



# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING CHAIR'S REPORT

October 7, 2024

Good evening everyone and welcome to the 22nd Annual General Meeting of the Surrey Tourism & Convention Association, doing business as Discover Surrey.

Discover Surrey acknowledges the traditional territories of the Semiahmoo, Katzie, Kwikwetlem (*kwee-kwet-lum*), Kwantlen, Qayqayt (*key-kite*) and Tsawwassen First Nations on which we live, work and thrive.

Discover Surrey, with the support of the City of Surrey and the Surrey Hotel & Motel Association (SHMA), receives funding based on collecting the 3% Municipal and Regional Destination Tax program (MRDT) from hotel, motel, and Online Accommodation Platform (OAP - eg. AirBnB, VRBO) stays in Surrey. Discover Surrey and the SHMA initially forecasted a gross revenue of \$2.5 million from the MRDT and OAP for 2023; however, Surrey exceeded expectations by continuing to attract transient leisure visitors from within B.C. and Alberta, as well as leveraging strong domestic travel from across Canada for longer stays. As a result, the gross MRDT and OAP revenue for 2023 was \$2,857,113.56, with a net amount of \$2,661,688.01 after accounting for administration fees and the mandatory contribution to B.C.'s Tourism Event Program. Discover Surrey received \$1,901,214, and the SHMA received \$760,474 in funding, based on \$95,774,571 in total accommodation revenues from hotels, motels and STRs in Surrey.

In Surrey, recovery from the pandemic continued to rebound through 2023, with stronger than anticipated occupancy and average daily rates (ADR). As of December 2023, Surrey's year-to-date occupancy rate reached 74.2%, up from 70.9% in 2022. The average daily rate (ADR) in 2023 also saw an increase, rising to \$195.65 compared to \$176.04 in 2022. Notably, the 2023 occupancy rate surpassed the pre-pandemic rate of 73% in 2019, when the ADR was \$150.64. These figures are verified by the Smith Travel Report.

Despite exceeding overall revenue expectations, challenges were persistent as airlines struggled with staffing issues and international flights continued to lag behind pre-pandemic levels, particularly from Asia Pacific to British Columbia (B.C.). China's strict travel restrictions and political issues in both China and India reduced visitation from these countries. This prompted the tourism sector to diversify its marketing efforts, targeting other regions while encouraging domestic travel to mitigate the economic impact.

Discover Surrey's robust media pitching and hosting program is dedicated to raising awareness of Surrey's year-round tourism offerings, from its vibrant culinary scene to its abundant green spaces. In 2023, the team strengthened relationships with Canadian and American travel writers, resulting in over 35 stories, including a feature in *Food & Wine Magazine* naming Surrey as "one of the next great food cities," and inclusion in *Canada's Best New Cookbook*, a collaboration between Destination Canada and Air Canada enRoute. This

program continues to build valuable exposure for our tourism partners and experiences, working closely with Destination BC's media and content teams.

In 2023, Discover Surrey achieved several key marketing wins. We hired a dedicated Marketing Manager to drive our initiatives and partnered with broadcasters to showcase Surrey in upbeat commercial spots to domestic and US audiences. Crowdriff selected us as a case study for our dynamic visual content, and by working with local creators, we brought diverse, first-person perspectives to our social media. Through our new TikTok account, we're shifting the narrative around Surrey to focus on food and hidden gems, boosting positive engagement. We also launched a fully mobile Visitor Servicing Strategy, with over 900 hours of activations and nearly 5,000 visitors engaged. Additionally, we introduced the Tourism Event Marketing Grant and strengthened partnerships with the BC Bird Trail, BC Ale Trail, West Coast Food, and more, helping to reach new audiences while deepening regional ties.

Sport tourism remains a key focus for the partnership between Discover Surrey, the SHMA, and the City of Surrey. In 2023, the three organizations collaborated to attract more sports tournaments through the Sport Surrey initiative. They also used Visitor Services to encourage athletes and their families to explore Surrey by providing on-site visitor support at tournaments and sharing tourism information before arrival.

In 2022, Discover Surrey completed a Tourism Experiences Strategic Plan, and in 2023, we began implementing many of the recommended strategies. This includes taking the initial steps to launch a Destination Development program aimed at fostering the creation and enhancement of bookable tourism experiences in the city.

Discover Surrey is committed to promoting all that Surrey has to offer and leveraging all available and future opportunities with regional, provincial, and national tourism partners to extend the awareness of Surrey as a tourism destination.

The Discover Surrey Board of Directors is made up of dedicated representatives from various sectors of tourism who volunteer their time to promote Surrey as a premier destination. I want to extend my sincere thanks to all board members for their outstanding support, commitment, and contributions to both the organization and the broader tourism industry. A special acknowledgement goes to Philip Aguirre, who is stepping down from his role as Treasurer, for his many years of exceptional service on our board.

I would also like to extend my thanks to our Executive Director, Ange Chew, and her team for their exceptional work over the past year. The team has significantly raised awareness for Surrey and Discover Surrey by enhancing our mobile visitor services strategy and leveraging their professional relationships with the travel media, as well as the Destination BC and Destination Canada teams. Despite being a small but mighty team of four, they continually seek innovative ways to promote our partners and attract visitors.

Lastly, a heartfelt thank you to all our partners for your ongoing support and involvement with Discover Surrey. You are the backbone of our organization, and by working together, we share the unique story of Surrey, benefiting all businesses.