

# What We Heard – Budget Consultations 2022

Every year as we approach “Budget Season”, I undertake a series of consultation meetings with stakeholders and residents in our riding of West Vancouver-Sunshine Coast-Sea to Sky Country. The consultations took place during three meetings over a two-week period, including separate sessions for West Vancouver, the Sunshine Coast, and the Sea to Sky. We also received written submissions from stakeholders and residents on their priorities for Budget 2022. The following is a summary of what we heard that has been submitted to the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in order to inform the development of Budget 2022.

## **Mitigating Climate Change While Adapting to our Changing Climate**

The recent flooding and forest fires in B.C. have made it clearer than ever that we have no time to waste when it comes to fighting climate change. British Columbians are already facing the of increasingly frequent and intense natural disasters along with progressive changes we can expect with a rapidly changing climate. Residents and stakeholders made it clear that it is critical that our government take the following measures to help protect British Columbians and avert the worst effects of runaway climate change, including to:

- Ensure measures to meet Canada’s 2030 and 2050 goals are funded through Budget 2022.
- Continue to implement tax measures and other incentives to support emissions reducing companies.
- Provide Canadians with the tools and incentives to make choices to reduce their personal GHG emissions.
- Protect British Columbia’s old-growth forests and salmon habitat.
- Increase funding to local governments to manage and protect vital watersheds and sources of drinking water.
- Support organisations and volunteers engaged in remote shoreline cleanups and habitat restoration.
- Renew funding for the Oceans Protection Plan.
- Work with British Columbia to develop flood maps and flood mitigation plans, including a national flood insurance program to protect homeowners at high risk of flooding.
- Provide funding for municipal infrastructure upgrades to adapt to our changing climate.
- Provide financial support towards new technological innovation in emissions reduction and the elimination of the consumption of fossil fuels.

## **Address Housing Affordability**

Canadians from coast to coast to coast are feeling the impacts of worsening housing affordability, but perhaps nowhere is as badly affected as British Columbia and West Vancouver – Sunshine Coast – Sea to Sky Country in particular. As the dream of home ownership continues to fall further out of reach for many Canadians, it is important that the Government of Canada do what it can, as well as work with

other orders of government to address housing affordability challenges and bring the dream of home ownership back into reach for the middle class. As a part of this effort, we have committed to measures to support increasing the supply of housing stock, tackling speculation and dark money in real estate, and building more purpose-built affordable housing. With that in mind, the following actions we're highlighted by participants to tackle housing affordability in British Columbia.

- Implementing the measures promised in our government's Fairness in Real Estate Plan to protect Canadian homebuyers from practices that make it harder for them to purchase a home, and implementing a Homebuyer's Bill of Rights to ensure they are not taken advantage of.
- Quickly launch the First Home Savings Account to help young Canadians save towards purchasing a home.
- Increase funding to the Rapid Housing Initiative to alleviate critical housing shortfalls, while taking measures to ensure this program and other programs in the National Housing Strategy are more accessible in rural areas.
- Incentivizing the construction below-market rental housing and workforce housing in smaller communities.
- Expanding the range of programmes available through CMHC for affordable housing development, in particular the re-funding of housing co-operatives.
- Increasing funding to the Housing Accelerator Fund and use funding to encourage municipalities to make zoning changes to encourage density around transit lines.
- Establish a Canada Financial Crimes Agency to tackle the deleterious effect of money laundering on B.C.'s housing market, and to situate this agency in British Columbia, ground zero for money laundering in Canada.

### **Walking the Path of Reconciliation**

Canada has a long history of oppressing Indigenous People, including the dispossession and exploitation of indigenous land resources, lack of recognition of rights, countless examples of policy that has acted to greatly impact indigenous culture and language. Canada has embarked on the important journey of reconciliation, including a commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into Canadian law. Members of the community have also made it clear how highly they prioritize the ongoing process of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, including such measures as:

- Providing adequate support to indigenous peoples to resource the rebuilding of their communities to the prosperity that they once enjoyed.
- A full commitment to UNDRIP and resources to help communities fully implement the provisions of this important document
- Prioritizing programming to quickly implement the remaining Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in partnership with indigenous peoples.
- Providing support for municipalities to advance reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

### **Invest in Community Services to Build More Healthy, Affordable, and Clean Communities**

The Government of Canada has an important role to play in supporting other orders of government to build, expand physical and social infrastructure, while making it more affordable for Canadians. The following areas were highlighted by participants:

- The expansion of public transit and the creation of walkable, transit-oriented communities that foster healthier, greener lifestyles reduce our dependence on fossil fuels while creating more inclusive communities. By using funding to encourage higher density zoning around transit projects we can both fight climate change and build better housing that's more affordable. The following priority topics came up:
  - The Burrard Inlet Rapid Transit and Lower-Level Road project which will drastically improve transportation on the North Shore and reduce traffic congestion while promoting and improving active transport links with new cycling infrastructure.
  - Regional transportation and transit poses a special challenge in rural communities. Participants highlighted the importance of supporting regional and rural transportation on top of existing funding that has been provided through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program and the Rural Transit Fund.
  - Providing funding for other orders of government to complete studies determining how existing transit infrastructure can be improved to maximize its utility.
- We have consistently heard that one of the biggest barriers to economic development is the high-cost and relative unavailability of childcare. While licensed childcare will drop to only \$20/day by the end of 2022, and to \$10/day within four years as a result of the National Childcare Program created by Budget 2021, our communities continue to face challenges accessing childcare. Participants highlighted the importance of a significant portion of the 40,000 childcare spaces needing to be constructed in our region to deal with existing shortfalls. Given the high cost of living and the rapid population growth, there is a growing shortfall of Early Childhood Educators that needs to be addressed in our region as well.
- Participants noted the challenges of small and rural communities to fund necessary infrastructure improvements with limited taxation powers of municipalities, and the importance of Budget 2022 maintaining the doubling of the Gas Tax to provide reliable funding without the need for grant applications for rural communities.
- Our region has a rapidly growing demographic of seniors, while infrastructure has not kept up to this growth. Participants noted the need for increased capital funding for health care in the wake of the pandemic and for the construction of new health care facilities. This includes new care homes, assisted living facilities, and hospice care. Stakeholders and community members expressed concern about these facilities in the wake of the poor conditions at many private seniors care homes during the pandemic and emphasized the importance of working with the province to build new publicly owned and operated care facilities.
- Participants noted that community services and social programs have often worked in silos but would be more effective with a greater degree of collaboration. The federal government should explore tools to help community services work together in a more holistic way that can provide improved outcomes.
- Stakeholders were also concerned about the growing challenges of mental health, especially in the wake of the pandemic. The federal government should continue to work with the provinces to grow and enhance supports for mental health. This should include efforts to increase health transfers to the provinces to shore up and improve our healthcare system.

## **Supporting Small Businesses**

In nearly every sector of our economy, we have heard about the difficulty of finding, training, and paying staff. There are many reasons for labour shortages including lack of housing, expensive childcare, immigration backlogs, high cost of living, and low wages. The service and tourism industries are especially suffering from labour shortages with many restaurants having to close multiple days a week due to lack of staff. Participants noted:

- Programmes to help businesses afford to train and pay new staff would be highly beneficial to the small business community.
- Providing incentives such as tax credits for business to provide task based training and micro-credentialing would be beneficial in employee retention for businesses.
- Funding to clear the immigration backlog and to prioritize immigration streams for sectors that have the highest labour shortages, such as tourism and hospitality, personal support workers, and childcare are much needed.
- New businesses that were left out of COVID-19 support measures are carrying a heavy debt burden and should be supported.
- The cost of operational requirements has increased; as small businesses continue to recover from the pandemic, financial assistance for the increased costs of supplies would be beneficial.

## **Shore up the Community Based Non-Profit Sector**

The pandemic has shown us the importance role that the generosity of regular Canadians plays in supporting our communities and aiding the health and welfare of Canadians. During our consultations we heard about the important role that this sector has played in our community and suggestions for how to strengthen it. Participants recommended that the Federal Government:

- Implement a three-year renewable operating grant for Community Based Non-profit Organizations to ensure that these organizations can keep their doors open, the lights on the technology current and continue to engage in innovative business development.
- Advance the implementation of the Community Services Recovery Fund to help charities and non-profits adapt and modernize as they recover from the pandemic as outlined in the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Mandate Letter.
- Increase funding for the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program and the Community Action Program for Children.
- Make charitable donations eligible for the same level of tax incentive as political contributions.
- Given the importance of the relationship between the community based non-profit sector and government, that the government collect data about community needs to better tailor government programs to the needs of communities. To this end it was suggested that the federal government invest in a mechanism – a minister and supporting bureaucracy – that focuses on this sector and nurtures the contribution that this sector makes; that deals with issues linking strategy with practice, policy development and program development.
- Further incentivize charitable donations by removing the capital gains tax on donations of private company shares and real estate to registered charities.

## **Ensure that Canada has the Capacity to Defend its Sovereignty and Continue to Play an Active Role in the NATO Alliance**

Participants also raised concern at the increasingly troubling situation in Ukraine and raised the need for enhancement of Canada's national defence capacity. It was noted that Canada does not currently meet the target under NATO to spend 2% of its GDP on national defence and that Canada should strive to move closer to this target and ensure that we have the ability to defend our sovereignty and that of our NATO allies.