



Jonathan Wilkinson

NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

July 15, 2016

Our Summer of Housing Discontent

Real estate has long been a staple of summer patio conversation in North Vancouver. However this year the tenor is different, more urgent, because the current situation is unlike anything we have seen before.

The tone is an impassioned mix of alarm, growing anger and, to some extent, sadness that our community appears to be irrevocably changing.

I've raised my two daughters on the North Shore believing that someday they'd be able, if they chose, to build a life here for themselves. At present, this seems increasingly less likely.

The cost of housing in the Lower Mainland has become completely disconnected from local incomes. For many, particularly young people, home ownership is becoming an increasingly doubtful proposition.

There has been no shortage of media commentary on the myriad of consequences of all this, so there is no need for me to repeat them here. What people rightly want to know is what are politicians at all levels of government doing about it.

Gravity of the situation

Job #1 for me and my federal BC Liberal Caucus colleagues has been to work to ensure that relevant decision makers in Ottawa fully understand the gravity of the situation.

We began several months ago by meeting with a number of Vancouver experts to deepen our understanding both of how we got into this situation and of potential solutions – particularly those that are within the realm of the federal government.

We then developed and circulated in Ottawa a briefing document that attempted to convey the urgency of the situation and the need for a federal action plan.

That document and subsequent conversations played a role in the Prime Minister's decision to convene and chair a round table of housing affordability experts in Vancouver on June 17th.

Andy Yan, acting director of Simon Fraser University's City Program, one of the roundtable participants, said, "One of the most powerful things he [the Prime Minister] did was begin to listen. I think that's one of the first steps, to actually understand the problem before coming up with solutions."

Subsequent to the roundtable I spent 90 minutes meeting with Finance Minister Bill Morneau in his office discussing

what is happening in the Lower Mainland, sharing with him the impact on North Vancouver and reviewing potential paths forward.

The Minister made clear to me his view that the current situation is untenable and that co-ordinated near term action by all three levels of government is needed. Minister Morneau has announced the formation of a joint federal-provincial-municipal Working Group that has been mandated to develop a plan of action within the next few months.

Not a barrier to action

Given where things stand, I believe there is limited public patience for the "we need more data" argument. Several researchers – including Professor Josh Gordon of SFU – have been able to gather sufficient information to underline many of the key issues at play.

I am personally not convinced that a "lack of data" is a reasonable barrier to action. At a very minimum, there is enough information about the probable causes of the situation to direct where we need to look to close any remaining information gaps and to actively evaluate policy options.

Each level of government has potential policy levers that can be brought to bear on this issue. Arguably the Province is in the strongest position to be able to take effective action. However, all three levels of government need to be working to ensure that measures developed to address the current crisis are well considered and well-co-ordinated.

North Vancouverites and residents of the Lower Mainland generally are looking to their governments for direction and for action.

Based on my discussions with key decision makers in the Government of Canada, I know that this government "gets it" and I am confident that we will see concrete actions later this year that will aim to begin to address this matter that is so important to the residents of North Vancouver.

Some food for thought for summer patio conversations.

Sponsored by the Electoral District Association of North Vancouver, Liberal Party of Canada.

CONTACT INFO:

CONSTITUENCY OFFICE: 102 West 3rd Street, North Vancouver
EMAIL: Jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca | TEL: 604-775-6333