

Open for Business

2014 AWARDS

Application: City of Port Coquitlam

Application Contact Person

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Question 1:

What steps have you taken to maximize economic development in your community? Please detail initiatives that improve coordination and engagement with educational institutions, other levels of government, businesses or non-profits.

We started with a strong vision and policy directives.

- We are guided by our 2011 Corporate Strategic Plan and its vision: *Port Coquitlam is a happy, vibrant, safe community with healthy engaged residents and thriving businesses, supported by sustainable resources and services.* The strategic outcome Economic Strength promotes economic development and ensures we consider the impact of City decisions on businesses.
- Our Official Community Plan supports a balanced economy and encourages a range of employment opportunities.
- Our Downtown Plan, crafted in partnership with the Port Coquitlam Downtown Business Improvement Association, has contributed to the successful revitalization of the downtown area over the past decade.

We took action to turn the vision into reality.

The Mayor's Task Force on Business Development Opportunities, active from spring 2012 to 2013, was tasked with removing barriers and providing support for companies doing business in and with the City. Members included three Councillors, representatives of the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce, Port Coquitlam Business Improvement Association and Urban Development Institute, local businesses and the development community. The Task Force increased our understanding of the business community and identified clear, actionable items to ensure the City has a customer focus, a business-friendly approach, reasonable taxes, a focus on local purchasing, and excellent communications. *View the report, adopted by a unanimous Council decision, at www.portcoquitlam.ca/BDO.*

We implemented the following key directions.

Customer-focus:

- Invested in customer-service training for City staff who deal with the public and business community.

Business-friendly approach:

- With input from developers and businesses, in 2013 and 2014 the City has implemented faster application, inspection and approval processes; introduced policies to promote business viability; and simplified business regulations in our bylaws.
- City business-promotion initiatives have included:
 - Hosting a business networking event in 2012.
 - Introducing the PoCo Best Biz Awards in 2013, with categories representing the spectrum of local businesses. The awards extensively promote all nominees and encourage public participation through a People's Choice Award. The awards ceremony, open to all local companies, celebrates local businesses and provides networking opportunities.
 - Planning for an economic development theme for the City's 2015 calendar.
 - Offering an artist-in-residence program providing free space for local artists to work, teach, mentor and show their art.
 - Holding a weekly Farmers Market that supports and promotes local small businesses and the downtown area.
- Partnerships with businesses have included:
 - Ongoing support of the Port Coquitlam Business Improvement Association and the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce with in-kind and financial assistance.
 - Ongoing partnership with BCIT to offer a management training diploma program to City staff at City Hall.
 - Partnering with a local cookie company on the Smart Cookie program when introducing new corporate policies. The Crazy Cookie Company is a supportive fundraising organization run by the non-profit New View Society, which provides services to those struggling with mental illness.
 - Partnering with TELUS to introduce a City-wide fibre-to-the-premises network for faster internet access.

Reasonable taxes:

- Conducted a line-by-line core services review in 2012 and introduced Continuous Improvement Assessments (in-depth reviews) of all City functions and areas in 2013 to ensure City services are as efficient and cost-effective as possible.

Focus on local purchasing:

- A review of the City purchasing policy in 2014 includes investigating how to incorporate local purchasing into the City's practices to maximize economic development in Port Coquitlam, and a workshop with the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce.

Excellent communications:

- Launched an online Business and Development Hub at www.portcoquitlam.ca/business in 2014, with clear, comprehensive and user-friendly information and resources for businesses of all types, along with new streamlined applications.
- Distribute a newsletter to businesses each fall in conjunction with business licence renewal notices.

Question 2:**A) How has your municipal government directly recognized the contributions of small businesses in your community?**

The City recognizes the important role businesses play in creating a vibrant community, and has undertaken a number of actions and initiatives to support and strengthen local businesses. Small businesses make up the majority of Port Coquitlam's businesses and are the primary beneficiaries of the City's economic development work.

Port Coquitlam Business Improvement Association (BIA) – More than 300 businesses operate in the City's downtown area, most of them small businesses. The City maintains a strong relationship with the BIA, whose mandate is to promote and advocate for downtown property owners. The City also provides funding and in-kind support for the BIA year-round.

PoCo Best Biz Awards – The City launched the annual PoCo Best Biz Awards in 2013 to recognize the contributions businesses make to the community, to celebrate their accomplishments and to encourage residents to shop locally for goods and services. The categories were selected to represent companies of all sizes and types, including home-based businesses. The City promotes all nominees through print advertising, a website (www.portcoquitlam.ca/bizawards), and social media posts to close to 6,000 Facebook followers. The 2014 winners will be featured as a "business of the month" in the City's 2015 calendar (see below). The awards ceremony is also a business celebration and networking event.

Mayor's Task Force on Business Development Opportunities (BDOTF) – Launched in 2012, this task force focused on finding ways to make Port Coquitlam more business-friendly. Local businesses played a major role in shaping its work, with significant representation on the task force and participation in an extensive consultation process that included a survey and the PoCo Biz Forum (see below). The City has taken action on each of the recommendations in its report (*available at www.portcoquitlam.ca/BDO*).

PoCo Biz Forum – Held in October 2012, this well-attended event hosted by the BDOTF provided a networking opportunity for local businesses. The event included a trade show with free display space, a presentation on the City's business survey results and discussion of how the City can become more business-friendly, and a panel of several prominent local companies that shared their success stories, challenges and opportunities.

2015 City Calendar – The City's annual calendar will have an economic development theme in 2015 in order to promote and celebrate local businesses. Winners of the 2014 Best Biz Awards will be prominently featured. The calendar is delivered through the local newspaper to 18,800 households and can be picked up for free to all residents of the City.

Annual Mayor's May Day Breakfast – Each year, a local business is recognized for the work it does in the community.

Centennial Barbecue – In 2013, the City collaborated with the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce to recognize the long-standing businesses in the community at one of the events held to celebrate the City's 100th birthday.

Broadway Business Fair – The City hosted a business fair in September 2011 to help promote Broadway Street companies following a major road reconstruction project on Broadway Street. More than 35 businesses took advantage of the free outdoor trade show space.

B) Provide details on a small business(s) that you would like the Roundtable to recognize for their innovation and their positive effect on your community.

Shawn Lam Video – This local business received the Home-Based Business Award in the 2013 PoCo Best Biz Awards for demonstrating significant growth, sustainability and excellent customer service. The business has grown from a technology start-up into a global video production company working in locations around the world. Shawn Lam has taught at BCIT, has been recognized for three international video production awards, has written more than 60 published video production articles and product reviews and is a contributing author to two video editing books. The company is helping to support other small businesses in Port Coquitlam by contributing his services in the development of a promotional video for the 2014 PoCo Best Biz Awards. The company website is www.shawnlam.ca.

Question 3:

What measures have you taken to ensure tax fairness for businesses in your community? Examples may include: freezing property tax rates, balancing the ratio between commercial and residential property tax rates, freezing or reducing annual budgets.

2014 Budget

The City undertook a rigorous budget-preparation process for 2014, guided by Council's desire for the City to run as efficiently as possible, in order to meet community needs and address the public's decreasing appetite for higher municipal taxes. This work included:

- A thorough review of operating and capital budgets,
- Seeking new opportunities for savings, with a focus on areas that would not affect service to the public, such as eliminating vacant positions or finding alternative ways to deliver services.
- A cost-reduction exercise in which departments identified the potential changes to services if they were required to operate with only 90% of their budget.
- Divisions in each department being asked to take a creative approach to identifying potential existing and new sources of revenue, and to articulate how they intend to further explore these options.
- Extensive public consultation on proposed cost-savings measures and planned expenditures in the 2014 budget.

By ensuring all City functions are as efficient and effective as possible, this rigorous approach benefitted all taxpayers. The savings achieved – more than \$400,000 – were passed on to taxpayers through lower property taxes. For example, the average single-family home received a small property tax decrease of 0.21% in 2014, and the average business received a small property tax increase of 0.29% – significantly smaller than in past years.

Consideration of the ratio between commercial and residential property taxes:

In establishing property tax rates, Council considers the tax ratios of each property classification in light of the tax ratios of other municipalities in the Metro Vancouver; in particular, it seeks to ensure Port Coquitlam's tax rates are competitive to those of the nearby jurisdictions of Port Moody and Coquitlam. In 2013, the City's business and light industry tax ratio were close to the Metro Vancouver average. The light industry ratio of 3.54 is lower than the regional average of 4.1613, and the business ratio of 3.103 is slightly below the average of 3.2897. These ratios are monitored each year to ensure Port Coquitlam's tax rates are competitive with those of other Metro Vancouver cities.

Continuous Improvement Assessments

In 2014, the City implemented Continuous Improvement Assessments (CIA), a comprehensive review of each City service area that includes close scrutiny of current activities, research of government and private-sector best practices, and identification of opportunities to improve. Each CIA team includes a private-sector content expert – if possible, a business that operates in the community – to ensure the City's operations reflect real-world best practices. CIAs will be conducted for three service areas each year and are an important tool for the City to ensure a rigorous and ongoing review of services and processes, and to continually seek opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness that will benefit our business and residential taxpayers.

Question 4:**What steps have been taken to reduce regulatory red tape for businesses operating in your community?****Creation of the Mayor's Task Force on Business Development Opportunities (BDOTF)**

The Mayor's Task Force on Business Development Opportunities was launched in 2012 to determine how the City could make it easier for businesses to succeed in Port Coquitlam. Members included three Councillors, representatives of the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce, Port Coquitlam Business Improvement Association and Urban Development Institute, local businesses and the development community. The task force reviewed municipal processes that impact business development, engaged an economic consultant to assist its understanding of economic development, surveyed local businesses to identify opportunities and constraints, and involved local businesses in making its recommendations.

Implementation of enhanced development application and business licence processes:

- A new online Business and Development Hub on the City's website (www.portcoquitlam.ca/business) brings together all information related to doing business, developing, building and renovating, including checklists and step-by-step guidance for common processes. To ensure it meets the needs of the target audience, the hub was developed and fine-tuned with input from local businesses, including an online survey.
- Augmented funding to enhance staff training promotes a positive experience for businesses interacting with the City.
- Streamlined building and development application forms are posted on the Business and Development Hub.
- Plans are in place to implement electronic inspection scheduling and mobile technology to improve the building inspection process.
- The City's development processes have been improved and clarified by:
 - Revising application handouts to create user-friendly materials with input from businesses, and
 - Implementing the online Prospero file management system throughout the organization.
- The City's zoning and parking regulations – which were consolidated and replaced with a simplified, user-friendly Zoning Bylaw in 2008 and amended parking requirements – have been further refined to minimize requirements to rezone as the needs of businesses change.
- A strengthened file manager approach has provided more consistent oversight of building and development applications and provided a go-to staff person for businesses to contact.
- Development permit processes and the Building and Plumbing Bylaw were streamlined and revised in 2013 to facilitate renovations in businesses by reducing administrative and regulatory requirements for façade improvements, minor alterations and tenant improvements.
- The City reviewed its fees and charges for development approvals to ensure they are competitive with other local governments.

Other efforts to reduce red tape for businesses

- In 2014, the City introduced myPortCoquitlam, which enables property owners to receive and manage their City licences, taxes and utility levies online. The free service provides businesses the added function of viewing their utility use history online.
- The City collaborated with the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce and two other cities in the Tri-City region to introduce Intermunicipal Business Licences in 2013, enabling businesses that physically provide services throughout the region to obtain a single business licence.
- Businesses have been able to renew their business licences online for a number of years.

Providing a voice for business

The City regularly seeks the perspective and input of businesses to ensure government processes are as business-friendly as possible. Examples include:

- Representation from the BIA on Council's Smart Growth Committee.
- A strong communications program inviting the participation of businesses in review of development applications and projects such as road improvements.
- Involvement of local businesses in review of City processes such as fleet management and purchasing policies.

Question 5:

What steps has your community taken, in cooperation with the small business community, to improve opportunities for First Nations, new Canadians, youth, seniors or persons with disabilities to find employment opportunities to address local workforce needs?

Opportunities for Seniors

The City provides both volunteer and contract employment for senior citizens through Wilson Centre, including volunteering to work with youth or in the kitchen, and contracted teaching positions providing programming for other seniors. The program helps provide necessary services to the community while keeping seniors active, healthy and involved.

Youth Employment Training Program

This City program provides life and employment skills to marginalized and at-risk youth by providing them with access to leadership and education programs in the City's Recreation Division, including training to become a lifeguard. Michelle Hill, a participant who recently completed her lifesaving training, noted: "Before I got the awesome opportunity to go through the lifesaving courses I thought that I couldn't accomplish a goal. Don't listen to people that say you can't, remember, people do believe in you even if you think no one does!" The City is actively working to expand this program to local businesses to provide additional training options for at-risk youth.

Community Integration Services Society

This non-profit organization provides services that enable adults with developmental disabilities to acquire skills to enter the workforce. Recognizing the value of this work, the City worked closely with the society to help it become established in Port Coquitlam, for example, by providing guidance and direction through the zoning and business licence application process.

Teens Against Graffiti

This City program offer youths volunteer employment assisting local businesses in removing graffiti from their buildings. The program provides youth with life skills and helps them build relationships with local businesses that may be potential future employers. TAG also supports businesses by providing them with volunteer labour to remove graffiti and helping to ensure their buildings are welcoming to customers. A number of businesses have supported this initiative through in-kind donations of food, refreshments and paint supplies. Since the program's inception, over 1,700 illegal tags have been removed.

Intergenerational Dinner Night

Seniors and youth come together once a year to prepare a turkey dinner for the community. This multi-generational event, supported by the City and local businesses, is the culmination of youth training in culinary arts that includes Food Safe certification. The skills gained by the youth are highly transferable and assist them in finding employment.

Youth Week

At the City's annual Youth Week celebrations each May, local businesses are invited to participate in an annual forum for area youth, to make connections for future employment as well as provide product and resource information.

Kwikwetlem First Nation

The City invites the Kwikwetlem First Nation to participate in the annual May Day Parade and other civic events, and has also promoted its economic development activities, such as art shows showcasing First Nation artists, and bicycle tours.

Port Coquitlam Sports Alliance

The City created and funded the Port Coquitlam Sports Alliance, a coordinating body for sports organization in Port Coquitlam. The Sports Alliance works with sports organizations to provide youth with marketable skills through mentoring, coaching and refereeing programs.

Question 6:

If your municipality were to be the recipient of the \$10,000 award, how would you spend it to support local small business within the spirit of the Accord principles?

The City of Port Coquitlam will use the award funds to create new programs to support small business in our community, to enhance existing economic development work, and to strengthen partnerships with local educational institutes and business organizations.

The following new programs have been identified as ideas that could showcase and connect small businesses:

Biz Alley – This small-scale home show would be held during the City's popular annual May Day Festival, which is attended by thousands of residents from Port Coquitlam and other communities. Debuting in 2015, Biz Alley would offer free display space to all local businesses.

- *Benefits to small businesses:* provides an opportunity to showcase goods and services and build their local customer base.

Business Enterprise Centre – The City would develop an online resource centre including a searchable business directory, a networking platform where businesses could connect and share ideas, and access to resources and information.

- *Benefits to small businesses:* promotes businesses to local customers, provides networking and B2B opportunities, provides convenient access to resources, strengthens the local supply chain.

Youth Entrepreneurial Program – This mentorship program would target youth under age 25 who have innovative entrepreneurial ideas but lack the experience or resources to move their idea into action. The program would match young entrepreneurs with local business mentors to refine their business idea, formulate a plan and present it to a panel of judges. Tying into the annual PoCo Best Biz Awards, the winner(s) would be awarded a bursary to help make their business idea a success.

- *Benefits to small businesses:* provides training and mentorship for future small business leaders and the local workforce, promotes and builds goodwill for local businesses.

Strengthening partnerships to support small businesses

The City is partnering with BCIT to provide on-site classes to our employees towards an Associate Certificate in Leadership. Course assignments can be directly applied to City initiatives, and the capstone project for the first semester was: "What can the City do to help support small business?" Some of the ideas above were generated through this project.

Using the award funds, the BCIT Leadership team would work with City staff and community partners such as Douglas College, the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce and the Port Coquitlam Business Improvement Association to implement one or more of these ideas.

The resulting strengthened relationships with these community partners could also lead to future economic development initiatives that benefit local businesses.

News Release Quote: *A regional news release will be distributed by the province for each 2014 Open for Business Award recipient. Please provide a quote that includes details on how the award will be used to support small business success.*

Quote from Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore:

“Small businesses are the cornerstone of our local economy, and we’re very pleased to be recognized for our efforts to both support small businesses and to create an environment where all businesses can grow and prosper,” said Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore. “The award funds will help the City work with community partners to develop new programs that focus attention on our businesses such as a Biz Alley trade show, an online resource centre, or a mentorship program for youth entrepreneurs.”

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