

Free market is failing affordability: advocate

Regional plan, transit are 'critical' in achieving diverse development

Every time a new rental housing development goes up in Vancouver or New Westminster, another comes down in Burnaby, making it increasingly harder for people to find an affordable place to live, says the head of the B.C. Non-Profit Housing Association.



GOVERNMENT

OF B.C. Peter Fassbender, the TransLink minister, speaks on Thursday at a discussion, entitled Transit Enabling Livable Communities, that explored the role transit plays in affordable housing and livability.

Kishone Roy says allowing the market to dictate development has led to a disparity of housing across the region, with high-end studios or one-bedroom condominiums springing up after the demolition of once-affordable rental apartments.

And while some cities, like Vancouver, demand a one-for-one replacement of rental units, this isn't the case across Metro Vancouver, particularly in Burnaby, where older rental apartment buildings are being demolished in areas like Metrotown, and along the new Evergreen Line in the Tri-Cities.

Some 500 rental units, he said, have been lost in the past five years.

“My heart goes out to renters in that area who don’t feel they can have the security of tenure,” Roy said of the situation in Burnaby. “We’re going to have to ask the government to intervene so we can build more diverse developments.”

Roy’s comments followed a roundtable discussion on Thursday, called Transit Enabling Livable Communities, which was organized by Deloitte at the request of the B.C. government to examine the role transit plays in affordable housing and livability.

Peter Fassbender, minister for TransLink, said the roundtable — which included regional mayors, UBC economics professor Thomas Davidoff, and Andrew Ramlo of Urban Futures — was a “good starting point” to look at how the province can tackle the issue of using transit investments to bump up the supply of affordable housing across the region. This includes charging developers fees to build higher structures around SkyTrain stations and along other transit corridors, with the fees funding transit.

“Transit is absolutely critical to a livable community and it is not just about housing supply and density ... but is an issue in terms of greenhouse gas emissions by getting people out of their cars, and health benefits,” he said.

“This will really drill down to what steps we can take to deal with these issues.”

A report from Deloitte is expected in the next month.

“We don’t have a lot of time to waste,” Fassbender added, noting the federal and provincial governments have committed funding to the first phase of the Metro mayors’ 10-year transportation plan. “What is clear is we need more supports in the region to deal with the affordability issue. We need to look at that and, if there is more density, how that value is going to support transit.”

Roy agreed transit and housing affordability have to be linked, noting when transit is built, the price of nearby land skyrockets.

But he added more has to be done to ensure a more uniform response across Metro Vancouver. Cities like Coquitlam, Surrey and Burnaby, he said, are “going through a new era,” having spent the last 20 years with booming growth and no federal support.

“**We have no regional plan.** We can’t make these decisions and we have all these different rules in different cities,” Roy said.

“Every time Vancouver or New Westminster is building, something is getting destroyed in Burnaby. We’ve made no headway at all even though the population has surged like crazy.”

But with billions of dollars on the table, he said, there is opportunity to make drastic changes and build more diverse housing.

“Transit is going to be a critical part of that,” he said, but added: “It’s critical we make these decisions now and look at who’s going to be living here in the next five to 10 years.”

Jon Stovell, of the Urban Development Institute, said he believes the province is making an effort to address the situation, which he said “are natural pains that come with the rapid growth in our region right now.”

9 Comment(s)



[Ricketty Rabbit](#)

22 July 2016

06:28

"Free Market"? What kind of a "free market" allows offshore buyers unlimited and unrestrained access to our small market while their government puts huge restrictions on Canadians buying in their market?

This is not a free market - it is a one-sided sellout that favours developers and the construction industry at the expense of local home buyers. Yes, some local home owners who sell at inflated prices are benefiting, too. But every local who buys in Metro Vancouver now is essentially paying a charge in the hundreds of thousands created by government inaction that gives an advantage to developers and offshore customers at locals' expense.

When you add the fact that a significant proportion of the offshore buyers are not paying taxes rightfully due in Canada, we're adding a taxation penalty to all Canadians who do not have offshore income to shelter from the taxman's grasp.

[WaskesiuT](#)

22 July 2016

06:49

Fassbender should ask the local mayors how many (if any) infrastructure planners they have, as contrasted to developer coordinators (of which they have plenty).

It's no surprise why the local situation qualifies as a SNAFU.

[Nomore](#)

22 July 2016

07:57

What else would you think Fassbender would say. A disappointment of the highest order. Not interested in helping out the little guy. Just interested in topping up the Victoria coffures. Him and deJong.

[Rancher](#)

22 July 2016

08:01

The reality is that even if offshore buyers have doubled the price of homes in the past three years, lower mainland housing costs would still have been out of the reach of most first home buyers.

I'm sure that most people rely upon their home as retirement income in the face of taxation that steals most of every investment dollar. None of them are crying about the value of their homes.



[mistereye](#)

22 July 2016

08:36

What is often forgotten is that yes Vancouver homeowners have made some pretty paper profits. And that they may bank on these for retirement. But when they sell, where do they go? Downsizing to condos may look attractive until you factor in the rapidly appreciating prices there, the stiff competition for available units, the several hundreds per month condo fees. So does a paper profit really make you richer?



[Art Iskandid](#)

22 July 2016

11:32

Free market allows free sale and purchase of assets of all kinds. If someone is willing to pay us a high price - is that all bad? Does it not present opportunities? Opportunities to some, but not to all who live in Vancouver. Or are we mostly afraid of the yellow hordes?

Social justice is the duty of government. A tough role, it is, too, because public opinion is not unanimous - regarding social housing, and other issues.



[RHW](#)

22 July 2016

12:07

Where do they go eye? Pretty well anywhere but here with money in the bank.



[Den -](#)

22 July 2016

12:27

Well said Art. Any decision they make will be negative to a lot of people. They are in a no win situation.



[VanIsle](#)

22 July 2016

14:58

Where do they go? Folks moving in next door to us today sold their house in West Van for several million and bought in the Comox Valley for \$1.5 million. Going to be a long time before the smiles are gone from their faces.