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NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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Public land should be used for homes

A non-descript industrial location in North Vancouver captured some attention during last week's coverage of the federal budget for being "ripe for housing development".

What makes this noteworthy is that the land at 120 Charles St. is owned by Canada Post and is currently being assessed for potential development where apartment towers or other types of buildings could be built and paired with ground-level postal operations.

It's a small local slice of a sweeping and unprecedented plan detailed in the budget to free up public land for housing that's anticipated will add 250,000 new homes by 2031 - with the overall new housing strategy expected to see 3.9M homes built by that date.

Unlocking land

Today, governments across Canada are sitting on surplus, underused, and vacant public lands. By unlocking these lands for housing, governments can lower the costs of construction and build more homes, faster, at prices Canadians can afford.

In the face of Canada's housing crisis, the federal government is saying that whenever possible, public land should be used for homes - an historic shift in its approach to federally owned lands.

The new *Public Lands for Housing Program* will use every tool available to convert public lands to housing. They include building homes not just on Canada Post property but on Department of National Defence lands and converting underused federal offices into homes.

Local response to the initiative has been encouraging. "Bringing land into the mix does help us produce a more affordable product for the community," says DNV Mayor Mike Little.

Fresh thinking

Using public lands for housing is, admittedly, just a fraction of Canada's comprehensive and multi-faceted Housing Plan. But in my mind it illustrates the ingenuity, fresh thinking, boldness and vision that characterize the profusion of new initiatives in Canada's Housing Plan designed to end our nation's housing crisis.

The Union of BC Municipalities has said Canada's Housing Plan, "...is significant in its scope and its scale of investment and shows a recognition of the important federal role in the funding and delivery of housing."

Penny Gurstein, professor emerita with the School of Community and Regional Planning at the University of B.C., has said the federal government is listening to solutions from housing advocates and experts. "Our greatest need is housing and so I think this is a really, really good step that the government is making."

As an aside that I hope is not interpreted as overly partisan, I could not help but be struck by the contrast between the thoughtful, multi-faceted policy approach of Canada's Housing Plan with the alternative solution articulated by the Conservative's housing critic:

"Common sense Conservatives will build the homes by punishing gatekeepers that block home building and rewarding those who get homes built."

This federal government is taking action to meet the moment and build housing at a pace and scale not seen in generations. We did it when soldiers returned home from the Second World War, and we can build homes on that scale again to make sure that Canadians at every age can find an affordable home.

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