



Shared Priorities for Provincial Government Action: July, 2017

The Chamber, the City of Victoria, Tourism Victoria, the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority (GVHA) and the Downtown Victoria Business Association (DVBA) have collectively identified seven urgent and immediate issues affecting the City of Victoria and the Greater Victoria area that require provincial government action. Here is a brief overview of these issues and what we are asking the Province to do.

Increase Affordable Housing

There is an affordable housing crisis that is threatening the wellbeing of our population and the ability of our economy to continue to grow. Our vacancy rate is 0.6, the lowest in Canada.

“It matters to our economy that the people who provide services we need and want, can afford to live here,” said Mayor Lisa Helps. For example, a minimum-wage worker makes \$22,568 per year working full-time. Assuming 30 per cent of this income is spent on housing — a generally accepted guideline — that’s \$565 per month for rent, inclusive of utilities. But the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in this region is around \$900 and there are none for less than \$750.

The single person on income assistance gets \$375 per month for shelter allowance and \$610 total. Even with provincial rent supplements of \$300 or \$400 per month, they can’t access affordable housing. Affordable home-ownership for low-income families is increasingly difficult. Single family homes are out of reach, which means turning to condo living. Yet there are very few three bedroom condos being built, even if they were affordable.

We are asking the Province to:

- Work with the federal government to ensure that the National Housing Strategy, and the budget allocations that accompany it, has enough flexibility to meet local need, is driven by local demand and based on local consultation.
- Make a predictable, consistent investment in affordable housing, with the amount based on a business case and on the number of people un-housed or under-housed in British Columbia, and have an annual call for proposals from the non-profit and for-profit housing sectors.
- Reward local governments that have clear strategies at the local level for cutting red tape and making it easier for non-profit and for-profit housing developers to build new rental housing. The reward can be higher funding for affordable housing.
- Raise Income Assistance rates, or at the very least the shelter allowance, so that people who receive it can afford to find shelter with it. They need shelter to find jobs.
- Create — through tax relief, grant funding or other innovative financing — more opportunities for first-time homebuyers to enter the housing or condominium market.



Improve Mental Health and Addictions Services

The City of Victoria has a disproportionately higher population of homeless compared to other B.C. municipalities and other Greater Victoria municipalities. In addition, a high proportion of the homeless population suffers from mental health and/or severe substance use disorders. Victoria's challenge is exacerbated by being the location for 90 per cent of regional services for this population.

The City of Victoria does what it can to address this issue with a tax base of 80,000 residents. Victoria can no longer afford to carry this burden on its own. We are grateful that the \$60 million Regional Housing First Program, including housing with supports, is a truly regional approach.

Acting Victoria Police Chief, Del Manak, stated, "Although many agencies are working hard to properly serve and support this population, the police remain the only option in many cases due to their 24/7 availability. Recently, Victoria and Esquimalt Council approved adding two additional police officers to the four Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams to allow for early intervention for those with the most severe mental illnesses, but much more is needed in terms of mental health outreach."

Insufficient coordination between the Ministry of Health and BC Housing and a lack of affordable housing stock exacerbates the issue as an increasing number of these challenged individuals slip through the cracks. Without coordination or a single lead organization at the Province, service providers end up working in silos and competing for funding, further challenging an already complex situation.

We are asking the Province to:

- Provide supportive services for these individuals throughout the province so Victoria is not a draw because more services are available here.
- Adequately fund mental health and addictions care and enhance the Island Health Authority's ability to build, and properly resource, integrated teams to provide effective and assertive treatment and outreach. We want a model where there is consistency among service providers allowing them to support, rather than fight with, one another to get those that need help the assistance they require.
- Take the lead in identifying and developing new housing stock of shelter space and supportive housing, followed up with market rent and rental supplements.
- Take the lead in assessing clients for placement into housing managed by independent not-for-profit service providers, and create the necessary treatment and harm reduction programs that dovetail into a dispersed housing model.
- Improve governance at the Cabinet level by establishing a Mental Health Secretariat, as described by the Province's 2016 Justice Summit.



Provide Affordable, Accessible, Quality Child Care

Child care is a fundamental workforce requirement. The lack of affordable, quality child care spaces in Greater Victoria is having a direct impact on employers and workers. Workers are reducing their hours and modifying their shifts to compensate for the lack of child care. This is adding to the shortage of labour at a time when we have the lowest unemployment rate in the country.

With regard to affordability: For a working family, child care and housing are typically the two highest expenses. According to Victoria Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR), the average monthly cost of full-time child care for kids under 5, as of February 2017, was between \$812 and \$1128 per month. That is over \$10,000 a year per child and at least \$40,000 from birth to Kindergarten. The problem is exacerbated for a family with more than one child and continues with the need for after-school care and care during school vacations.

With regard to availability: The 2016 Canada Census data reveals the gap between our regional population of children and number of child care spaces. The most acute gap is for infants and toddlers where we have roughly one licenced child care space for every eight children. The gap is likely to expand. Between 2011 and 2016 our population of 25 to 39 year olds grew 9 per cent and our population of children under 11 also grew 9 per cent.

It is a shortage of early childhood educators that contributes to the lack of licenced spaces for child care as child care operators can only offer as many spaces as they can staff. According to CCRR average wages, as of June 2016, are under \$20.00 per hour which is not attractive in a full employment economy.

To overcome this drag on our economy and to ensure children have a safe and stimulating start in life, child care needs the same level of government attention and investment as the other fundamental underpinning of our economy such as education, transportation and health care.

We are asking the Province to:

- Ensure BC gets its fair share of funding from the federal government under the National Framework on Early Learning and Child Care.
- Expand publicly funded spaces for early childhood education training.
- Consider including childcare as part of the K to 12 education system and allow access to school property and facilities, which have already been paid for by the taxpayer, for affordable childcare.
- Deliver on the campaign promise of \$10 a day childcare.



Complete Sewage Treatment

We have until 2020 before we face hefty federal fines for not treating our sewage.

Thanks to the ability of seven local governments and two First Nations to finally come together and agree on a solution, with the leadership of the Province, we now have an approved Liquid Waste Management Plan (LWMP) and the governance structure in place to delegate implementation of the plan to an independent project board.

“The tourism industry in Greater Victoria prides itself on its sustainable practices. We have a carbon neutral airline, motor coach companies converting their fleets to electric power, hotels with the highest levels of sustainability and whale watchers contributing to research and environmental protection. Dumping raw sewage into the ocean is not congruent with our broader environmental sensibilities as a community and tourism industry. It is time to complete this project,” said Paul Nurse, President and CEO of Tourism Victoria.

While the LWMP has been approved and there will be treatment for liquid waste through to Class A biosolids production, more planning and investment is required to find an end use for the biosolids. The CRD is working on a cost-effective and forward-looking integrated resources management solution.

We are asking the Province to:

- Support the region in the implementation of this project through positive messaging and a solutions-oriented approach to any challenges that arise
- If required, amend legislation with regard to the management of solid and liquid wastes to allow for waste integration and beneficial use of waste into resources, and fund pilot projects in this regard
- Provide a fair share of provincial funding for these additional requirements of the Liquid Waste Management Plan.



Create a Regional Transportation Commission

Traffic congestion is becoming horrific, especially between Westshore and downtown. Citizens are concerned about increasing travel times, lack of parking downtown, lack of integrated transportation planning across municipal boundaries and no regional priority setting or funding for important infrastructure such as bridges, a designated major road network and additional modes of public transit such as water based transit or light rail.

There are only two regional transportation services: the Victoria regional Transit Commission, which has the mandate to deliver an integrated bus service and the CRD's regional cycling and walking trails.

“We need well planned regional transportation that optimizes all modes and delivers fast, reliable, affordable choices,” said Catherine Holt, CEO of the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce. “This helps attract workers, support tourism, allow goods to be transported efficiently and ensure Greater Victoria remains livable.”

In the longer term, Greater Victoria needs to integrate public transit access with land-use planning, creating zoning for high-density housing and community services near transportation hubs and walk/bike paths as well as providing incentives to reduce driving to the city centre, in particular during peak hours.

We are asking the Province to:

- Most urgently, fund an increase in operations by providing the Victoria Regional Transit Commission with 2 cents per litre of gas tax (for a total of 5.5 cents/ltr)
- Fund a dedicated bus lane along the provincial highway from the Westshore to downtown so the bus goes faster than cars and is a more desirable option,
- Legislate a regional transportation commission for Greater Victoria with the right governance, mandate, transportation and land use expertise, decision-making authority, revenue sources, project management ability and operating responsibility to design and deliver integrated multimodal transportation for the region.



Complete Belleville Terminal Improvements

The Belleville Terminal, in Victoria’s Inner Harbour, is a key international gateway to Greater Victoria and to our country for millions of visitors. Passage is provided to and from Victoria by Black Ball Line (service between Victoria and Port Angeles, WA) and Clipper Navigation Ltd., (service between Victoria and Seattle, WA) using the terminal. The terminal has an economic impact of \$180 million per year and supports approximately 4,500 full-time jobs in the region and on the Island. Terminal revitalization is strategically important.

Phase one was funded by the Province, Black Ball Ferry Line and Clipper Navigation Inc. and included dock replacement, improved custom facilities and covered walkways.

Phase two is funded by the City of Victoria and Tourism Victoria and will improve Belleville Street.

Phase three requires federal funding to construct a new terminal building with amalgamated border services and pre-clearance. It will boost existing cooperation between Customs and Border Protection and the Canada Border Service Agency, provide the infrastructure to make it easier for Canada and the USA to conduct business and also support the Beyond the Border initiative.

The province must identify an owner and operator for the terminal before the federal government will fund its construction.

“Improvements to the Belleville Terminal are long overdue and necessary for myriad reasons,” said Paul Nursey, CEO of Tourism Victoria. “Not least of which is to improve the passenger experience, attract more visitors to the region and build on Victoria’s reputation as a world-class destination.”

We are asking the Province to:

- Complete its business case and proceed to request federal funding for phase three.



Develop Ogden Point and Establish Home Port Victoria

Ogden Point is Canada’s busiest cruise ship port of call and also acts as a major international gateway to Greater Victoria. Managed by the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority (GVHA), Ogden Point welcomed more than 550,000 passengers and more than 212,000 crew on 224 ships in 2016.

The cruise industry is estimated to have an economic impact of \$100 million annually to Greater Victoria, providing an estimated 700 direct and indirect jobs in the region. Serving popular Alaska routes for all major international cruise lines, Victoria’s share of future cruise business is expected to grow by four to five percent per year over the next five years.

GVHA has developed a Master Plan for its existing footprint that enhances the cruise terminal buildings to create a tourism gateway, builds on partnerships with the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations for a strong cultural presence, and adds retail, services and hospitality infrastructure and the potential for marine industry.

Implementation will set the stage for Victoria to become a designated home port by the early 2020s, which will have an estimated regional economic impact of \$2 million per excursion and is estimated to create an additional 350 to 400 jobs in the region. Key to the plan is a successful submission to the Building Canada Fund to support construction of the new cruise terminal.

“Ogden Point enhances Victoria’s economy and the cruise capacity of Port Metro. It also boosts the visibility and viability of smaller ports including Nanaimo and Prince Rupert,” said GVHA CEO Ian Robertson. “Improvement to this facility is essential to maintaining British Columbia’s position as a key player in international cruise tourism.” **We are asking the Province to:**

- Support GVHA’s application for federal funding, and
- Support the plans for home porting in Victoria.

Conclusion

The Chamber, Tourism Victoria, the City of Victoria, the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority and the Downtown Victoria Business Association will continue working with each other and the newly-elected provincial government to achieve these high priority outcomes for Victoria.

“We are very pleased to have been able to work so closely together with the other organizations on our common priorities to make Victoria a better place to work, live and play” Chamber Chair Al Hasham said.

“We look forward to a positive response from the Province.”