



# WHITE ROCK

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## Branding Task Force Committee Report



FEBRUARY  
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## BUILDING A CITY BRAND FROM WITHIN

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Photo Courtesy City of White Rock

## Introduction and Summary

In 2007, the City of White Rock hired a consultant to develop a branding plan for the city. Whisper, a California-based company, submitted its report and recommendations in 2008. No further action was taken with respect to a branding plan at that time.

In August of 2010, White Rock City Council appointed a volunteer Branding Steering Committee comprised of White Rock residents, community and business leaders. The Committee's mandate was to revisit the work completed by Whisper and to determine if it contained information that could guide a new branding process.

The Committee met during the autumn of 2010 and concluded that certain portions of Whisper's report could inform a new branding plan. Specifically, Whisper conducted 33 interviews, or "conversations", that provide insight into what White Rock means to both internal and external stakeholders.

The Committee re-analyzed these interviews and identified people's common perceptions of White Rock and their feelings about the city. As described in the following pages, there are a number of recurring themes in the interviews, such as the city's waterfront setting, people's strong feelings of civic pride, and the dichotomy that exists in terms of the city's growth potential versus the desire for things to remain the same.

This report summarizes the key themes the Committee found in those interviews, as well as the Committee's recommendations for a potential branding plan based on those findings.

The members of the Committee wish to thank White Rock City Council for the opportunity to serve the city and provide input into this process.





## **I. The Committee's Mandate/Terms of Reference**

In August of 2010, White Rock City Council appointed a Branding Steering Committee to make recommendations on creating a brand image for the City. The mandate of the Steering Committee was to:

- 1) review research submitted to the City by Whisper during its previous branding exercise in 2008 and to report on this research; and
- 2) to make recommendations on creating a brand image for the City moving forward.

## **II. Our Approach**

Throughout the process, there were two questions at the forefront of our minds: who are we as a city, and who do we want to be?

These are difficult questions to answer because of White Rock's diversity, from the waterfront to the town centre; from businesses and merchants to galleries and artists; from long-time residents to families new to the community. Essential to any branding is the ability to balance these threads and weave them into a common ground.

As Committee members, we agreed to bring "open minds and open hearts" to the process. The work would be a journey, and we were open to the idea that it might take us in unexpected directions.

We began by reviewing the report submitted by Whisper, and re-analyzing the portions of the report that we felt could best help us answer the question "who are we?". We hoped that this would lead us to ideas for a successful city brand – one that resonates with three unique but important audiences: citizens, visitors and investors.

Ideally, we hoped that the process would point us in the direction of a brand that captures the spirit of the city and its landmarks, and celebrates its natural and cultural assets. We aspired to a brand built on the core values and strengths of the community, and that lives up to any promised benefits. Above all, the brand should inspire the community to what it can be in the future, and have enough longevity to allow for this growth.

### **III. The Environment in Which We Operate**

There are two key considerations to building a successful brand for White Rock. The first is the fact that, at its heart, White Rock is conflicted. There are people in the city who desire change, people who don't want anything to change, and people who desire both. It is as if there is a constant pull and push between the past and future. Unfortunately, the fear of change can be debilitating and prevent White Rock from truly embracing what it can be.

The reality is, the Semiahmoo Peninsula is undergoing rapid transformation. White Rock is growing, whether we like it or not. How will the city accommodate this growth? The questions we posed at the beginning of this process, "who are we as a city, and who do we want to be?", are tied to this issue.

The second challenge to building a city brand is one of geography. Although White Rock extends from North Bluff Road to Marine Drive, and from Bergstrom Road (138 Street) to Stayte Road (160 Street), many people think of White Rock as extending farther than these actual boundaries. On a practical basis, White Rock functions as part of a broader area – the Semiahmoo Peninsula, or South Surrey/White Rock. Numerous organizations (the Chamber of Commerce, for example) serve the region as a whole.





#### **IV. Our Analysis of the Whisper Report**

The Committee found both positive and negative elements to the Whisper report. We noted first of all, the physical size of the report, which includes:

- 9 pages analyzing the messaging of other cities, resulting in a “Key Message Taxonomy”;
- 47 pages describing Whisper’s “immersion process” into the community, and its conclusions about the community and what defines it;
- 156 pages of raw, unedited interviews, or “conversations”;
- 24 pages of recommendations on their proposed branding, “The Island of White Rock”; and
- 30 pages of a brand implementation plan for the above.

Despite the report’s bulk, much of its content is repetitive. Significant parts of the report involve lengthy discussions on subjects such as archetypes, or the art of developing a brand strategy. Substantial parts of the report could have been condensed.

What we find to be of most value moving forward are the interviews that Whisper conducted as part of its “immersion” into our community. These consist of 33 one-on-one “conversations” with internal and external stakeholders. These conversations provide revealing insight into how people see White Rock and what the city means to them. The interviews are included in Whisper’s document in raw, unedited form.



### **Whisper's recommendations and proposed branding**

Based on their interviews, Whisper recommended the following positioning statement for the City of White Rock:

*For tourists, confronted with a wide array of soul refreshing opportunities, our silver beach permits you to escape conformity transforming yourself and those you care about.*

*Unlike other regional tourism destinations, we are an island accessible by an easy drive, where you may feed your hunger for intimacy, and tap into the independence of our silver beach.*

The branding it proposed was “The Island of White Rock”, including the tagline “lucky you”.


There was significant public criticism of this branding, and we agree that no further action can or should be taken with regards to these proposed ideas.

However, in reviewing the 33 conversations, we found that what Whisper did with its proposed branding is hold a mirror to the city and reflect back to us many of the feelings that surfaced in the interviews.

The proposed “Island of White Rock” branding, for example, reflects the strong sentiment among people that White Rock is (or wishes to be) isolated, or unchanging, like an island. “Lucky you” reflects the pride and privilege people feel in living in White Rock.

While there is some truth in the conclusions that Whisper drew about White Rock, there are better ways to express these sentiments. For example, while White Rock is not an island, there is an island-like lifestyle here. White Rock is healthy, refreshing and rejuvenating. People are active; they go to the beach, and walk the pier and the promenade. Marine Drive and Johnston Road make the city an extremely liveable and walkable community. And unlike an island, White Rock is easily accessible by vehicle. The “Island of White Rock” may not be the way that the city wishes to promote itself, but there are elements of our relaxed, slower-paced lifestyle that could be integral to a branding plan.

Ultimately, the branding strategy that Whisper developed failed to connect with residents. Any successful branding must first resonate with those who live here.





## V. Our Re-analysis of the Conversations

Concluding that the most useful part of Whisper's report are the interviews, we set about revisiting the 33 conversations. Our goal was to identify commonalities in how people feel about White Rock. The themes that recur most frequently are listed in the following chart. Frequency count refers to the number of interviews that mentioned each particular theme.

| Theme   | Frequency Count | Percentage |
|---|-----------------|------------|
| Strong sense of pride and privilege to live in WR; strong sense of independence; distinct and unique place          | 33              | 100%       |
| Small beach town; community feel; seaside community   | 28              | 85%        |
| Attracted to beach / ocean / waterfront / pier / promenade  | 25              | 76%        |
| Natural beauty / mountain & ocean views / favourable weather  | 20              | 61%        |
| Seniors' place or retirement community  | 18              | 55%        |
| Dichotomy: growth potential versus status quo and fear of change (push/pull of past/future). "Drawbridge" mentality | 19              | 58%        |
| Need for infrastructure upgrades and revitalization: transportation, amenities, beautification, signage             | 17              | 52%        |

In 100% of the interviews, people express a strong sense of civic pride and feeling of privilege to live in White Rock. They describe the city as being an independent and unique place. Eighty-five percent describe White Rock as a small beach town or seaside community; while 76% associate White Rock with the beach, ocean, waterfront, pier or promenade.

Fifty-eight percent of the conversations mention the dichotomy discussed in section three of this report – the potential for growth versus a desire to maintain the status quo. This fear of change is what holds White Rock back from what it could potentially become.



## VI. Our Findings

In the context of the common “themes” discussed above, we set about answering the question, “who are we as a city?” Based on the most frequently mentioned traits, we can now describe White Rock as follows: a community of independent and spirited people who feel proud and privileged to live in a place of unique oceanside scenery and natural beauty.

With this in mind, we revisited Whisper’s original positioning statement:


*For tourists, confronted with a wide array of soul refreshing opportunities, our silver beach permits you to escape conformity transforming yourself and those you care about.*

*Unlike other regional tourism destinations, we are an island accessible by an easy drive, where you may feed your hunger for intimacy, and tap into the independence of our silver beach.*

We re-interpreted this statement in the context of our analysis of the conversations. The recurring themes from those interviews are highlighted in this statement:

*White Rock is a place where **independent-spirited** people **come together** to build a beautiful, vibrant **community by the sea** that embraces its spectacular **beachfront** natural settings and favourable weather to drive its economic, social and cultural values catering to singles, young and senior families, **residents, visitors and investors** alike to deliver a West Coast [premium] experience as both a **liveable city** and a **tourist destination**.*

The principles described in this positioning statement could form the foundation of a branding plan for the city.





### **Exploring themes for a new branding strategy**

As a Committee, we wanted to find a brand that would appeal to, and inspire, three target audiences: citizens, visitors and investors.

We began by focusing on specific niches. For example, White Rock could be marketed as a tourism destination, with the waterfront and pier. It could be branded as a centre of health and wellness, particularly with the launch of the new Centre for Active Living. It can be marketed as a place to do business, with opportunities for entrepreneurs and small business owners. White Rock could also be positioned as a centre for arts and culture, focusing on our galleries and theatre, and the work of local artists. We felt, however, that promoting one sector of White Rock over another limits what White Rock “is”. For any branding to be successful and to resonate with our target audiences, it needs to be inclusive of the many elements that make the city such a vibrant place.

### **VII. Conclusions and Recommendations**

At the beginning of this process, our goal was to bring together the diverse threads of the city, and to find a theme that would inspire citizens, tourists and investors.

We feel that it is important to embrace as many elements of the city as possible, positioning White Rock as a place where arts and culture, health and wellness, active family living, urban life, nature, business excellence – and more – all thrive.

With this in mind, we recommend three potential branding themes for the consideration of City Council. Each can be used as an overarching brand within which the city’s many assets can be promoted. We see the themes as inclusive of the many voices of White Rock, capturing the essence of the city and speaking to the community as a whole. Please note that while there are different attributes of the city described in each theme, these traits are interchangeable among the themes.



## White Rock ...



• Photo courtesy White Rock Players

Contributed by Betina Albornoz - Tourism White Rock



... a place where we celebrate  
*Arts & Cultural Diversity*



... a place where we celebrate  
*our Heritage*



A photograph of three people hiking on a dirt trail through a dense forest. In the foreground, a man in a blue long-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants is walking towards the camera, smiling, and using trekking poles. Behind him, a woman in a pink long-sleeved shirt and black pants is also walking and using trekking poles. Further back, another person in a red jacket and a red cap is visible. The forest is lush with green trees and undergrowth, and sunlight filters through the canopy.

Photo courtesy City of White Rock

Contributed by Betina Albornoz - Tourism White Rock

... a place where we celebrate  
*Health & Wellness*





... a place where we celebrate  
*Nature & the Great Outdoors*



... a place where we celebrate  
*Extraordinary Cuisine*



... a place where we celebrate  
*Professional Business Excellence*





Photo courtesy City of White Rock

Contributed by Betina Albornoz - Tourism White Rock

... a place where we celebrate  
*Business Development & Investment*

Photo courtesy City of White Rock

Contributed by Betina Albornoz - Tourism White Rock



... a place where we celebrate  
*Urban Prosperity & Revitalization*





... a place where we celebrate  
*Community Investment & Growth*



Photo courtesy City of White Rock

Contributed by Betina Albornoz - Tourism White Rock

... a place where you can  
*Visit ... Live ... Retire*



Photo courtesy Rene-Duson

Contributed by Betina Albornoz - Tourism White Rock

Celebrate everything White Rock has to offer  
*Culture | Community | Tourism | Commerce*



# POTENTIAL BRANDING THEMES

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**“Abundantly  
Beautiful”**



## 1) White Rock: Abundantly Beautiful

White Rock is abundant in so many things, from our scenic waterfront and uptown community to our strategic location near the United States border. We are also privileged to enjoy active living, community spirit, arts and culture, business excellence and much more. The theme “Abundantly Beautiful” is a simple and effective way to convey how plentiful the city is in terms of the assets it offers citizens, visitors and investors.

*Key message:* White Rock is so abundantly beautiful, “we have everything that you need”, whether it is business opportunities, fine dining, outdoor recreation, a family getaway, or more.



# “A West Coast Gem”





## 2) White Rock: A West Coast Gem

In many ways, it is White Rock's location that makes us who we are: the promenade and pier, and our seaside setting. "West Coast Gem" immediately conveys the city's coastal, waterfront location. But White Rock is more than a seaside locale. It is a gem, rich in the many assets it offers to those who visit here, invest here and live here. White Rock is a place to celebrate everything from arts and cultural diversity to health and wellness, business excellence and the great outdoors.

*Key message:* Offering a vibrant cultural and economic community within a spectacular setting, White Rock is a jewel – beautifully cultivated from nature.



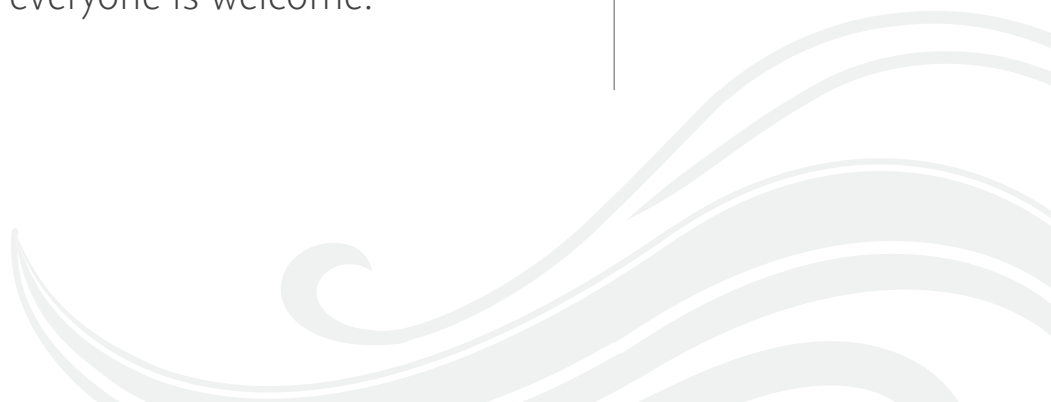
# “City by the Sea”



### 3) White Rock: “My City by the Sea” / “Our City by the Sea” / “Your City by the Sea”

The phrase “City by the Sea” effectively captures the experience of seaside living that is at the heart of White Rock. But there is more to the city – White Rock is comprised of a rich tapestry of voices. There isn’t one voice that speaks on behalf of the city. The theme “City by the Sea” can be personalized with “My”, “Our”, or “Your”, and used with supporting statements to tell all of our different stories. For example, for the business community: “My City by the Sea is Open for Business”; for the health and wellness sector: “Our City by the Sea is a Place for Active Living”; or for arts patrons: “My City by the Sea supports Arts and Culture”. Personalizing the theme offers a sense of ownership to stakeholders, while reaching out to potential residents, tourists and investors.

*Key Message:* Every one of us has a different idea of why White Rock is special, and it is our individual voices that, together, weave the city’s diverse fabric. Whether it is a place to do business, to discover the great outdoors or to enjoy a refreshing getaway, this is our White Rock, and everyone is welcome.





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**Sean Aleiandra**

## “My City by the Sea supports Arts & Culture”

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**WHITE ROCK**  
*My City by the Sea!*



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**Mayor  
Catherine  
Ferguson**

## “My City by the Sea is open for Business”

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**WHITE ROCK**  
*My City by the Sea!*





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***“My City by the Sea  
is a West Coast Gem”***

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**WHITE ROCK**  
*My City by the Sea!* 

These concept examples illustrate the personalizing of the “City by the Sea” slogan, to give voice to the rich diversity of our city, its services, its features and our citizens. In turn this allows us to take full advantage of the city’s existing brand equity.

Although these mock ups feature “My City by the Sea”, other variants of this theme could be applied using “Our” or “Your” as deemed appropriate. Concepts could include individuals or groups.

Exploring a Mix and Match approach with other themes is also viable. It is believed the other themes presented could be combined and presented in a similarly inclusive manner.





### **In Closing**

Over the course of our discussions, we realized that our response to various branding themes evolved from meeting to meeting. We would have initial reactions, other thoughts as we discussed them as a group, and sometimes we would reconsider our original positions as we contemplated the themes over the weeks. In this context, we respectfully encourage City Council to take some time to reflect on the recommended themes, as Council may find that its reactions also change over time as dialogue continues.

At the start of this process, we hoped to identify a brand that captures the spirit of the city, celebrates our natural and cultural assets, and reflects the values and strengths of the community. We wanted to find a brand that embraces the community's many voices, and is inclusive. We feel that each of the themes described above can achieve this balance, and recommend further consideration of these as potential new brands for White Rock.

We thank City Council for the opportunity to serve the city and to provide input into the city's branding process.





## BRANDING STEERING COMMITTEE

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**Committee Chair:**

Chris Thornley

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