

municipality
VOTES!

municipality VOTES!

“Just one question...”

This publication is intended to help you engage with local candidates in the municipal election on November 15, 2008. It's all about social issues that impact your community; questions that matter to you; and the role that the municipal governments can choose to take in addressing them.

Questions raise issues. Questions require candidates to develop a clear position on where they stand. In this document, we cover 6 social issues affecting communities across BC today, provide sample questions you can ask your candidates, and include links to more information. By getting involved, you get a say about the kind of community in which you would like to live – all it takes is **just one question**.

Tips to guide your way...

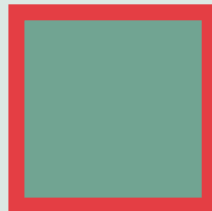
What the boxes mean...



This box suggests questions to ask your candidates



This box highlights the main issues of the topic



This box provides more information and links to supporting articles

List of Topics

1. Local Democracy	2
2. Affordable Housing	4
3. Inclusion & Accessibility.....	6
4. Diversity in Civic Engagement.....	8
5. Transportation	10
6. Municipal Governments & Community Social Planning	12

Local Democracy

In a time of rapid change in BC, local government is becoming more important than ever. Whether their community is growing in response to rising resource prices, or facing problems because of a declining economy, local governments are at the forefront of social, economic and environmental change.

As these changes take place, municipal governments are grappling to understand their role in a changing context. Local governments may not have a mandate or the resources to address issues such as poverty, housing, homelessness, or addiction. However, because the consequences of these issues are most visible at the local level, municipal governments have an interest in defining their role in responding to the issues.

Local governments can play important roles that do not involve delivering services or acting as funders. Local governments can be leaders in defining what makes communities livable and set the bar to achieve a high quality of life for all their residents. Local governments can play a convening role by bringing together stakeholders to identify issues and priorities. When local councils are asked to address social issues that may call for additional support and funding beyond their control, they can take a leadership role in communicating community concerns to senior levels of government.

When local governments are asked to respond to community social issues, their plans to address an issue should be made with the inclusion of local citizens. Local citizens will be the ones most affected by any changes local governments may make, therefore citizens should contribute to forming the solutions. In a democracy, citizens choose who will

represent them on decisions that affect their way of life. Local governments are in the best position to understand their communities and develop local approaches to address complex social issues, and represent those issues to higher levels of government.

Local governments can also choose to take a more proactive role in supporting other community groups that are working on social issues, such as community social planning organizations, and support citizen engagement groups. Community groups are increasingly involved in the decision-making of our municipalities. Communities can choose to seek out candidates that see value in community-based approaches.

For More Information:

The Social Role of Local Government
(Caledon Institute of Social Policy)
www.caledoninst.org

Vibrant Communities
<http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2.php>

BC Civil Liberties Association
www.bccla.org/citizenshipguide/index.html

Local Democracy: Questions and Key Points

Local governments need to be leaders in building communities with a high quality of life for all residents.

Local governments need to involve residents in finding solutions to address important issues.



What kind of role do you think local governments can play in addressing social issues?

How will you support community organizations working to address community issues such as poverty, homelessness, etc.?

Affordable Housing

Very little new affordable housing stock is being built in BC communities. Due to an erosion of existing market rental housing stock through conversion, demolition and redevelopment, as well as lagging incomes that have not kept pace with rising housing costs, many BC communities are facing a housing affordability crisis. Approximately 44% of renters and 23% of owners in BC are spending more than 30% of their income on shelter. The 2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count reported 2,647 homeless people, an increase of close to 20% since 2005, and a jump of 131% since 20021. It is estimated that there are over 10,000 homeless people in BC.

A healthy community is one that is inclusive, with a range of housing types and prices, and a balance of living and working opportunities. Communities throughout BC are facing increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified employees, including professionals such as teachers, nurses, and emergency, fire rescue and policing staff, because of the lack of affordable housing. People with moderate incomes are feeling the affects of the increasing lack of affordable housing, living farther away from their place of work, impacting the environment, traffic volumes and their quality of life. Some communities are experiencing significant “graying”, with very few young families moving in and schools closing.

In October 2006, the BC government introduced its provincial housing strategy, Housing Matters BC. In 2007, 225 new supportive housing units were completed through the program with promises of more than 4000 additional units over the following years. The province is expecting municipalities to contribute to building these units and has signed agreements with Vancouver, Surrey, Kelowna, and SPARC BC. 2008. Metro Vancouver Homeless Count, 1 Sept. 2008. Byers, S. 20 March 2008. Clarifying BC’s homeless count. 25 Sept. 2008.

Victoria. Municipalities will contribute based on their own plans for how to go about addressing their unique situations. Differences in geographic regions, population diversity and density, and the type of industry and economic base available will change how each municipality approaches building affordable housing.

Some municipal councils have taken leadership roles in supporting the provision of affordable housing in their communities. They have provided land at below market rates to non-profit housing providers, negotiated with developers for affordable rental units during the rezoning process, established housing funds, and introduced regulations prohibiting rental conversion and controlling demolitions. They have also supported creative responses from the development industry, including laneway housing and shared equity ownership programs.

Other municipalities have done very little. The upcoming municipal elections are your opportunity to choose a council that will ensure that your community maintains or builds a diverse range of affordable housing stock.

For More Information:


Metro Vancouver Housing Research
www.metrovancouver.org/planning/development/housingdiversity/Pages/default.aspx

Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre
<http://www.tenants.bc.ca/>

Affordable Housing: Questions and Key Points

Municipal councils can take a leadership role in supporting the provision of affordable housing in their communities.

Municipal councils can take steps to urge the federal and provincial governments to commit funding to safe, affordable housing.



What steps will you take to create an affordable housing plan for the community?

How will you improve supportive housing for people with addictions and mental health issues?

What will you do to ensure that the community is involved in the planning of affordable housing?

Inclusion & Accessibility

The word “community” implies belonging. Inclusion means that everyone belongs. Accessibility means removing barriers to inclusion for people with disabilities. One in ten adults under age 65 in BC. has a disability and is more than twice as likely to live in poverty. The likelihood of incurring a disability increases with age, so as the population in BC ages, more people will face barriers to inclusion. Municipalities can choose to enhance community accessibility by considering initiatives along 5 themes: moving around, working, living, playing, and participation.

Accessible communities ensure that everyone can move around freely. Municipalities can use barrier-free design to ensure that people with disabilities are fully included.

Accessible workplaces increase employment for people with disabilities. Through the removal of barriers, people with disabilities can continue to be contributing members of their communities. Workplace efficiency is often a positive outcome from hiring people with disabilities because the necessary physical adjustments to the workspace make it safer and more comfortable for staff, customers, and other visitors

People with disabilities require affordable homes to live in with the necessary supports for day-to-day living. Sometimes this is home care, physical adjustments such as ramps and support bars, or the addition of audio aids throughout the neighbourhood, such as audio signals or Braille signage. Municipal governments can be a source of leadership, incentive, and financial support to make sure the necessary supports exist and that the necessary affordable housing exists.

Supporting the inclusion of people with disabilities into the arts and culture of a community can enrich an entire

community. It's not just a matter of providing physical access to things like theatres (which also helps to include everyone, such as mothers with young children) but providing equal opportunity to access specialized training programs and activities that can help people with disabilities maximize their talents, which in many cases provides additional income for people.

Civic participation and inclusion of people with disabilities, within local government planning processes and decisions, is vital to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are met. Inclusion is a process as well as an outcome. Municipal governments can seek out diverse participation in civic dialogue. Supporting the specific needs of people with disabilities invites more complete participation.

Inclusive communities benefit everyone and everyone needs to be included in building inclusive communities. Equity in opportunity and participation gives all community members a full range of choices. You can choose a municipal government that can bring various stakeholders and groups together, and provides leadership in inclusion and accessibility.

For More Information:

Abilities Foundation
www.abilities.ca

BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
www.bccpd.bc.ca

SPARC BC
www.sparc.bc.ca/access-awareness-day

Inclusion & Accessibility: Questions and Key Points

Inclusive communities ensure that everyone is welcome and able to participate in all facets of community life.

To be accessible, communities must consciously remove barriers to full participation for people with disabilities.



How would you encourage local businesses and services to increase their accessibility both to clients and to prospective employees?

What opportunities do you see to enhance the public facilities such as parks and recreation centres, to accommodate people with disabilities?

Will you be designing and implementing an accessible community plan to ensure that physical and social barriers are removed for people with disabilities?

Diversity in Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is one of the many democratic freedoms available in our society—but being part of local decision-making is more than just casting a ballot. Getting involved in neighbourhood issues, as well as direct participation in local politics, are ways to be civically engaged all year round. Although we live in communities with considerable diversity, this diversity is not typically seen at civic events. It is important to question this pattern and develop processes that are more representative of the community. Municipalities can choose to take action to encourage diversity in civic engagement.

Reaching out to include diverse backgrounds and perspectives into civic life helps to broaden the dialogue. It also lets people know that they are valued and important to the society that they live in. Diversity in civic engagement can help create social cohesion and provide opportunities for human development.

Ethno-cultural diversity in our communities continues to grow and it is essential that all people can access civic information. This includes acquiring knowledge of the governance system and issue of importance to the local community. Translation of key civic materials and announcements is one way of increasing access to municipal information.

A number of communities are also concerned about low youth participation rates. Youth have lower participation rates in civic engagement initiatives than do other population groups. The “Get Your Vote On” campaign has been integral in encouraging youth votership across BC. Some groups

even advocate for lowering the voting age to 16 in order to encourage greater participation among youth.

Ethnicity and age are just two aspects in the broad range of issues that encompass diversity. Local governments have a responsibility to reach out to people who may be excluded, whether it is because of economic reasons, because of a disability or any other source of marginalization. Civic participation across diverse communities is an important contributing factor to developing healthy communities for all members. You can choose to elect a local government that values diversity and has an appreciation of what it means to be included.

For More Information:

Inclusive Cities Canada
www.inclusivecities.ca

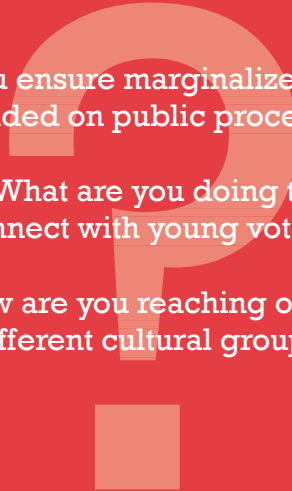
Get Your Vote On
www.GetYourVoteOn.ca

Affiliation of Multicultural Societies
and Service Agencies of BC
www.amssa.org

Diversity in Civic Engagement: Questions and Key Points

Greater diversity in civic participation is an indicator of successful social inclusion in communities.

As our communities grow and change, it is important to ensure that local decisions are reflective of community diversity.



How will you ensure marginalized people are included on public processes?

What are you doing to connect with young voters?

How are you reaching out to different cultural groups?

Transportation

For communities to be livable, local governments need to commit to building transportation systems that are sustainable, accessible, and affordable. BC municipal governments share in the responsibility of providing elements of transportation systems with BC Transit, a provincial crown agency (excluding Metro Vancouver). With rising gas prices, climate change, and the possibility of energy scarcity, now more than ever, municipal governments need to choose to invest time and resources, and conduct citizen engagement, to create transit plans that are comprehensive, sustainable, and tailored to local needs.

Municipal governments are responsible for setting local transit objectives and approving transportation plans. They are also responsible for roads, traffic by-laws, and land-use development. Local governments have the opportunity and ability to increase sustainability in their community by going beyond building roads and public transit, they can lead development of bike paths, walking paths, public education on alternative transportation, support car-sharing operatives and use creative planning to build walkable communities.

Another important aspect of creating a sustainable transportation system is consulting the public and involving them in the planning. In order for a system to be useable and inclusive of all people in a community, a variety of perspectives need to be brought around the planning table. Transportation needs can range widely from region to region; from dense urban cores and town centres, to low-density, suburban residential neighbourhoods, to sparsely populated agricultural and rural areas. The differences in

neighbourhoods within a single community can sometimes be large enough to warrant very different design and application of transit options.

A community that has transportation options, that are safe, well maintained, and affordable, adds to the overall quality of life for residents. Municipal governments have a role to play in creating healthy, livable communities. Municipal governments can choose to be leaders in comprehensive sustainable transportation plans and prepare their communities for the future where dependency on cars is reduced. Residents can choose to elect representatives that are interested and passionate about creating transportation, and communities that work.

BC Transit. 2008. The transit partnership. <http://www.transitbc.com/corporate/munsys/partnership.cfm> (September 25, 2008).

Roseland, M. May 2005. Towards sustainable communities.

For More Information:
Victoria Transport Policy Institute
www.vtpi.org
SmartGrowth BC
<http://smartgrowth.bc.ca>
Better Environmentally Sound Transportation
<http://www.best.bc.ca>
Built Environment and Active Transportation
www.bcrpa.bc.ca

Transportation: Questions and Key Points

Transportation policies should provide a range of safe, convenient, affordable and accessible transportation options at the local level.

Transportation plans need to be developed with local input and be relevant to the unique needs of the region and people.



How would you increase the transportation options in your community to reflect your residents' needs?

What are important elements to a safe walkable community?

How would you encourage residents and businesses to bike to work?

Municipal Governments & Community Social Planning

Community social planning is a collaborative, community-based approach to identify and plan for dealing with social issues and increasing quality of life for communities. Whether it is seen as an important element in planning processes of municipal government, or as an activity undertaken by a community-based organization, the role of community social planning is increasing in importance in a time of complex change.

At the heart of social planning is a focus on empowering people and communities; involving them in decision making, building capacity to address challenges on their own, and adapting to change. Effective collaborative planning that involves all the sectors of the community increases the effectiveness of the activities and attracts leadership resources that can achieve transformational results.

This key role of community social planning was recognized at the 2007 Union of BC Municipalities convention, when delegates from across the province voted to support a resolution calling on the provincial government to provide sustained financial support for social planning in BC.

The motion affirms the significant role that community social planning organizations play in developing coordinated and comprehensive solutions to complex problems such as affordable housing, homelessness, poverty, addiction, and social inclusion.

In many communities, social planning is led as a staff function within municipal government, usually supported by an advisory committee made up of community leaders and resource people. In other communities, independent community organizations work at arms length from government, or a community agency plays a lead role in

community social planning. Whatever model is followed, community social planning works to develop analysis, partnerships, and long-term solutions to community issues. Municipal governments can enhance social development efforts by providing support and resources to community social planning organizations.

Social sustainability is built on a strong foundation of collaborative coordinated efforts to make social improvements. Community social planning provides the processes by which those can be achieved. Municipal councils who choose to support community social planning ensure the sustainability of their communities.

For More Information:

SPARC BC
www.sparc.bc.ca/community-social-planning

Social Services, Social Planning and Social Issues at the Local Level
(BC Ministry of Community Development)
www.cserv.gov.bc.ca/LGD/policy_research/bibliography/book6.htm

Municipal Governments & Community Social Planning: Questions and Key Points

Municipal governments can play an active role in supporting community social planning.

Engagement with community members and organizations is the best way to ensure effective community social planning processes.



How would you ensure support for community social planning?

How can municipal governments work towards social sustainability?

Notes

Notes



SPARC BC (Social Planning and Research Council of BC) is a non-partisan, charitable organization operating in BC since 1966. SPARC BC focuses its work with communities on income security, accessibility, community development education and community social planning. Through research and public education, we raise awareness and encourage the building of just and healthy communities.

SPARC BC has produced the Votes Papers for municipal, provincial, and federal elections for a number of years because we believe that democracy works best when citizens engage in dialogue on important issues. Municipality Votes papers outline key social issues and related questions that are important in this election. Asking questions is a way to make sure these issues are on the municipal agenda. By reading this publication and passing it on, by asking questions and talking about the issues, and especially by voting on November 15, 2008, you can help shape the kind of community in which you want to live.

SPARC BC
Social Planning & Research Council of BC
4445 Norfolk Street
Burnaby BC, V5G 0A7
Canada

tel: 604-718-7733
www.sparc.bc.ca
info@sparc.bc.ca



“Just one question...”

municipality
VOTES!