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COPE mayoral candidate pitches universal transit for \$ 1 a day

I think other cities will jump on this bandwagon. MEENA WONG COPE CANDIDATE

Mayoral candidate Meena Wong of COPE launched another populist proposal Wednesday, calling for a universal transit program that would cost each of Vancouver's citizens \$ 1 per day.



RIC ERNST/PNG

Meena Wong, COPE mayoral candidate, announces a proposed \$ 30 monthly transit pass for Vancouverites during a news conference Wednesday.

Wong, who has already called for a tax on vacant condo units in order to combat Vancouver's soaring real estate prices, told reporters her transit plan is key to making the city affordable for all residents.

Wong said the plan, which would cost "working- age residents" \$ 30 a month for unlimited three- zone travel, would also generate \$ 160 million for the transit system each year.

Residents will have the ability to opt out, she added.

When asked if the proposal is realistic within the regional transit system, or whether TransLink and Victoria would agree to Vancouver launching its own system, Wong answered: "If the people want it, I think this is the important thing ... I think other cities will jump on this bandwagon. I will negotiate with other cities."

She said COPE had talked to TransLink about the plan, but that TransLink hadn't "responded very well."

Speaking from COPE'S Main Street campaign headquarters, Wong who was born in Beijing, was surrounded by supporters and Chinese dragon dancers and drummers. Wong's policies — generally about making Vancouver greener, more affordable, and less of a developer- controlled city — are aimed at left- wing voters who may have supported Vision Vancouver in the last election. COPE and Vision, two parties that split into left and right factions, previously had a non- compete agreement that prevented COPE from running for mayor. This will be the first time Mayor Gregor Robertson is directly challenged by the leftist COPE voters. Wong and COPE are attempting to motivate a voter base of renters and citizens who are frustrated with the cost of housing in Vancouver. The party has steadily attacked Robertson and Vision Vancouver as being mostly funded by developers, and therefore unwilling to take drastic measures to address affordability.

Wong repeated that accusation on Wednesday, saying Robertson "is too close a friend with developers."

And she defended her proposal to tax vacant condos.

Wong said that since announcing the plan, which could let the air out of Vancouver's condo market, people from around the world have emailed her to state that the strategy is feasible and works in other jurisdictions.

"I can tell you, this is doable," Wong said. "The people want it, and they will give us the mandate. Other cities have shown us they can do it. I believe affordable housing is a part of a city's infrastructure."



As reporters continued to press Wong on the viability of COPE'S proposals and her chances of winning the mayoral race, supporters started a loud chant — "When I say people, you say power!" — and Wong flashed a broad grin.

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