

# Coquitlam leverages location to entice enterprise

BY MELANIE JACKSON, VANCOUVER SUN NOVEMBER 1, 2013



Coquitlam has lured commercial real estate developers who work for firms impressed with the city's easy access to transportation facilities.

Photograph by: Handout, Avison Young

VANCOUVER — With easy access to transit and the enhanced Highway 1 and Port Mann Bridge, Coquitlam's commercial leasing activity heated up in 2013 – while activity in product-tighter, more traffic-congested Burnaby languished in comparison, according to [Avison Young's Fall 2013 Burnaby/Coquitlam, BC Industrial Report](#).

From fall 2012 to fall 2013, Coquitlam's industrial vacancy fell from 7.8 to 4.4 percent. From spring to fall 2013, Burnaby's dropped from 4.6 percent to 4.3 per cent, the report reveals.

Burnaby does have some vacancies, for example, around Lake City and Winston Street. The problem is, the buildings are older – and so far lessees aren't biting, says Kyle Blyth, senior associate with [Avison Young](#).

“The cost of purchasing older product, and the cost of reinvesting in refurbishing, is still quite expensive. If they could purchase at a lower price, that would be a viable option. But the current purchase price and cost of fixing up doesn't make the numbers make sense. If those dynamics change, I could see it happening.”

Blyth attributes the growth of Coquitlam – population 129,716, and with a business mix of retail, manufacturing, technology, warehousing and professional services – to its “central location within Metro Vancouver. It’s close to and from downtown Vancouver, airport, the Valley. If you’re coming from the north or west side of the river, you don’t have to deal with any tolls. You’ve got two main highways: the TransCanada and Lougheed. Another plus is transit and SkyTrain. All this makes it attractive for companies to situate within the area.”

Christopher’s Furniture Services snared 26,000 square feet in a catbird’s-seat spot just south of the TransCanada, near both Port Mann and the Maryhill Bypass. Director of Operations Josh Hough says his company initially looked at locating in Burnaby, around Winston and Government Streets. The drawback? “Gagliardi Way is too congested. You have to wait too long a time to get on to Lougheed. It’s counterproductive.”

Christopher’s, an installation group for commercial furnishings, also considered Surrey’s Port Kells. “But 40 per cent of our staff is on public transit. It’s not in any way convenient to get transit to Port Kells,” Hough points out.

With 26,000 square feet on Hartley Avenue in Coquitlam, “we’re just one bus from the SkyTrain. And, we’re saving on fuel and tolls.”

Other conveniences are Christopher’s neighbours. For example, Wastech recycles the massive amounts of cardboard the company goes through. Home Depot and Lee Valley are “tool places we use every day.”

Just four km east, in the same prime hub, is Canada’s biggest soccer store, [Soccer Express](#). With soccer burgeoning in popularity, owner Brad Leitch knew he’d need every inch of the store’s 10,000 square feet, as well as the nearby 7,000-square-foot warehouse to support online and club sales.

With the Whitecaps’ growing popularity, and municipal and provincial support for soccer facilities “to get kids on the field and off the streets, soccer now dwarfs hockey,” Leitch says.

“We looked at the map, at the access to Fraser Valley and across the Lower Mainland. When we decided to do one retail place, it had to be Coquitlam.”

Again, ease of transportation was the game-changer. Leitch admits he worried about the Port Mann toll at first. Before the bridge improvements, “you could sit 45 minutes at 3:30 in the afternoon waiting to get over to Surrey. Now I look out the window and see cars zooming over. [For two tolls a day totalling \$6] you’re getting two hours of your life back every day.”

Leitch also sensed the one-stop-shopping attraction of big-player neighbours like Ikea, Rona, and Bed Bath and Beyond. “These guys spend millions on R & D, and this is where they are. That tells us something.”

But for Leitch, who grew up in the Tri-Cities and is now raising a family in Anmore, the area's draw is more than efficiency of location. "It's community-oriented. It's small enough to go to malls and feel you know people. We feel a part of the cloth of the city. But it's still a big hub."

The only users who'd see a geographic drawback to Coquitlam are those that distribute using the port, says Blyth. "They tend to situate closer, in Richmond and Delta."

From what [Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce](#) Executive Director Michael Hind says, Coquitlam won't miss them. It's full-steam ahead. "Areas like the United Boulevard-Highway 1 corridor have now grown in to major industrial/retail areas. The Town Centre is emerging as a vibrant, growing area, with much new residential development, which is bringing business into the area to service the needs.

"With the Evergreen Line coming on board in the next three years, and the completion of the Highway 1 -Port Mann project, this growth should continue," Hind predicts. "The Evergreen Line will have a great effect on Coquitlam and Port Moody. Residential development along the line has already begun. This is also leading to more retail and office space development."

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