

## Mayor's vacancy tax gets provincial support

The City of Vancouver is one step closer to introducing a vacancy tax that will target homes and condos that sit empty for the majority of the year after the provincial government on Monday committed to introducing the needed legislation in a rare summer sitting of the legislature.



**ARLEN REDEKOP FILES** Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson has proposed a vacancy tax that is aimed at increasing the city's rental stock. He welcomed Victoria's support Monday, saying it was a step in the right direction.

Finance Minister Mike de Jong said Monday that the House will convene on July 25 to pass new legislation that will effectively amend the Vancouver Charter and provide the city with statutory authority to introduce and administer Mayor Gregor Robertson's proposed vacancy tax.

As well, de Jong said the government will use the summer session to introduce legislation that will end the self-regulation of B.C.'s real estate industry, a move promised by the government earlier this month following release of a scathing report of the sector by an independent advisory group.

De Jong's announcement responds to a request late last month by Robertson for the province's support to impose a vacancy tax as a way of encouraging some of the owners of an estimated 10,800 vacant residences to rent, thereby increasing the city's rental stock.

At the time, Robertson warned that the city was prepared to push ahead with the tax with or without the province's help. On Monday, De Jong agreed that the proposal is a way to increase rental supply while waiting for some of the city's pending housing projects to come online.

"It strikes us that if the city wants to do this, it is a reasonable request on their part," he said. "We want to ensure the City of Vancouver has clear statutory authority to do this. But, it is ultimately their decision to proceed. We want to ensure that they have all of the information that is available to the province, that could reasonably be expected and be needed to effect enforcement of a measure like this when it is up and running."

Robertson welcomed the province's support at a press conference held later on Monday, saying it was a positive step in the right direction. He did note, however, that a lot of work around the details — including the rate of the tax, how it will be administered and what data the provincial government will supply to the city — still need to be ironed out.

“We want to make sure it is fair, we want to be sure it's focused on homes that are empty 12 months a year and that we are using all the data that has already been collected, whether that's provincial data or city data we are using, that to make sure we administer this fairly and efficiently,” he said.

“We are working on the next steps with the province on exactly how we collect the data administer the empty home tax. So we haven't gotten to the point where we've made decisions on how this is going to be administered.”

De Jong said the day-to-day administration of the tax will be the city's responsibility.

Robertson is hopeful other communities, particularly ones around Metro Vancouver, will push forward with their own empty-home tax as a way of increasing rental stock — a move that will require legislative changes to the Community Charter — noting that Vancouver is not alone in dealing with a vacancy crisis.

“The whole region is dealing with a vacancy crisis,” he said. “Rental housing is in short supply.”

De Jong said Vancouver is the only jurisdiction to date that has put forward a formal request for a vacancy tax.

NDP housing critic David Eby slammed the government on Monday for not acting fast enough on the affordability crisis, saying the only reason the government has decided to support Vancouver's vacancy tax is because the B.C. Liberals are polling badly in Metro Vancouver.

The announcement also does nothing to address the issue of housing affordability in other communities, he said.

“If the mayor of Vancouver is happy with this, then I'm glad,” said Eby. “But the reality is that the province has responsibility for Metro Vancouver, and for the other areas that have identified this as an issue and this is a zero response for those residents that are grappling with unaffordability across the region.”

## 9 Comment(s)

[Rancher](#)

12 July 2016

05:38

One thing we can guarantee with anything implemented by Moonbeam and his city wrecking crew, their tax will be revenue negative. Additionally, the hallmark of all left wing initiatives there will be a bevy of "unintended negative consequences".

[Brent Carson](#)

12 July 2016

06:51

Brilliant political move by the Libs - putting the ball back in Mayor Robertson's court.

TGB of BCLA - Gibsons Public Library (PQ)

12 July 2016

07:41

i should change my comment on the first page, this guy moonbeam is the comic section!

[Forbsey](#)

12 July 2016

07:43

Just asking, not criticizing - how does the city determine if a property is vacant? Seriously, is there some data set that provides this information or will there have to be active inspections on the part of the city?



[Art Iskandid](#)

12 July 2016

08:26

It will require more bureaucracy, but it may be ineffective. It does not address the real "problem," or the real opportunity. Offshore money wants to park here. How is this turned to our advantage - without discouraging the flow of offshore money? Plenty more where it came from. We need housing. They need a safe way to invest. Well, I see that as opportunity. Pity that others don't see it my way. The story of my life.

[tug](#)

12 July 2016

10:15

*Pity that others don't see it my way. The story of my life.*

LOL Art, I get it, I was swimming against the tide transiting the birth canal.

[peanut gallery](#)

12 July 2016

10:24

A tax grab??? Any sort of a tax will likely be regarded as a reasonable "management" fee for the large offshore investments in a safe haven. Another optical illusion opposed to real action.



[RHW](#)

12 July 2016

10:50

The collection of the "data" will prove interesting. How much intrusion into the private information of homeowners will be sanctioned with proper authorization? Will the starting point be a snitch line, or a foray into private hydro information, teams of snoops scouring the city, mail recon, provincial data bases, or all of the above? Just how much will this swell the city coffers or not?

More posturing from an ineffective mayor.

[Corrie Kost](#)

12 July 2016

13:51

Opportunity for private enterprise to make an empty home look "lived in" ?