism

Langley boasts an array of attractions, from outdoor adventures and agritourism to heritage sites and festivals.

The city's multiple parks and trails are ideal for walking and cycling; many parks also have facilities for tennis, basketball, soccer, baseball and other recreational activities. There are also a variety of golf courses scattered throughout the area – all with stunning views of the surrounding mountains and opportunities for horseback riding and experiencing fabulous wineries. The Fraser River and Brae Island Regional Park can be explored by kayak or canoe, and adventure seekers may enjoy a helicopter or hot air balloon tour of the local scenery.

The Township of Langley is considered the horse capital of B.C., and approximately \$50 million is contributed to its booming equine industry each year.

Of course, many visitors come to enjoy the area's food and wine. From fresh produce and delicious preserves to award winning grape vintages, Langley has something



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for every taste. Agritourists can pick berries, meander through peaceful lavender fields, visit orchards and pumpkin patches, or experience life on a working dairy farm. Langley's farm gate shops sell heirloom vegetables, fresh baked pies and specialty turkey products. Local wineries produce award winning wines and give visitors the opportunity to tour the vineyards and learn more about the art of winemaking.

A number of art galleries showcase handmade jewellery, paintings, pottery, glasswork, and carvings. Langley also boasts the largest square footage in commercial retail outside of Vancouver, from big box stores to specialty shops and boutiques. The city is also the site of the Cascades Casino and the Greater Vancouver Zoo. History buffs appreciate Fort Langley National Historic Site, the former site of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post. The site maintains some original buildings as well as accurate reconstructions and interactive displays.

To be sure, Langley is home to a host of business and development opportunities, as well as tourist attractions. The city's recent efforts are paying off, and in 2013 Langley was given the NAIOP Most Improved Municipality Award. The city's ongoing improvements to transportation and infrastructure, as well as its strong emphasis on development, will help maintain the City of Langley's status as a major business centre – and will continue to make the community a great place to live, invest and to visit. ■

CITY OF LANGLEY



City of Langley, British Columbia

20399 Douglas Crescent
Langley, BC V3A 4B3

P: 604 514 2800

F: 604 530 4371

E: info@langleycity.ca

www.city.langley.bc.ca

