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# Community Resilience & Recovery Strategy

June 2020 - December 2022

CITY OF ABBOTSFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

[abbotsford.ca](http://abbotsford.ca)





# Introduction

This interim 2020-2022 Economic Development Strategy sets out some of the shorter and longer term areas of focus for the City of Abbotsford's Economic Development department as the community continues to build upon strengths, adapt, recover and learn from the COVID-19 crisis.

The City remains committed to fulfilling Council's Vision of Abbotsford as the Hub of the Fraser Valley; a community where talent and investment thrive.







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## About

### **THE CITY OF ABBOTSFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

The City serves existing Abbotsford businesses, attracts new ones, and creates programs that support ongoing development of our key economic sectors. The Economic Development team serves as ambassadors for business development and vibrant economy for all of Abbotsford. We assist with expansion plans and offer programs to help grow businesses. We attract new investment and innovative companies to our thriving city. We also collaborate with industry associations and economic development partners to solve regional issues. And we celebrate the quality of life that turns visitors into residents.

## Section One

### COMMUNITY RECOVERY | June 2020 – June 2021

Currently, the City of Abbotsford is collaborating with local business community associations and members, as well as key stakeholders and community partners to support our City as we go through the process of economic opportunities for recovery and continue building toward ongoing community resilience following COVID-19.

The economic impact of COVID-19 has been wide-spread and will continue to be felt throughout 2020 and beyond. It is important to recognize that while the City's capacity for response is directly connected to Provincial and Federal Government response programs and initiatives, the City has been actively engaged in supporting local businesses and stakeholders throughout the pandemic and will continue to provide supports as we move through community recovery.

### IMMEDIATE APPROACHES

#### 01 Participation in the Abbotsford Business Community Coalition

Within the community, there has been an unprecedented collaboration of 12 agencies including the Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce, Abbotsford Downtown Business Association, Fraser Valley Indo-Canadian Business Association and the City of Abbotsford to coordinate a community-level response to those merchants and businesses impacted by COVID. This includes the development of some locally generated grant funding to support businesses faced with suspending operations, coordination of peer to peer business connections and mentorship, as well as opportunities to assist businesses to develop an online e-commerce presence.

In addition to ongoing participation on the Coalition, the City has provided a \$17,500 contribution to assist with marketing efforts to roll out the program through local media outlets.

The City will continue to be involved with the Coalition through the balance of 2020.

#### 02 Creating a Single Portal for Government Support and Resources

The City's Economic Development website has been updated to include a link which presents all of the announced programs available to support business. With frequent updates and changes to provincial and federal programs, this serves to create a single resource for businesses, but also to better aid staff to assist when asked about some of the available resources.

This portal will be continue to be updated with all current information from senior levels of government and provide resources and links for local businesses to access going forward.

This page will remain active through the balance of 2020 and beyond.

#### 03 Extension of our Tools to Support Pandemic-Related Needs

The City currently utilizes a GIS mapping tool for investment opportunities. An additional layer to this platform has allowed us to not only list businesses that are open to the public and their hours, but also to plot them on a map to better assist the public to identify shops and services nearest to their home or workplace.



Ongoing updates will continue to be made to the GIS mapping tool to support local businesses in their recovery and outreach efforts as available.

#### **04 Advocacy on Key issues with Provincial and Federal Government**

We continue to reach out to local businesses regularly to understand their unique concerns and continue to share those concerns with senior levels of government to help the Province and Federal governments to create meaningful recovery funding and programs that will assist our local business community during these challenging times.

The feedback that we gather from the community will play a key role in adapting the City's Advocacy Strategy for 2020-2021 to reflect those issues most pressing during this unprecedented crisis.

#### **05 Review of City Processes to Adapt to Changing Health Protocols**

As local businesses continue to adapt their services and service delivery practices to address COVID-19 health requirements, the Economic Development department will take a leadership role in community outreach and in reviewing how the City can consider temporary (or permanent) updates to City policies, bylaws, and processes to support innovative business efforts.

Examples of initiatives that have occurred to date include updates to our Community Events, Filming and Activities Bylaw to support the safe delivery of smaller scale community events, as well as the opportunity for businesses to consider expanded outdoor patio experiences.

#### **06 Communication and Customer Service**

While physical distancing protocols remain in place, in-person community connections have been maintained with our businesses, stakeholders and community contacts via digital means through e-mail, telephone and online platforms such as WebEx and Zoom.

The City will continue to ensure we provide customer service excellence through utilizing all platforms and employing best practice safe workplace and physical distancing approaches.

#### **07 Collaborate with Tourism Abbotsford to Re-Engage and Re-Imagine Tourism Opportunities**

With travel being restricted to within our own region during the Province of B.C.'s phase 2 ReStart Plan, and then provincially in phase 3 of the ReStart Plan, the City will be working alongside our Tourism Abbotsford partners to connect locals and nearby residents with some great things to do in Abbotsford through the balance of health restrictions.



## Section Two

### ENSURING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE ON THE HORIZON | June 2020 – December 2022

As our global economy begins to rebound and re-establish operations, the City of Abbotsford is positioning itself to ensure our readiness as the world once again opens for business. The following approaches are ongoing and will continue to be undertaken by the City's Economic Development department to support our local economy and local business community in building resilience and success going forward.

#### IMMEDIATE APPROACHES | June 2020 – Forward

##### 01 A Keen Focus on Business Retention & Expansion Efforts

The City is committed to ensuring timely and meaningful support for our present local merchants to support their continued operations. This includes support and outreach for our key sectors in Agriculture, Aerospace, Manufacturing, Technology and the Film & Television sectors.

This will include:

- a. Active business visitation to ensure that merchant issues are heard and that actions are taken to address City processes which have an adverse effect on local business
- b. Re-development of the "Business Walks" program to allow for more constructive action items stemming from those interactions on the front line
- c. A focused inter-departmental response to communicated concerns and challenges identified through out liaison with business leaders in the community

##### 02 Renewed efforts in investment attraction

Endorsed by Council in May 2020, Abbotsford's new Investment Profile creates an essential tool to assist site selectors and developers to identify the strengths that Abbotsford presents for their next investment and to better communicate our value proposition to a wide range of industry and development. The document demonstrates our investment readiness as a City and represents that we understand the most pressing challenges of business in today's global climate.

This includes the best utilization of our online tools as well including our GIS microsite on the Economic Development website which provides data, comparative information and real estate listings that allow for self-guided discovery of Abbotsford's opportunities on a 24x7 basis. For greatest effectiveness, we will be ensuring circulation of this publication to relevant industry contacts including, but not limited to:

- a. Investment attraction agencies - Federal, Provincial and regional
- b. Corporate site selection firms
- c. Trade associations with a focus on in-bound Foreign Direct Investment
- d. Real estate brokers

##### 03 Conduct an Inventory of Available Land Opportunities

As a partner exercise to investment attraction, the development of an inventory of available lands will assist the City to best identify opportunities and to target the desired industries to locate here. Understanding our present inventory and identifying our strategy to acquire and/or convert land for primary industry is critical to our future success. This will require a multi-department approach to ensure that proposed growth meets the communicated needs of in-bound investors, aligns with the Official Community Plan, considers present and future transportation initiatives, best addresses the scalable impact on municipal infrastructure.



#### 04 Fostering a Culture of Entrepreneurship

While investment attraction speaks to a wide spectrum of business development activities, recognition that entrepreneurship and start-ups factor in as a separate and unique opportunity for Abbotsford. Unlike corporations who may simply need the data in order to make an informed site selection decision, entrepreneurs are often starting from scratch with limited resources and often limited experience. This requires a hands-on approach and providing resources such as the Business Planning Guide and the Building Blocks Marketing Toolkit available through the economic development office.

In addition to ensuring awareness and connectivity with existing resources and agencies to support entrepreneurs, we will continue to build and share tools that support business start-ups where gaps exist in the present landscape of supports for this area of focus.

#### 05 Implementation of a Workforce Development Program

Partnering with the Abbotsford School District, the City will introduce **EdgeFactor** to students in five high schools to help identify the scope and volume of rewarding, high paying jobs that exist in the community and assist students to make the course selections that will position them for eligibility to pursue these career paths which may ignite their passion. This platform is one of the few on the market which integrates the relationship between education, employers, youth, parents and economic development to create a collective benefit to the community.

This program is expected to launch in classrooms in September 2020.





## Section Two

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### INTERMEDIATE APPROACHES | January 2021 - December 2022

As our community continues to move through an economic Recovery Phase, the City of Abbotsford will continue efforts to support our Key Sectors:

#### 01 Support for Agriculture

The City of Abbotsford is the largest municipality in B.C. with a total area of 389 km<sup>2</sup>, and is the province's fifth largest city by population. Abbotsford is one of the most intensely and diversely farmed areas in Canada, supporting a wide range of crop and livestock operations. Approximately 75 percent of the city's land base is located within the Agricultural Land Reserve, with agriculture supporting 1 of every 4 private sector jobs and 1 in 5 overall jobs in the community. Abbotsford's gross farm receipts are \$20,441 per hectare, which is three times greater than the next most productive agricultural region in Canada. The City has undertaken a project called AgRefresh, which is a comprehensive three stage land-use planning process that includes a review of our municipal agricultural policies, bylaws, & regulations, and will establish a framework for ongoing bylaw compliance for land within the ALR. The AgRefresh project will provide 3 deliverables: an update to the Official Community Plan (OCP) policy, an updated Zoning Bylaw regulation, and a Bylaw Compliance Strategy.

- a. Continue with the implementation of the AgRefresh project
- b. Support for producers in continuing to be able to access Farm Workers through the Federal Foreign Temporary Workers Program or alternate sources
- c. Support efforts to ensure that Abbotsford's profile as the largest farm gate producer in Canada is recognized by senior levels of government in their support for the community in providing funding and opportunities

#### 02 Support for Aerospace

Abbotsford has a thriving aviation and aerospace industry, which is a key driver for the local economy. In the next 5 - 10 years, the Industry Training Authority predicts this sector will need 4,000 new technical workers, structural technicians and trades labourers. The Abbotsford International Airport (YXX) is owned and operated by the City of Abbotsford and is one of the community's primary assets. It also serves the greater Fraser Valley region which is growing by leaps and bounds. YXX appeals to passengers as a lower cost and lower hassle alternative to Vancouver's International Airport (YVR). The business development objective for our international airport is to strengthen our wide, robust economic base. This includes efficient airport land-use, educational initiatives, attracting aerospace initiatives and businesses, enhancing our national presence and offering sustainable economic benefits for both city and airport. This plan maintains the vision set forth by the City of Abbotsford: to preserve community values and ensure sustainable operating practices.

- a. Support ongoing development of YXX lands
- b. Ensuring that we continue local training and development of aerospace workers to support job market demand for the industry
- c. Work with the Abbotsford Airshow Society and the Aerospace Defence and Security Expo in supporting those events continuing in the community



### 03 Support for Development and Construction

Boasting an International Airport, 2 U.S. border crossings, major rail carriers, our own University of the Fraser Valley, a Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre, a brand new BC Supreme Court Regional Court Facility, a recently updated and award winning Official Community Plan that projects how the community will develop to a population of 200,000, alongside an unwaveringly strong economy that the Conference Board of Canada describes as one of the most diverse in the country, Abbotsford is poised to be the centre of growth and investment for the region moving forward. In 2019 the City of Abbotsford recorded an all-time high of \$575 million in building permit activity. While 2020 will likely not see level of record growth, the City remains committed to ensuring our development climate remains attractive.

- a. Continue working closely with the Development and Construction Sectors to support Abbotsford being viewed as a preferable destination to do business

### 04 Support for Producers and Manufacturers

The City of Abbotsford is a part of Southwestern B.C.'s complex transportation network, integrating air and marine ports with rail lines and major roads as well as international border crossings. As part of the Asia-Pacific Gateway, it is of regional and national economic importance that Abbotsford has a safe, reliable and efficient transportation network for our producers to be able to get their goods to market. The significant congestion impacts currently being felt along our main transportation corridor of the Trans-Canada Highway directly affect the competitiveness of the City's overall economy. These impacts will only continue to compound as growth and development continue in the region.

- a. Continue working alongside the manufacturing industry to support efforts to ensure that transportation access is improved to support goods getting to market
- b. Continue working closely with the Ministry of Transportation and the Provincial Government on finding solutions for congestion along the Trans-Canada Highway #1



## Section Two

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### LONG-TERM APPROACHES | January 2022 - December 2022

The City of Abbotsford will begin re-initiating and phasing-in the following economic development actions and activities as community and market conditions permit.

#### 01 Resume of Foreign Direct Investment Attraction Efforts

Travel restrictions have impeded both in-bound and out-bound exploration of investment opportunities in Abbotsford that may be suitable for investors in our target sectors and in emerging fields including green technology and renewable energy. Our efforts will focus on re-engaging those delegations to visit Abbotsford and allow us to best present the Fraser Valley advantage for those companies, specifically in our identified target sectors of Agriculture, Aerospace, Manufacturing and Technology – as well as industries that demonstrate a value-added opportunity in support of these sectors.

#### 02 Continued Exploration of Labour Force Strategies for Growth and Resilience.

Workforce needs rates as the number one site selection criteria for business. The availability of talent, access to training and development for that staff, the cost of living and quality of life for employees all factor into that equation. Stemming from a Labour Force Analysis Study, the department will continue to implement the identified strategies from that document which includes detailed actions for each of the following segments:

- a. Facilitate collaboration between business and education partners
- b. Create an ecosystem to support labour force access to opportunities
- c. Enhance opportunities for experiential learning
- d. Improve access to Information
- e. Promote Abbotsford as a *Community of Choice*



## GIS MICROSITE TOOL

From creating ground-breaking tools for business and collecting current data on what businesses need to succeed and thrive, the City of Abbotsford is designing opportunities for investment and growth. We have continued to enhance our Geographic Information System (GIS) microsite to include cutting edge tools to help businesses obtain key information.

### FAVOURITE FEATURES INCLUDE:

- **BUSINESS DATA:** Explore industry clusters; find major employers, and information on competitors or customers.
- **COMPARE:** Compare statistical data from Abbotsford with any other community/region across Canada.
- **SITES & BUILDINGS:** View searchable MLS listings for available industrial and commercial sites and buildings in Abbotsford. Within this tab you can also seek out statistical demographic, labour force and consumer data for any specific location.
- **MOBILE FRIENDLY:** We are happy to support a mobile friendly environment with our GIS microsite.

[abbotsfordsitefinder.ca](http://abbotsfordsitefinder.ca)

### MAPPING

Visualize data with our easy-to-use mapping tool.

### DEMOGRAPHICS

Get demographic, labour force and consumer spending information.

### BUSINESS

Explore industry clusters, find major employers and discover your competitors or customers.

### COMMUNITY

Use our community profile infographic tool to explore our region.

### COMPARE

Compare Abbotsford with other communities in the region or across Canada.






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# Stay Connected.

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