

# City of Surrey Economic Strategy 2024



## Engagement Summary

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Surrey is in the process of developing a new Economic Strategy. This strategy development process includes research and engagements with the business community in Surrey. Three targeted engagement sessions with members of Surrey’s business community were organized to help understand the challenges and opportunities related to **Surrey’s innovation ecosystem, industrial land and manufacturing** and **local business vibrancy and support**.

Workshop sessions gave stakeholders an opportunity to engage in dialogue on themes that emerged from previous stakeholder engagement and surveys that occurred prior to the Economic Strategy engagement process. The **purpose** of the workshops was to deepen the City’s understanding of the Economic Strategy themes identified in previous engagement with business stakeholder groups. The following executive summary encapsulates the highlights, key takeaways, and proposed actions resulting from these sessions.

## Consultation Session #1: Surrey’s Innovation Ecosystem

Date: Tuesday, June 13th, 2023

Location: City Hall, Committee Room A&B 1E

During the first workshop, attendees engaged in in-depth discussions about Surrey’s Innovation Ecosystem, exploring opportunities for growth, challenges faced by businesses, and potential strategies to address them. Top themes that emerged included the need for increased City **Investment in Innovation Infrastructure, Collaboration, a People and Environment-Centred Economy, Marketing and Branding**, the importance of **Nurturing Existing Talent and Businesses**, more efficient and supportive **Land Use Regulations and Processes** and strengths and gaps in Surrey’s **Innovation Assets**. We also heard suggestions for that there is a need for more space for **Testing, Trails and Competitions**.

## Consultation Session #2: Industrial Land and Manufacturing

Date: Thursday, June 22nd, 2023

Location: Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Surrey Campus, Conference Centre

The second workshop focused on Industrial Land and Manufacturing and provided a platform for stakeholders to share their perspectives on the city’s current strengths, gaps and potential areas of improvement for the City’s industrial sector. Top themes that emerged included the need for more efficient municipal **Land Use and Processes, Regulations and Planning**, a **People and Environment-Centred Economy**, a need for more **Investments into Infrastructure and Industrial Businesses**, the issue of **Taxes, Costs and Incentives**, the challenges of **Land Scarcity and Space**, the need for increased **Workforce Readiness** and **Collaboration**, keeping on top of **Future**



**Trends**, as well as the need for more **Marketing and Branding** and **Engagement** with the community and stakeholders. Suggested economic metrics to keep track of including those related to economic productivity such as jobs or productivity per square foot, as well as those related to a people and environment-centred economy, such as affordable housing and crime levels.

### Consultation Session #3: Local Business Vibrancy and Support

Date: Tuesday, July, 18th, 2023

Location: City Hall Atrium

Consultation session #3 was hosted as an open house that was a dynamic forum for both business owners and the general public to engage with the Economic Strategy. Attendees had the opportunity to interact with visual board displays by providing feedback on Local Business Vibrancy and Support. The session highlighted feedback such as the need for reduced government red tape and a more livable, people and environment-centred economy, a need for more investment in Surrey's **Talent and Workforce**, the sharing of **Data and Market Insights** with businesses, and more supportive and transparent **City Processes**. We heard that most participants thought that future trends such as remote and hybrid work, keeping up with emerging skills and training, automation, robotics AI and digitization, as well as the immigrant workforce would have positive impacts on businesses in Surrey. We also heard that small and medium-sized businesses needed more **support, skills and development training, networking and collaboration opportunities, workforce retention and access to capital** to succeed in Surrey. Finally, top suggestions for how Surrey can become the most livable city in Canada include more **Transportation Planning, Nightlife, Culture and Entertainment** and an **Inclusive Economy**.

### Next Steps

The engagement results and findings from all three consultation sessions will inform the development of Surrey's new Economic Strategy, including a long-term vision and priorities for implementation. Other factors that will be considered include feasibility, City priorities in the short, medium and long term, as well as other considerations.

# INTRODUCTION

## Project Background

The City of Surrey is in the process of developing the Economic Strategy 2024. This strategy development process includes research and engagements with the business community in Surrey.

Three targeted engagement sessions with members of Surrey's business community were organized to help understand the challenges and opportunities related to:

- 1) Surrey's innovation ecosystem
- 2) Industrial land and manufacturing
- 3) Local business vibrancy and support

## Purpose and Objectives

Workshop sessions gave stakeholders an opportunity to engage in dialogue on themes that emerged from previous stakeholder engagement and surveys that occurred prior to the Economic Strategy engagement process. Modus facilitated three workshop sessions, each focusing on a particular theme and a specific set of stakeholders.

The **purpose** of the workshops was to:

- Deepen the City's understanding of the Economic Strategy themes identified in previous engagement with business stakeholder groups

The specific **objectives** of the workshops were to:

- Inform participants about the Engagement Strategy themes identified from prior engagement with business stakeholder groups
- Give participants an opportunity to discuss the relevant workshop theme and listen to various perspectives.
- Bring stakeholders together to encourage excitement around the Economic Strategy and future opportunities.
- Engage at least 15-20 people per workshop

# WHAT WE DID

## Consultation Sessions

Based on Engagement Strategy themes developed from prior engagement with business stakeholders, we hosted three consultation sessions to provide an opportunity for in-person dialogue. A list of engaged organizations can be found in Appendix A. Consultation session topics are as follows:

- **Consultation Session #1: Surrey's Innovation Ecosystem**
- **Consultation Session #2: Industrial Land and Manufacturing**
- **Consultation Session #3: Local Business Vibrancy and Support**

## Discussion Format

Each consultation session had an associated number of engagement questions, as seen in the section below. A presentation on the new Economic Strategy was given at the beginning of consultation session 1 & 2 by City staff, which can be found in Appendix D. Conversations for each consultation sessions 1 & 2 were hosted in rounds, one for each engagement question. Participants, facilitators and notetakers remained at the same table throughout all rounds of discussion. For each round, the facilitator posed an engagement question to the group and asked participants to write down their thoughts and responses on sticky notes (one idea per sticky note), and placed them on a table sheet. Table sheets for both consultation sessions 1 & 2 can be found in Appendix B. Consultation session #3 was hosted as a public open house that was a dynamic forum for both business owners and the general public to engage with the Economic Strategy. Attendees had the opportunity to interact with visual board displays (as seen in Appendix B) by providing feedback to the questions on Local Business Vibrancy and Support.

## Engagement Questions

### Consultation Session #1:

1. What does innovation in Surrey mean to you? Why is it important?
2. Surrey aspires to be an innovation hub. What are Surrey's innovation strengths? What are some opportunities and gaps that Surrey faces in becoming an innovation hub?
3. What partnership opportunities/ideas exists between the City and your organization and/or others in advancing Surrey's innovation agenda



## Consultation Session #2

1. What can the City do to support job creation and attract high-value industries into our industrial areas?
2. What metrics should Surrey use to assess the value of different opportunities in developing Surrey's industrial areas?

## Consultation Session #3

1. What do you believe is important when starting a business in Surrey?
2. What business support services and programs would you like to see in Surrey?
3. What assets will increase livability in Surrey?
4. What is missing? What are some types of businesses that could be successful but are missing in each town centre?
5. Which one of these factors will have the greatest impact on businesses in Surrey?
6. Where in the Metro Vancouver region do you live and work?
7. What do small and medium-sized businesses need in order to thrive in Surrey?
8. How can Surrey become the newest modern and most livable city in Canada?

## Graphic Recording

A graphic recorder was present at consultation session 1& 2 and was responsible for creating a graphic recording of table discussions. The results of these graphic recordings can be seen in the "What We Heard" chapter of this document.



## Participation

	Day/Time	Location	Number of Participants	Number of Businesses/Organizations
<b>Workshop #1: Surrey's Innovation Ecosystem</b>	Tuesday, June 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2023 1-2:30pm	City Hall, Committee Room A&B 1E	23	18
<b>Workshop #2: Industrial Land and Manufacturing</b>	Thursday, June 22 <sup>nd</sup> 1-2:30pm	Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Surrey Campus, Conference Centre	26	22
<b>Workshop #3: Local Business Vibrancy and Support</b>	July 18 <sup>th</sup>	City Hall, Atrium	43	28



## WHAT WE HEARD

Results from the three consultation sessions are summarized in this report. Open-ended questions were summarized based on key themes that surfaced through participant comments. The report is structured around the three consultation sessions.

### Consultation Session #1: Surrey's Innovation Ecosystem

#### Question 1: What does innovation in Surrey mean to you? Why is it important?

When asked about what does innovation in Surrey mean to them, participants made comments that related to the following themes.

##### **Investment in Innovation Infrastructure (19)**

Participants suggested that there is a need for more investment in innovation infrastructure and access to resources in Surrey. In particular, participants suggested a need for increased support for start-ups and businesses, which can include connecting small businesses to tools they need to grow, a one-stop shop for resources and connections, as well as programs such as rent subsidies and incentives, which can attract companies and lead to industry breakthroughs. We also heard suggestions for the City to be more aware of where the demand for resources and investment are, and to know the areas and industries to best invest in.

We heard recommendations for the City to create a database to quantify investment and resource needs. This can include a heat map of investments, tracking businesses that need support, access to fibre etc. Some participants wanted to see a strong vision for investment outside of the City Centre, while others wanted to see the city support companies grow and scale up, which requires infrastructure and space.

##### **General Definitions of Innovation (15)**

We heard many definitions and understandings of innovation and what it means for the City of Surrey. Some participants felt that innovation means that an organization/business/city is the first one to develop something new through trial and error. Similarly, we also heard suggestions that innovation was about investing in R&D (research and development) and bringing new ideas to market. Others mentioned that innovation can mean people who are innovative, as well as future-proofing and solving new challenges.

We also heard definitions and understandings of innovation that were industry-specific such as innovation meaning minimizing waste through the circular economy and community-based health care.

Some participants shared requirements for innovation to happen, including the enabling of capital and a strong vision. Finally, we heard about the benefits of innovation including job creation and increasing the City's competitiveness with other cities.

### **Collaboration (10)**

We heard that innovation is about collaboration across multiple levels of the economy. Specifically, we heard that innovation is about connecting people, teamwork and a collaborative approach to working with industry, government, and academia to bring different perspectives together. Participants shared that this could look like connecting small businesses to resources and partnerships and linking the economic hubs of Surrey and Vancouver better. We also heard about the need for more hospital partnerships in Surrey.

### **People-Centred Economy (9)**

Participants shared that innovation is more than ideas, businesses and products, and also includes a healthy, livable and sustainable place for people to live. In particular, we heard that innovation is important for the health of Surrey's residents, especially for youth and an ageing population, and that true innovation is inclusive and avoids leaving communities behind. This can include intergenerational and low-cost housing, a rebalanced economic structure, mitigating climate change, an efficient transportation system and meeting other needs of communities. Some participants suggested that there is a choice between encouraging innovation for jobs, ideas or quality of life.

### **Marketing and Branding (8)**

We heard that another aspect of innovation is related to talent attraction and making it attractive for people to live and work in Surrey. Some participants suggested that this might involve creating a strong brand image for the city and raising more awareness about Surrey as a destination that supports businesses. This might involve creating a database to understand the experiences of businesses in Surrey and to keep track of new businesses being established and businesses that leave the city. Understanding these factors can help the City build a narrative of its role in supporting innovation. We heard some suggestions that the City should focus on a few key industries to promote and encourage, to make Surrey a distinct place for doing business, such as digital health and virtual care.

### **Nurturing Existing Talent and Businesses (6)**

Some Participants shared that innovation doesn't always have to be about creating something new and reinventing the wheel. It can also be about nurturing existing talent and businesses through optimizing policy, looking at precedents elsewhere and contextualizing for Surrey's needs.

## **Innovation Assets (4)**

We heard that thinking about what innovation means also means thinking about innovation assets. Specifically, participants shared some examples of Surrey's innovation assets, including being close to the border, a friendly climate for new immigrants to settle, a growing health industry and located by multiple heavy trucking routes. We also heard about gaps and opportunities in Surrey's innovation assets including a lack of heavy industrial land specific to manufacturing and opportunities for creating a clean transportation network.

## **Land Use Regulations (4)**

Some participants shared their views about the barriers to innovation in Surrey, including restrictive height requirements for buildings, limitations and conflicts due to zoning, outdated community plans and lack of suitable land for certain industries. In terms of zoning, for example, some participants mentioned that the nature of heavy industrial use is different today as compared to when the relevant zoning bylaws were created. We also heard that it is hard to find suitable land for a food hub.

## **Other (14)**

Other ideas we heard about the meaning of innovation include the need to focus on strengths, and the need to get a return from innovation. We also heard about what innovation means to specific industries such as transportation where innovation can mean the ability to expand transportation options by creating alternative fuels.



**Question 2: Surrey aspires to be an innovation hub. What are Surrey’s innovation strengths? What are some opportunities and gaps that Surrey faces in becoming an innovation hub?**

### **Strengths**

When asked about Surrey’s innovation strengths, participants made comments that related to the following themes.

#### Innovation Assets (15)

We heard that Surrey has strong innovation assets such as buying power, health and robotics industries, industrial land, urban planning opportunities and proximity to aerospace companies and the US border. Other geographical and land assets we heard about included Surrey’s rural and agricultural land and the eagerness for its farming community to use new technologies.

#### People-Centred Economy (3)

We also heard about the social assets of the City including the City’s diversity, youthfulness, and a growing and educated population. Specifically, a supportive immigration policy makes it easier for educated people to come to Surrey as compared to some other countries such as the United States. We also heard that a key strength

for Surrey is having one of the largest school districts in B.C. and a large corresponding population of youth, who may require mentorship and skill-building initiatives to support them in participating in Surrey's innovation ecosystem.

#### Investment in Innovation Infrastructure (2)

Some participants expressed satisfaction in seeing Surrey's efforts in enhancing community assets and parks, which are key to a people-centred innovation economy.

#### Collaboration (2)

Some participants expressed appreciation for supportive government at all levels. We also heard that a key innovation strength for Surrey is its proximity to the United States, which has a lot to do with business success, relationships and partnerships.

#### Marketing and Branding (1)

We heard that there is a need to market Surrey's strengths like the health and tech sector.

### **Gaps**

When asked about what gaps and opportunities Surrey faces in becoming an innovation hub, participants made comments that related to the following themes.

#### Investment in Innovation Infrastructure (19)

Many participants suggested that the key gap and opportunities for Innovation in Surrey was a lack of innovation infrastructure. This includes transit accessibility and innovative public transportation and a lack of programs that support innovation such as investments and grants for start-ups and key industries like the clean energy sector. Investments and grants can help build a critical mass for innovation in Surrey, which is currently lacking. In particular, we heard that there is still a lack of big companies focused on heavy industrial in Surrey. In addition, we heard suggestions for Surrey's innovation focus to move beyond the City Centre and that areas of growth outside of this key neighbourhood need infrastructure as well, to promote innovation in these areas. We also heard that once an innovation ecosystem is mature and established, there is a need for policies and programs to maintain it.

#### People and Environment-Centred Economy (18)

We heard suggestions that Surrey has some significant gaps and opportunities for creating a people and environment-centred economy, which is critical for innovation. This includes challenges with hospital access for a growing population and an adequate amount of schools and doctors being educated. We also heard about the need for Surrey to encourage more opportunities for women to participate in the economy and Surrey's innovation ecosystem. Barriers to women's participation included housing for young families and a lack of childcare. We also heard that it's important for Surrey to support young people in participating in its economy and innovation ecosystem. Barriers

to youth participation include long commutes, difficulty getting around without a car and a high cost of living. Finally, other opportunities we heard about included creating more gardens, skating rinks, community events, public space and other civic amenities, as well as the protection of the natural environment.

### Marketing and Branding (11)

We heard that Surrey needs to promote more industries and focus more on how to share existing success stories to provide Surrey's innovative companies more exposure. Some participants mentioned that Surrey is currently unknown on the global market and that the City needs more marketing to encourage businesses and people to come to Surrey. In addition, we heard that Surrey is currently struggling with attracting talent from other cities, as most people and businesses are attracted to Vancouver for its "cool factor", as Surrey has parks and rivers, which are not accessible as those in Vancouver and it is known for being a mostly residential suburb. Some participants suggested that this requires Surrey to create better branding. Finally, we heard that there is a need for the City to raise awareness of underutilized programs that promote innovation, like programs run by the Provincial Government.

### Nurturing Existing Talent and Businesses (11)

Some participants mentioned that innovation is not always about coming up with something new, as there are already innovative companies, businesses and people in Surrey that need support. We heard that a major gap and opportunity in Surrey is the optimization of existing systems. This could include providing companies with the tools and resources they need to grow, reducing the costs of doing business, supporting students to work in Surrey, engaging youth and matching technology with farming.

### Collaboration (10)

We heard that Surrey could do better in supporting collaboration to encourage the innovation sector in the City. This might look like the City adopting innovative technologies that are created by companies that are located in Surrey, and the City providing support for businesses to grow and reach out to potential customers by providing contacts for clients or partners. We also heard suggestions that the City should work more closely with the Federal and Provincial governments, as there is a current lack of support and investment from senior levels of government in Surrey's innovation economy.

### Land Use Regulations (8)

Some participants shared that land use regulations are a significant gap and opportunity for Surrey to become an innovation hub. This includes underutilized land in Surrey, as it has a large number of parking lots and underutilized commercial areas with a lot of opportunities for new businesses. This could mean that parking lots and underutilized commercial areas rezoned for uses that support the innovation economy.. We also heard about the challenges with onerous permitting processes, as the process to make



use of industrial land takes too long, and zoning bylaws are too restrictive and out of date for innovative sectors. We heard suggestions for more flexibility with current land uses, and creating stronger long-term economic plans and strategies with a strong vision and end goal.

#### Innovation Assets (6)

We heard that some key gaps for Surrey in becoming an innovation hub include Canada's relatively small population, a lack of venture capital funding, a lack of fibre optic infrastructure, and a lack of big 'anchor' companies in key sectors that can attract other companies. We also heard that there is a shortage of staff in the City to promote the innovation economy.

#### Other (2)

Other gaps that we heard about include the need for quality insurance to ensure that the products and solutions that are created by Surrey businesses meet a certain level of quality. We also heard about workforce equity, as some feel that company profits should be shared equally between employees and their employer.

### **Question 3: What partnership opportunities/ideas exist between the City and your organization and/or others in advancing Surrey's innovation agenda**

#### **Investment in Innovation Infrastructure (10)**

We heard that investment in innovation infrastructure is a key area for partnership opportunities/ideas to advance Surrey's innovation agenda. Key opportunities and ideas in this area include social infrastructure suggestions for the City to provide grants, subsidies and funding for small businesses and convening potential partners, and suggestions for hard infrastructure such as the need for more hydro stations and providing City-owned land for the development of hydro stations. Ideas for increasing access to funding include providing information on opportunities for funding, especially for start-ups.

#### **Collaboration (9)**

Some participants felt that the City could do more to increase collaboration in the innovation sector. This can include promoting public partnerships with senior levels of government and First Nations, to encourage innovation and create an anchor for the innovation economy to organize around, increasing access to the workforce, providing programs and services for capacity building for businesses, and partnering with the Cascadia Innovation Hub. We also heard about opportunities for the City to become a convener and create connections and promote partnerships between different projects, companies and sectors.

## **Testing, Trials and Competitions (7)**

We heard suggestions that the City could encourage testing, trials and competitions for new ideas, products and solutions. Specifically, we heard that there is an opportunity for the City to encourage testing on new mobility options, robotics and clinical medical trials. Participants also suggested some policies and programs that can encourage these such as creating regulatory sandboxes for testing and trials of new technologies and services, creating design competitions to bring new ideas to the table and creating a civic innovation lab like the joint entity created by the City of Burnaby and Simon Fraser University.

## **Marketing and Branding (6)**

Some participants suggested that there is an opportunity for the City to do more in terms of marketing and branding. In particular, we heard suggestions for the City to convene existing innovative companies, businesses and individuals to work together on a marketing and promotion strategy for Surrey. We also heard that the City could work with academic institutions to build media attention and excitement for the innovation sector. Finally, we heard suggestions that the City should attract three to five major companies to relocate to Surrey in order to create a critical mass.

## **People-Centred Economy (5)**

Participants shared that there are quite a few opportunities for Surrey to support a people-centred economy including supporting transportation options to hospitals, designing for livability, mandatory waste separation, promoting green transportation and renovations and the adoption of LED lights. One participant provided the example of the Korean government providing 50% funding for sustainable products.

## **Engagement (4)**

We heard that a key opportunity for Surrey to work with the innovation sector is to continue to engage companies, people and other levels of government in the development of the City's innovation sector. We also heard a need to continue working on the future of Innovation Boulevard, which will require stakeholders at the table to drive the vision forward and to co-create policy initiatives to reduce barriers for life science start-ups in Surrey and support the scale-up of businesses. We also heard about a need to engage with different sectors.

## **Innovation Assets (3)**

We heard that some partnership opportunities could include creating new innovation assets in Surrey, such as establishing more hotels and convention centers, so visitors do not have to stay in neighbouring Cities like Richmond and Langley, as well as working with businesses to bring anchor tenants to create an entertainment district in Surrey. We also heard that Surrey can build on its health innovation assets by supporting existing initiatives such as the Gateway 2 project that trains doctors and allied health professionals to work together.

## Land Use Regulations and Processes (3)

Some participants suggested that there is an opportunity for the City to make it easier for businesses to navigate land use regulations and processes, including making it easier to open a business in Surrey, by expediting permit approval times, and promoting economic hubs that make the permitting process smoother, such as a health sector hub, a clean tech hub and a sustainability hub. Other suggestions include changing the procurement process for the City to promote more local innovative businesses and leveraging future development opportunities.

## Nurturing Existing Talent and Businesses (2)

We heard that the City could support businesses more, including training the workforce with purpose-built facilities.



Figure 1: Graphic Summary for Consultation Session #1

## Consultation Session #2: Industrial Land and Manufacturing

### Question 1: What can the City do to support job creation and attract high-value industries into our industrial areas?

When asked about what the City can do to support job creation and attract high-value industries into Surrey's industrial areas, participants made comments that related to the following themes.

#### **Processes, Regulations and Planning (41)**

Many participants suggested that the City could do a better job of making its processes, regulations and planning more efficient and conducive to job creation and attracting high-value industries to Surrey's industrial areas. We heard many suggestions for the need to review permitting processes, planning and policies, as onerous permitting processes, policies and land use regulations create barriers and missed opportunities due to the fast-paced nature of business and the need to be very competitive. Specific suggestions for process, regulation and planning changes include reviewing parking ratios, as not every business needs a vast amount of parking, reducing the time it takes to adhere to development permit areas, creating incentives for multi-story development and defining the difference between heavy and light industrial. We also heard that the City could cut the red tape getting in the way of setting up businesses, by taking on more of a facilitator role for building permits, development permits and tenant permits. We heard suggestions that the City could create new policies and planning incentives that encourage industrial development.

#### **People and Environment-Centred Economy (30)**

We heard that it is important to support a people and environment-centred economy and build a city with people in mind, as this can promote job creation and attract high-value industries to Surrey's industrial areas. Many participants suggested that it is important for Surrey to promote livability so that people that work in the city can stay within the city. We heard that the cost of living and long commutes is causing many employees to move to other provinces and that this is making it difficult for industries located on industrial land to find production workers. Some suggestions to ameliorate these challenges are to invest in quality public transit and to add more housing closer to industrial areas. We also heard suggestions for increased promotion of trades and skills programs, as some new immigrants take on entry-level roles at fast food restaurants due to a lack of qualifications.



### **Investments into Infrastructure and Industrial Businesses (23)**

Many participants suggested that Surrey needs to invest more in quality infrastructure to, from and on industrial land. This includes more efficient transportation options to industrial parks such as Campbell Heights Business Park, and BC Hydro infrastructure for industrial areas. Some participants suggested that infrastructure should be created, as industrial parks grow, as a proactive measure, instead of responding to infrastructure needs. We also heard about a need for more incentives and subsidies for high-tech food manufacturing businesses.

### **Taxes, Costs and Incentives (13)**

We heard that taxes and costs are a big barrier for companies to set up in Surrey, specifically on industrial land. This includes cost increases due to increases in property tax, cost of land, redevelopment costs, the cost of creating multi-level industrial developments, as well as high rents and no vacancies in the City. We heard suggestions for the City to match tax rates to other municipalities to even the playing field. In order to reduce costs for businesses to operate in Surrey, we also heard suggestions for the City to incentivize small businesses to come back to the City or stay in the City through decreased property taxes.

### **Land Scarcity and Space (12)**

We heard that land scarcity and finding space to do business in Surrey is a major challenge for businesses wanting to set up on Surrey's industrial land. In particular, businesses are finding it difficult to find space to operate in places like Port Kells, which have a lack of industrial land. Participants suggested that the City should open up more land for industrial use or promote multi-level industrial buildings. We also heard that the South Westminster area could be better used for industry, as it is transit accessible.

### **Workforce Readiness (10)**

Workforce readiness was another major theme that surfaced in conversations with participants. Specifically, participants shared that there is a need for the City to support workers in training for industry needs through trades. Participants mentioned that there is a high turnover for industrial businesses and that it is getting more challenging to find trained workers. Some participants suggested that the City could help with the training by working closely with Kwantlen Polytechnic University to increase access to training and resources in the trades, through incentives to enroll in trades programs for example.

## **Collaboration (7)**

We heard that collaboration will be key to encouraging job creation and attracting high-value industries to Surrey's industrial areas. Some participants feel that Surrey needs to work with industrial businesses to better understand what high-value means, as some businesses don't feel like they are included in this definition. Other participants suggested that there is a need for more partnerships between academic institutions like Kwantlen Polytechnic University and industry, as research often has practical applications in industry, as well as preparing working workers for jobs in the trades. At the same time, some participants feel that universities are facing challenges in moving quickly to make changes and that universities need more feedback from the industry to understand industry needs.

## **Future Trends (6)**

Another theme that surfaced for participants was the importance of understanding future trends, in order to support job creation and attract high-value industries to Surrey's industrial areas. This can mean looking into the future to anticipate changes in industry trends, like clean technology, hydrogen fuel and EVs. Some participants felt that the City was not keeping up with changing trends and not adequately addressing realities on the ground, especially with Industry 4.0 where the line between high-tech and manufacturing companies is being blurred, and making sure industrial land is future-proofed so that these industries can do business in Surrey.

## **Land Use (5)**

We heard about the importance of land-use decisions, regulations and policies in job creation and attracting high-value businesses to Surrey. Specifically, we heard that the South Westminster neighbourhood close to Scott Road Skytrain station could be used better, as it is currently filled with parking lots. In addition, participants suggested that the City should have a good understanding of the differences between the needs of light industrial vs. heavy industrial as well as dirty industry vs clean industry. There were some suggestions that light industrial uses should be located separately from heavy industrial uses and that the City should address the challenge of remediation of industrial land for clean industries, on parcels where dirty industries were once located.

## **Marketing and Branding (4)**

Some participants highlighted that marketing and branding is important to job creation and attracting high-value industries to Surrey's industrial areas. This includes promoting and highlighting existing manufacturing businesses that do business in Surrey. There is also a need to market trade courses and programs to countries abroad so that international students are attracted to find work in the trades in Surrey.

## **Engagement (2)**

We heard that the City needs to work more closely with BC Hydro, specific businesses, and academic institutions to create a vision for Surrey's future.



## **Other (9)**

We heard other ideas including the City needs to understand the challenges employers face better, that participants wanted to see what options were available to promote job security and attract high-value businesses and that high-value industry is different from heavy industry. We also heard suggestions that the City should focus less on promoting new industrial buildings and focus on attracting tenants to existing buildings instead.

## **Question 2: What metrics should Surrey use to assess the value of different opportunities in developing Surrey's industrial areas?**

When asked about what metrics Surrey should use to assess the value of different opportunities in developing Surrey's industrial areas, participants made comments that related to the following themes.

### **The Success of Businesses and Other Business Metrics (21)**

Many participants mentioned that it is important for the City of Surrey to track the success of Surrey businesses as well as other key business metrics. Specific metrics could include longevity of businesses, the number of new business set-ups within a year, lease turnover, and employee retention as well as conducting surveys to understand why companies choose to stay in Surrey, and what advantages they see to staying in Surrey. On the other hand, some participants also felt that it is important to also measure business challenges and failures, including conducting interviews with companies that have left the city to understand the challenges they encountered, as well as business closures.

### **People and Environment-Centred Economy (21)**

A people and environment-centred economy was another major theme that we heard about from participant conversations. We heard that many participants wanted to see the City track more qualitative and quantitative measures that have to do with livability, including factors such as transportation capacity, crime levels, why Surrey residents are leaving Surrey and where they are going. We also heard that it is important to track measures such as the availability of child care, amenities in industrial areas (such as childcare), access to better-paying jobs and income mobility.

## **Processes, Regulations and Planning (11)**

We heard themes around tracking metrics regarding municipal processes, regulations and planning. This can include tracking the time it takes for development applications and permitting processes to be approved, as well as how long it takes for new businesses to get up and running in Surrey. Some participants wanted to see Surrey set targets for permitting approval times. In addition, other participants mentioned that there is a lack of consistency in building codes between cities, policies and regulations and that Surrey should look at how other areas, cities and countries are successful in growing.

## **Job Density (9)**

Another theme that we heard about was job density. Participants wanted to see the City track metrics such as the average jobs per acre, to make it easier to make decisions about how to best utilize space, as well as vacancy rates. On the other hand, other participants felt that looking at jobs per acre was too limiting, as not all jobs are equal or pay the same. As an alternative, some participants suggested that the City track productivity per area. We also heard suggestions for the City to look at wages, revenue, and export product, as well as how many residents are employed in a given area, and setting a target for the percentage of the population the City would like to see live and work in Surrey.

## **Costs, Incentives and Funding (6)**

We heard about the importance of tracking the costs of doing business, incentives and funding. In particular, participants suggested that it would be important to track the increase in property taxes, as property tax increases can be used by property owners to push out industrial businesses from industrial land which then gets developed into high-rise residential buildings. We also heard about the importance of tracking funding and incentives that might be invested by governments to attract high-value industries.

## **Land Use (5)**

We heard suggestions for collecting metrics that measure the optimization of land being used in industrial zones. Some participants suggested that there should be different types of industrial zones, just as there are different types of residential zones. In particular, we heard suggestions to think of industrial land as a spectrum ranging from things like heavy industry to more office-based uses.

## **Infrastructure Investments (3)**

Infrastructure investments were another theme that surfaced from participant conversations. We heard that as the City grows and densifies, there is a need for infrastructure investments such as increased transportation capacity, and facilities that are required by industrial businesses. Participants suggested that the City should collect metrics to determine where resources are needed, which could then feed into Surrey's Economic Strategy.

### **Workforce Readiness (3)**

Some participants suggested that the City should keep track of workforce readiness, including the difference between skills that residents have and industry needs, the time it takes to sign up for trades education and the number of university graduates in the workforce.

### **Nurturing Existing Talent and Businesses (2)**

Participants shared that they would like to see the City create support programs for existing businesses to grow so that they can rely less on federal initiatives.

### **Future Trends (1)**

We heard suggestions that the City should track trends over the long term.

### **Land Scarcity and Space (1)**

We heard about challenges with land scarcity and finding space, and the need to track industrial land availability and/or Industrial vacancy rates, as businesses leave the City if either is not available.

### **Collecting and Sharing Metrics (6)**

Other suggestions we heard from participants involve the process of tracking metrics and sharing them widely. In particular, participants suggested that metrics collected should be made public for increased transparency. We also heard that making metrics public can also help with new businesses who are entering the market. Some participants shared that it will be important to not change the goalposts in the middle of the process and that the City should commit to collecting specific metrics over the long term. Specifically, some participants mentioned that the data collected should not just be cross-sectional but also longitudinal to control for inflationary effects.



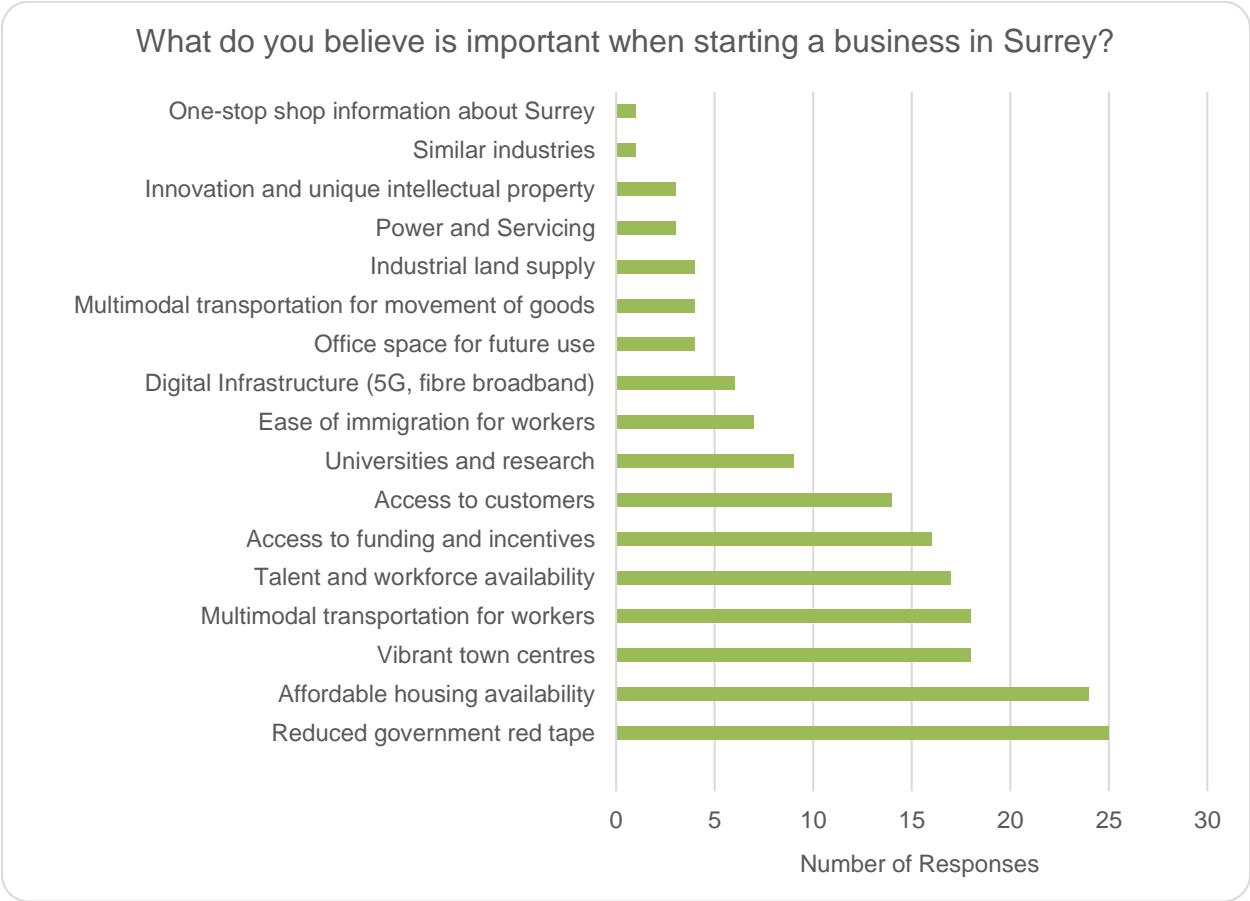
Figure 2: Graphic Summary for Consultation Session #2



# Consultation Session #3: Local Business Vibrancy and Support



**Question 1: What do you believe is important when starting a business in Surrey? Place dots on your top five choices.**



When asked what they believe is important when starting a business in Surrey, participants rated their top five responses as reduced government red tape (25), affordable housing availability (24), vibrant town centres (18), multimodal transportation for workers (18) and talent and workforce availability (17).

**Question 2: What business support services and programs would you like to see in Surrey? Write your ideas on sticky notes and place them below.**

When asked what type of business support services and programs they would like to see in Surrey, participants made comments related to the following themes.

**Talent and Workforce (7)**

We heard that participants wanted to see more investment in Surrey’s talent and workforce. This included running job fairs for businesses to meet potential clients, promoting collaboration between employers, students and government for integrated



learning opportunities, training and resources for newcomers, skills upgrading for employees, and micro-credentialing to upskill current workers.

### **Data and Market Insights (5)**

We heard that participants wanted more information from the City regarding immigration statistics, regular newsletters on market intelligence, labour market research, as well as a better understanding of Surrey's ethnic makeup and the challenges being faced by vulnerable Surrey communities.

### **City Processes (5)**

We heard that participants wanted to see changes to certain municipal processes, such as increased transparency for zoning/development discussions, prioritizing smaller startup businesses in civic tenders, engaging newcomers, and connecting academic institutions to employers.

### **Other (11):**

Other comments we heard include the need for more support in general, including for arts and culture, for importers as well as for the manufacturing industry. We also heard that there are not enough commercial properties and there is a need for more commercial kitchens, and business training. Some participants suggested that they would like to see more services such as a marketplace for people/businesses to test new ideas and online marketing services. Other participants suggested that the City needs to leverage its position as a city on the American border to attract tourism, which could include adding more convention centres, hotels and theatres, especially in South Surrey.

**Question 3: What assets will increase livability in Surrey? Place dots on your top five choices.**



When asked what assets will increase livability in Surrey, participants rated their top five responses as efficient transportation (22), walkable and vibrant areas with more foot traffic (19), more housing supply (18), tourist attractions and entertainment options (17) and live entertainment and performing arts, festivals and street events (16).

**Other Ideas**

We also heard other ideas for assets that will improve livability. These included:

- Incubator/incubation program venture capitalist journeys
- Senior housing, assisted living
- Secure lock-ups for bikes/e-bikes/scooters etc.
- Higher rated elementary schools
- Restaurants with seating in Downtown Area
- Less congested community development
- More needs to be done for the unhoused people, vulnerable, and people with drug addictions, more advocating for them

- Affordable rental units
- Efficient hospital service
- Cost of living
- Post-pandemic, there are more small businesses less commercial districts and more housing
- We also heard a comment about the need for more explanation about what co-working spaces means.

**Question 4: What is missing? What are some types of businesses that could be successful but are missing in each town centre? Write your ideas on sticky notes and place them below.**

When asked what is missing, and what are some types of businesses that could be successful but are missing in each town centre, participants made comments related to missing types of businesses in each town centre, as seen below.

In particular, we heard that most participants feel that South Surrey and Whalley/City Centre were the top two Town Centres that they felt were missing key businesses. The businesses suggested for South Surrey, included a range of businesses including those that cater to out-of-town visitors like hotels and convention centres, as well as amenities and businesses for local residents such as satellite offices of major firms and manufacturing space. Some suggested businesses were for everyone, including themed bars, a party hall, an indoor tennis centre and an arts and culture hub. On the other hand, participants mentioned that missing businesses in Whalley/City Centre include nightlife and entertainment. Common threads across all Town centres include suggestions for indoor tennis centres, hotels and convention centres, increased access to medical services, increased transportation options and places for people to eat and drink.

**South Surrey (12)**

- Themed bars
- Skytrain to South Surrey
- Manufacturing space
- Attract U.S. tourists
- Hotels
- ER services
- Party Hall and convention centre
- Indoor tennis centre
- Satellite offices of major firms
- Hotel
- Convention Centre
- Arts and culture hub

### **Whalley/City Centre (10)**

- Arts Centre, pool
- Medical services, doctors, dentists, specialists
- Food trucks
- Conference/event centre
- Nightlife and entertainment
- Indoor Tennis Centre
- Theatre
- Convention Centre
- Visitor attractions
- Nightlife

### **Newton (9)**

- Fine dining
- Urban park
- walkable connecting areas (cafe shops, ice cream shops, etc.)
- Create safe transportation accessibilities
- Organic & ethnic stores
- Indoor Tennis Centre
- Medical services, urgent and ED, health services
- doctors dentists
- Convention centre hybrid

### **Guildford (8)**

- Restaurants, local eatery
- Childcare
- Healthcare services
- Community centre needed
- Transportation buses
- Indoor tennis centre
- "night" restaurants/cafes that are open past 10 PM
- More medical hours, should be easier to get appoints + better healthcare system

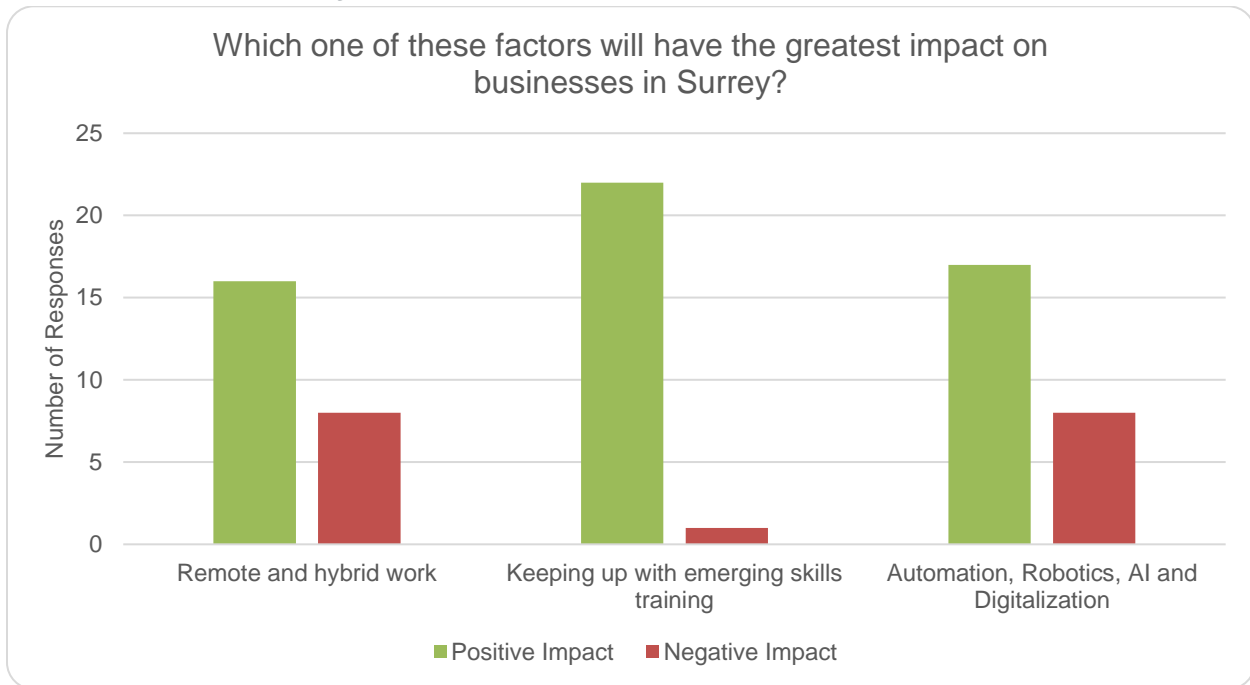
### **Cloverdale (5)**

- Cool breweries, cideries, tasting lounges
- Transportation
- Indoor tennis centre
- Music & live music pub to chill
- Manufacturing

#### Fleetwood (4)

- Casual eateries
- Cost of living -> price of housing, taxes, etc.
- Medical professionals
- Dining

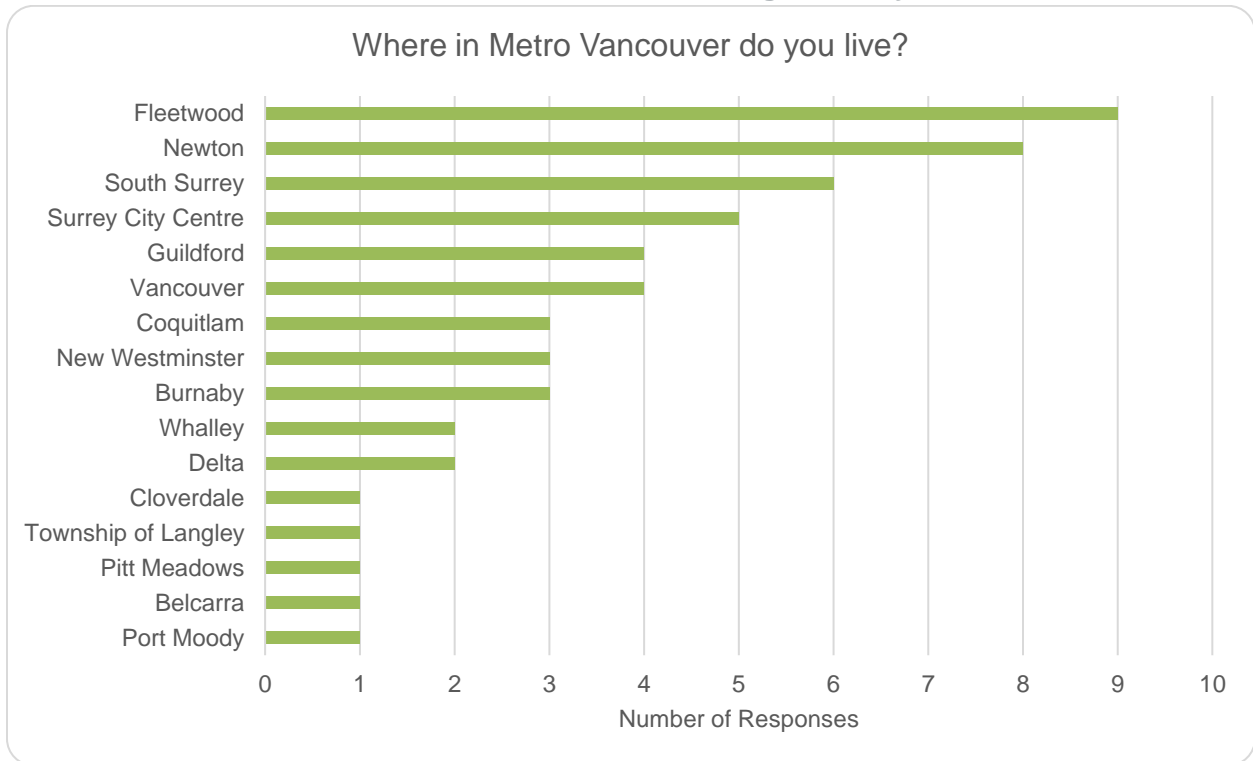
#### Question 5: Which one of these factors will have the greatest impact on businesses in Surrey?



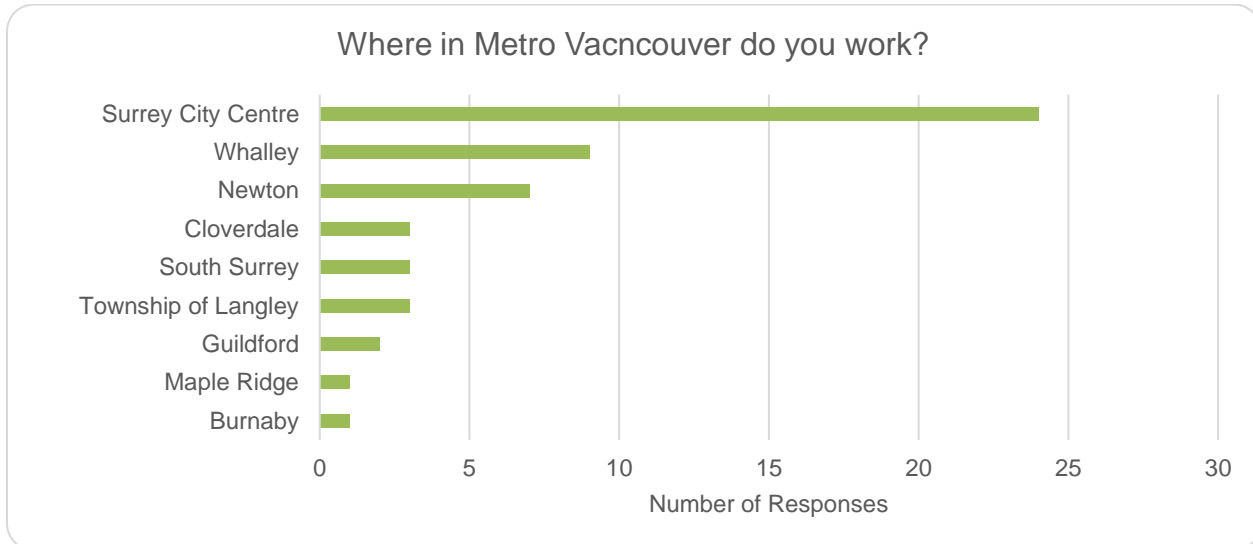
When asked what assets will increase livability in Surrey, most participants rated all four factors as having a positive impact on businesses in Surrey, with the immigrant workforce rated as the factor with the highest positive impact (27), followed by keeping up with emerging skills training (22), remote and hybrid work (16) and finally automation, robotics and digitalization (17). Remote and hybrid work and automation, robotics and digitalization (8), robotics and digitalization (8) were rated as the factors with a negative impact on businesses in Surrey by most respondents while the factors with the least amount of negative impact ratings by participants were keeping up with emerging skills and training (1), followed by immigrant workforce (0).



**Question 6: Where in the Metro Vancouver Region do you live and work?**



When asked where in Metro Vancouver do you live, the top five responses were, Fleetwood (9), Newton (8), South Surrey (6), Surrey City Centre (4) and Vancouver (4).



When asked where in Metro Vancouver do you work, the top five responses were Surrey City Centre (24), Whalley (9), Newton (7), Township of Langley (3) and South Surrey (3).

# Where in the Metro Vancouver region do you live and work?

Place dots on your approximate live/work locations.

 Use green sticky dots for home.

 Use red sticky dots for work.

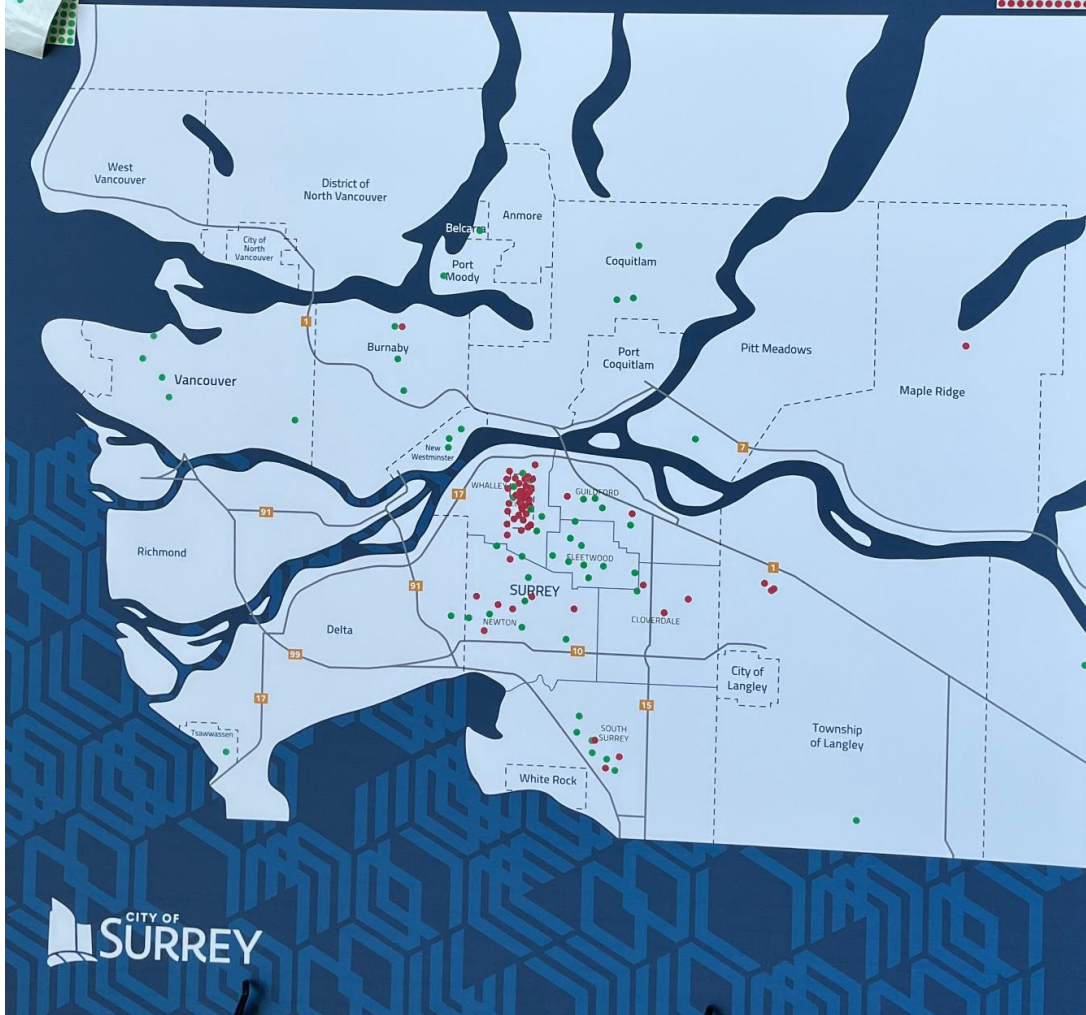
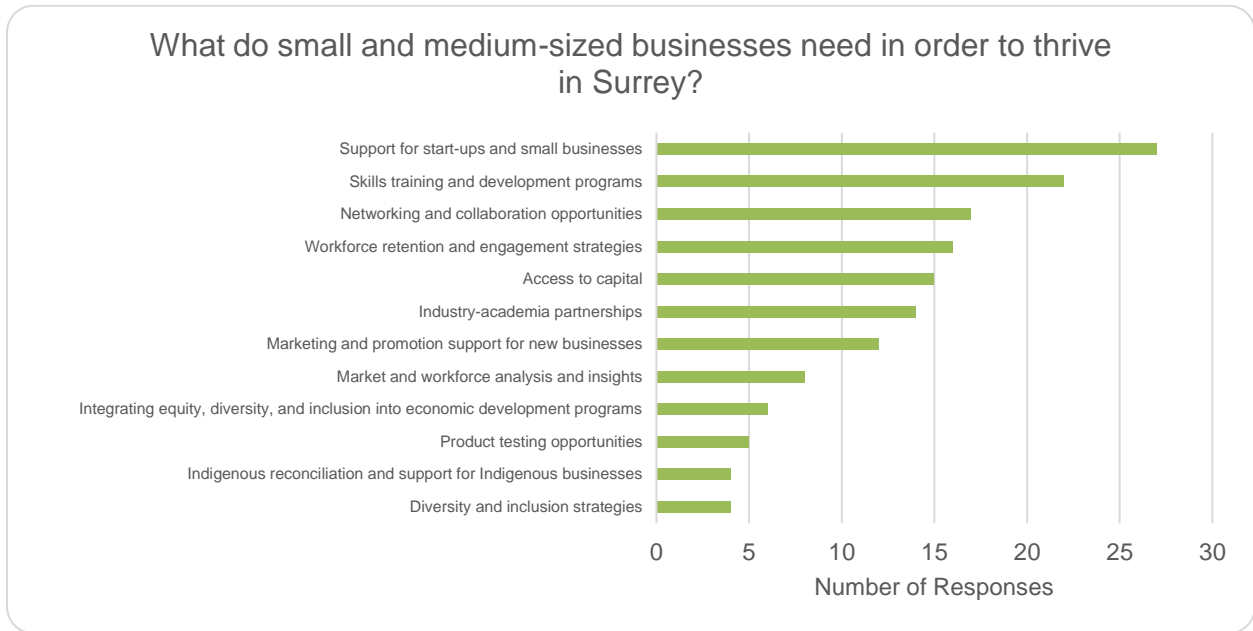


Figure 3: Board Activity Responses for Question 6.

**Question 7: What do small and medium-sized businesses need in order to thrive in Surrey? Place dots on your top five choices.**



When asked what assets will increase livability in Surrey, participants rated their top five responses as support for start-ups and small businesses (27), skills and development training (22), networking and collaboration opportunities (17), workforce retention and engagement strategies (16) and access to capital (15).

**Question 8: How can Surrey become the newest modern and most livable city in Canada? Write your ideas on sticky notes and place them below.**

When asked about how can Surrey become the newest modern and most livable city in Canada, participants made comments that related to the following themes.

**Transportation Planning (17)**

Many participants shared that transportation planning would be a key factor in Surrey becoming the most livable city in Canada. Participants suggested that the City should support the adoption of the 15-minute city model, where it is easy to get around by active transportation. We also heard a need for the City to be better connected by rapid transit, bike share, bike trails, walkable spaces, pedestrian-only shopping areas and more multimodal transportation options in general. We also heard that there is a need for better transit service to remote areas.

**Nightlife, Culture and Entertainment (13)**

Participants shared that they would like to see more nightlife, culture and entertainment in Surrey. Examples given include breweries, cafes, restaurants with patio and/or

outdoor spaces, and bars. We also heard that there is a need for more arts and culture spaces, for both residents and visitors, such as an arts centre, museum, art gallery, an arts and culture hub, hotels, convention centres and art studio rental space.

### **Inclusive Economy (9)**

We heard that it is important for Surrey to have an inclusive economy where everyone has the opportunity to participate. This includes refugee and newcomer integration, affordable rent, community spaces, employee rights, gender equality and an increase in seniors housing.

### **Civic and Social Assets (7)**

We heard that participants wanted to see more civic and social assets, including wellness spaces at the community centre, spaces for sports such as badminton, cultural support as well as more accessible community centres in general. We also heard that there is a desire for more apartments close to clean parks and recreation areas.

### **Employment and Education (5)**

Some participants suggested that Surrey needed more employment opportunities, quality education serving the community as well as more innovation hubs, industry and academic institutions.

### **Safety and Security (5)**

Participants shared a desire to see increased safety and more police in Surrey, as well as regular cleaning of the Downtown area.

### **Spaces to Meet and Collaborate (4)**

We heard that participants wanted to see more collaboration spaces for meeting and networking like a conference or event space that is accessible by transit. We also heard a need for more co-working spaces for startups so that their employees can avoid commuting to Vancouver.

### **Medical Services (3)**

Participants suggested that Surrey has a need for more efficient medical services.

### **Business Support (1)**

We also heard suggestions for the City to directly lease or sell properties to small businesses, instead of businesses dealing with landlords directly.

### **Agriculture (1)**

We heard suggestions for Surrey to develop more agricultural land for agricultural uses.







# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The feedback from all three consultation sessions has been synthesized into key themes below.

## What We Heard

### Key Themes

- **Collaboration**
  - Collaboration is key. The City can play a big role in forming partnerships, as it has relationships with multiple organizations, businesses and institutions.
  - The City can also serve to connect people to resources and services, such as chambers of commerce
- **Innovation Assets**
  - Surrey has significant innovation assets. These include
    - industrial land,
    - agricultural land,
    - health sector infrastructure,
    - educational institutions,
    - border with the US,
    - major transportation infrastructure such as highways
    - Social capital including diverse newcomer communities and a young population
- **Investment in Social Infrastructure, Hard Infrastructure and Innovation Infrastructure**
  - The City needs to invest in infrastructure. This includes things like:
    - Hotels,
    - Convention centres,
    - Supportive zoning, permitting and licencing processes,
    - Grants and subsidies,
    - Ideas competitions, innovation labs,
    - Networking and Collaboration Opportunities
    - Innovation outside of the city centre,
    - Transportation
    - Skills training and development programs
    - Workforce Retention and Engagement strategies
    - Access to capital
    - Support for start-ups and small businesses
- **Marketing and Branding**

- Surrey is not well known outside of the lower mainland for innovation. Branding and marketing are crucial to attract investment and business and create a positive feedback loop.
- Metrics and a database tracking successful businesses can help with building a brand.
- **Nurturing Existing Talent and Businesses**
  - Optimizing and supporting what already exists. Innovation and innovative businesses already exist in Surrey. Attracting new innovative businesses is important, but it is also important to build upon Surrey's strengths.
  - Prioritizing Surrey start-ups and local businesses in local civic tenders
- **People and Environment-Centred Economy**
  - To attract and retain talent, especially youth the City must be a livable and attractive place for living. This includes transportation, childcare, access to nature, housing affordability, recreation and amenities etc.
  - Other things needed for Surrey to become the most livable city in Canada include better transportation planning, more options for nightlife, culture, and entertainment, and inclusive economy, more employment and education opportunities as well as increased safety and security.
  - The economy, at its heart, is about people. Build a city for people, and a strong innovation economy will follow.
- **Taxes, Costs and Incentives**
  - In order to reduce costs, we need to increase vacancy rate to a reasonable 3-4% (as opposed to 0.3% now)
  - This means quickly bringing on more new supply of serviced industrial land and approving construction of units quickly
  - Reduce red tape (permitting takes months to years to get approved)
  - Take a facilitative approach to permitting rather than just a regulator
  - Be reasonable and flexible around expectation of development standards such as parking requirements, flood control levels, design guidelines, energy performance, aesthetics etc.
- **Municipal Land Use, Processes, Regulation and Planning**
  - Some participants shared that land use regulations are a significant gap and opportunity for Surrey's economy. This includes underutilized land in Surrey, as it has a large number of parking lots.
  - Differentiate needs of heavy/light/high tech industrial
  - Explore residential/industrial mixed-use
  - Restrictive height requirements for buildings, limitations and conflicts due to zoning, outdated community plans and lack of suitable land for certain industries.

- Challenges with onerous permitting processes, as the process to make use of industrial land takes too long, and zoning bylaws are too restrictive and out of date for innovative sectors. We heard suggestions for more flexibility with current land uses
- Need a stronger vision for the future of Surrey
- **Workforce Readiness**
  - Focus on “trades”, skills training such as running job fairs for businesses to meet potential clients, promoting collaboration between employers, students and government for integrated learning opportunities, training and resources for newcomers, skills upgrading for employees, and micro-credentialing to upskill current workers.
- **Future Trends**
  - Plan for industry 4.0 and the blurring of industry and technology
  - Foresight planning to stay ahead of trends
  - Encourage emerging businesses
  - Set up partnerships with high-tech companies to plan for long-term development
  - Future trends such as an increasing immigrant workforce, remote and hybrid work, keeping up with emerging skills training and automation, robotics, AI and digitalization were all seen as having positive impacts on Surrey Businesses.

**Metrics to Keep Track of:**

- Above average jobs per acre
- Productivity per square foot
- % of businesses as property owners or leasing
- The number of Surrey residents employed in Surrey businesses
- Proximity of jobs to housing
- Approvals times (how long it takes to get business up and running)
- Vacancy rates (should be 3 to 4%)
- Government funding received
- Lease turnovers/business closures
- Employee retention
- Traffic reduction, improved capacity of public transit
- Job density
- Affordable housing
- Business revenue growth
- Crime levels
- Open metrics/data preferred – will help businesses considering Surrey

# NEXT STEPS

Engagement for the City of Surrey’s Economic Strategy 2024 involved a participatory approach to strategic planning. Embracing a participatory approach offers numerous benefits that extend beyond the immediate process. It can encourage improved understanding, and build trust and stronger relationships between the City and the community. A participatory approach to engagement can also lead to better decision-making by facilitating data-driven decisions grounded in the community’s context and lived experiences. Finally, it can also generate increased public support and foster a sense of ownership of the strategy among the community. When people know their voices have been heard, they become more invested in the success and sustainability of the Strategy, ultimately contributing to its long-term success and implementation.

The engagement results and findings from all three consultation sessions will be a key stream of input informing the development of Surrey’s Economic Strategy 2024, including the long-term vision and priorities for implementation. This report encompasses valuable community insights which will help shape the new strategy, aligning it more closely with community needs, fostering innovation, exploring partnerships, and addressing gaps in Surrey's growth. In particular, the main findings as mentioned in the Summary of Findings as well as other key themes highlighted in this report, will help guide the strategy's approach to job creation, industrial development, business support services, and future readiness, while also facilitating the development of metrics to assess opportunities effectively. Taking this consultation feedback into consideration will help to enhance the strategy's relevance and effectiveness in addressing Surrey's evolving challenges and opportunities. Other factors that will be considered include feasibility, City priorities in the short, medium and long-term, as well as input from staff and City Council.