

May 2011 Newsletter – Election Issue

Peninsula Homeless to Housing (PH2H) Round Table

Providing leadership in the South Surrey White Rock communities

In recognition of May 2nd federal election, the focus of this month's newsletter will focus on the candidates for office in our federal riding of South Surrey-White Rock-Cloverdale.

Please circulate our newsletter to your members and congregations. We welcome your feedback to: petergreenwell@telus.net

On April 14th the PH2H Round Table asked all declared candidates for office in the South Surrey-White Rock-Cloverdale riding three questions on a national Affordable Housing Strategy. The solution to homelessness is housing. We asked the following three questions:

1. Do you support the creation of a National Affordable Housing Strategy?
2. What are the essential elements of a National Affordable Housing Strategy?
3. Describe the federal tax reform initiatives you would propose to support the development and retention of purpose-built rental housing.

These questions are based on a number of important facts:

- Canada is the only G8 country without a national housing strategy
- The United Nations has declared housing and homelessness in Canada a national emergency
- White Rock South Surrey has minimal resources to meet the needs of those who are at risk of homelessness.

We submitted our questions to the following declared candidates:

- Russ Hiebert (Conservative)
- Hardy Staub (Liberal)
- Susan Keeping (NDP)
- Mike Schouten (Christian Heritage Party)
- Larry Colero (Green)
- Aart Looye (Independent)
- Brian Marlatt (Progressive Canadian Party)
- David Hawkins (Independent)
- Kevin Donohoe (Independent)

On April 19th and 20th we followed up with email and telephone calls to each of the campaigns we had not heard from.

The answers we received back are published based on the order of votes received by the various parties in the last election.

Answers from Hardy Staub, Liberal Party

1. Our "Red Book" National Liberal Platform (p. 54-55) declares: Yes. We support a national affordable housing strategy. A long-term commitment to partnership with other levels of government is needed (by the federal government). A Liberal government will work with provincial, territorial and municipal partners to put in place a renewed Affordable Housing Framework (AHF), The previous framework was established a decade ago (by the then Liberal Government).
2. The main objectives of the new Framework (p.55) will be to; reduce homelessness; maintain and renew existing affordable housing stock; and, stimulate new construction of affordable housing.
3. Housing challenges and opportunities (p.55) vary from one region to another. Therefore, the new Affordable Housing Framework will emphasize flexibility and openness to innovative approaches such as tax incentives and loan guarantees. It will offer a platform for more effective collaboration among all levels of government, the private and non-profit sectors. The new Framework will promote progress on the particular needs of people with disabilities, as well as northern and Aboriginal communities. It will also recognize that affordable housing is one major piece of the larger puzzle for reducing poverty.

Answers from Susan Keeping, NDP

1. Absolutely. Libby Davies, NDP MP for Vancouver East introduced Bill C304 an Act that is intended to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for everyone in Canada.
 - In 1998 the Mayors of Canada's largest cities declared homelessness a national disaster.
 - Here in South Surrey, White Rock, Cloverdale there is the perception that we don't have homelessness, but those of us who advocate on behalf of those the vulnerable know this is simply not the case.
 - We also know that a high percentage of seniors are living in "core housing need" where their housing

is costing much more than the 30 per cent of their income that is considered suitable by CMHA.

- Food programs are reporting that seniors are volunteering so that they can get a meal, perhaps their only good meal of the day.
- It's not just seniors -- recently a young man came into my campaign office to ask about housing as he is a young professional with a good job, his wife also has a good job, but to purchase a home in the community where he was born has moved beyond his reach.
- If I am elected I will work tirelessly to ensure that Bill C304 passes.

2. The bill calls for a national housing strategy to ensure that the cost of housing in Canada does not prevent individuals and families from meeting other basic needs, including food, clothing and access to education. The bill also calls on the government to provide temporary emergency housing and shelter in the event of disasters and crises. As mentioned previously, an essential element of this plan is that there will be timelines, objectives and deliverables to keep us on track.

3. Tax reform is a complex issue, particularly for housing, as it requires the input of all levels of government. In particular, the NDP is committed to supporting municipalities in their efforts to encourage purpose-built rental housing, because this is the level of government that can often make the biggest difference in encouraging this type of building. As well, we are committed to putting more money in the hands of families and seniors so that they can better afford their housing. We will raise the GIS and protect pensions; we will ease the burden of childcare and eldercare. We will work to increase the stock of affordable and social housing, therefore relieving the pressure on rental housing stock. These are very practical solutions to a very complex problem.

Answers from Larry Colero, Green Party

1. Absolutely, yes, every person has the right to affordable, safe and secure housing.
2. Appoint a Minister for Housing
 - Include the right to affordable housing in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms;
 - Revive the CMHC's mandate to provide affordable, non-market and co-operative housing;
 - Set annual targets for new housing;

- Provide rent supplements and credit and loan guarantees for low-income individuals and families;
- Dedicate funding to the co-operative housing sector

3. Change the Income Tax Act to offer tax cuts for affordable housing including incentives to stimulate construction and investment in the building of and maintenance of an ongoing supply of affordable, healthy, energy-efficient, multi-unit rental housing and to include tax credits for gifts of lands, or of land and buildings, to community land trusts to provide affordable housing.

Answers from Aart Looye (Independent):

1. Yes but it must be in partnership with the local and provincial of government. It is pointless to have a National Affordable Housing Strategy if you don't get a buy-in from all affected parties. It's also pointless if you have no commitment to long term funding.
2. Proper Funding, Zoning/Official Plans that will actually allow affordable housing to occur.
3. Accelerated depreciation - lower corporate taxes - but only if the project remains low and affordable - any change would result in loss of benefits and penalties

Answers Mike Schouten, Christian Heritage Party:

1. Yes. Government policies must take into account their effects on affordability. A national strategy is one way to ensure that this happens.
2. Regional Awareness -- it would be unwise to expect that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will do anything to address affordability; provincial and local governments must be included in any strategy. Market Involvement - the strategy ought to rely primarily on the market to supply the units needed to address affordability issues
3. The capital gains tax provides a significant disincentive to the development of rental property. Eliminating this tax would positively impact the development of rental property.

Answers Brian Marlatt, Progressive Canadian Party:

1. Long called for but never delivered, a National Affordable Housing Strategy is long overdue.

Identifying its key components and determination in achieving them must be a priority of the next government. It can be achieved by working co-operatively with the provinces and municipalities to establish clear targets and achieve measurable results.

2. The Canadian government must take a leadership role, working co-operatively with the provinces and municipalities.
 - Clear targets and measurable results must be defined and committed to. Recognition that application nationally must reflect the cost of living in each province of Canada, and each region and municipality within each province is essential.
 - Care must be taken not to ghettoize affordable housing units; instead, inclusiveness and community should be stressed.
 - Access to core public services - commuter transit to places of work, proximity to schools and health services, for example - need to be part of the overall urban plan where it is municipality based.
 - Access to financial services specifically targeted toward social housing instead of maximized profits in the financial and real estate markets.
 - Essential services and design must acknowledge the increasing presence of the senior's community in need of affordable housing. The increasing incidence of homelessness needs to be a central concern for approaches to affordable housing.
3. To answer this question usefully requires more knowledge of real estate, mortgage, and home construction industries than I can claim. As a general observation insofar as the question asks about federal tax reform, tax incentives specifically targeting affordable housing rather than market conditions or maximized profits are common sense guides for federal legislation concerning support for the development and retention of purpose-built rental housing. Put another way, I don't have the answer to this issue. I don't know anybody that does, but I will listen.
 - I should point out that during the 1999 White Rock flood, as the Progressive Conservative Policy Chair in this riding and as an academic concerned with issues of natural disaster response, I received the support of Joe Clark's PC Task Force on Poverty and Homelessness co-chairs, MP Diane St- Jacques from Shefford, Quebec, and Senator Ermine Cohen from New Brunswick, in support of then Mayor Hardy Staub, former PC and current Liberal candidate, during the emergency and our offer of assistance with the homelessness crisis which resulted.

Why are opinions from all of the candidates not published?

The Peninsula Homeless to Housing Round Table wanted to provide information on all the candidates' positions on three specific questions on a national Affordable Housing Strategy for Canada. This is a long-standing issue of national concern.

We received a statement on the existing federal Homeless Partnering Strategy from the Russ Hiebert campaign. After receiving this statement we made a third request for answers to the questions we asked on a national Affordable Housing Strategy. We received no further response from Mr. Hiebert's campaign. Of course we are happy to provide Mr. Hiebert's campaign comments on the Homeless Partnering Strategy to anyone who contacts us.

In addition we did not receive any response at all to the questions we asked from the following candidates:

- David Hawkins (Independent)
- Kevin Donohoe (Independent)

Election Day is May 2nd

Polls are open from 7am - 7pm. If you are unsure where you vote you can:

Look it up on line at:

www.elections.ca/scripts/pss/FindED.aspx?L=e

OR

Telephone Elections Canada at:
1-800-463-6868

Please use your vote on May 2nd.

June's Newsletter will provide updates from the March, 2010 regional homeless count if they are available.