



Candidates unite on blueprint to save homes at CHF BC Housing Forum

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(BURNABY) Candidates from four different parties had the same blueprint for keeping thousands of seniors, low-income families and the disabled in their homes at a housing forum held by the Co-operative Housing Federation of B.C.

At a packed meeting in Burnaby at the Executive Hotel and Conference Centre, representatives from the BC Conservatives, BC Greens, BC Liberals and the NDP fielded questions about issues crucial to thousands of co-operative households across the province.

There was surprising unanimity on two key questions that were posed: how the parties would build more co-operative housing and whether or not they would commit provincial funding for rent assistance programs for co-ops whose federal housing agreements are ending.

Shane Simpson (NDP, Vancouver-Hastings) laid out a plan for more co-op housing and rent support programs for co-op members who need assistance under a New Democrat government. He told the audience the NDP is committed to building 1,500 units of social housing a year “and co-op housing will be part of that mix.” Just how much depends on a round of consultations the NDP would hold with stakeholders in the housing sector.

On the question of rent support, Simpson said the NDP would negotiate with the federal government to get them to continue funding for low-income, senior and disabled British Columbians. But he left the door open to having the provincial government step in if Ottawa walks away.

“If those discussions (with the federal government) are not fruitful, then we’ll deal with it,” Simpson told the crowd of over 100.

Between 2014 and 2017, more than 1,500 co-op households in B.C. will lose the federal rent support that currently makes their housing affordable as their housing agreements with the federal government come to an end. That number will double to 3,000 households by 2020.

And that will impact those who can least afford to lose their homes in the most expensive housing market in Canada – families with low-incomes, the elderly and the mobility-challenged.

Simpson said at the least, co-op members should be eligible for existing provincial rent support programs like SAFER and RAP.

“That option should be there for them,” Simpson said.

B.C. Liberal candidate Sam Sullivan (Vancouver-False Creek) said he doesn’t support the federal government “weaseling out of their responsibility” for funding rent support programs. But he added that if the senior level of government does walk away “then we’ll have to do something different” to keep co-op households in their homes.

He was unaware, however, that co-op households are not eligible for current provincial rent support programs.

“I need to do some more homework,” said Sullivan. “But I don’t see why not – it seems logical to me.”

Sullivan, former Vancouver mayor, said the best way to ensure more social and co-op housing gets built is to have a strong economy and emphasized the B.C. Liberals’ performance in handling the province’s finances.

B.C. Conservative candidate Rajiv Pandey (Vancouver-Fraserview) and Rick McGowan of the B.C. Green Party were both supportive of co-op housing and rent support, but didn’t have a lot of specifics on their parties’ policies.

The Housing Forum event was staged as part of CHF BC’s “You Hold the Key” campaign. During the provincial election, CHF BC is seeking commitments from all candidates and parties to continue rent support for low-income and other co-op members.

CHF BC Executive Director Thom Armstrong said he was pleased to hear such strong support from both Simpson and Sullivan for provincially-funded rent assistance for co-op members and the pledge to build more co-op housing.

“We’re encouraged that all the parties seem to be aware of the challenges some of our co-op households are facing and appear to be willing to do something about it,” said Armstrong.

“I’m also very happy to hear that they can see the potential of the co-op model to provide safe, secure, affordable homes for all British Columbians.”

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