



Survey Backgrounder

September 5, 2018

HOUSING

When it comes to key issues in the October 20th election, aspiring mayors and councillors can expect many questions from voters and businesses about the issue of affordable housing. The issue is considered as the most important issue facing local governments by politicians (42%), businesses (39%) and residents (29%). Concern about housing affordability is most pronounced in the City of Vancouver, the North Shore and Burnaby/New Westminster. Businesses are also being impacted by housing affordability, with three-in-four reporting their ability to recruit and retain employees has been affected by the cost of housing. Among larger businesses, the level is even higher at 91%.

Despite significant concerns about housing affordability region-wide, many voters say overdevelopment is also a top issue. It ranks second to affordable housing among politicians (18%) and third among residents (11%). Driving these numbers are concerns about densification and loss of agricultural land. Concern about overdevelopment is most pronounced in the Tri-Cities and Maple Ridge, Richmond, South Delta, Tsawwassen, Surrey, North Delta, Langley and White Rock.

When it comes to housing solutions, support is strong for existing housing measures like the tax on empty homes, and limits on foreign capital and speculation in B.C.'s housing market. When asked if they think local government should prioritize action to increase housing supply or limit housing demand, residents (60%), businesses (51%) and politicians (58%) tend to respond a combination of both. There is higher support among businesses (34%) and politicians (33%) for supply side measures compared with the general public (17%). This, combined with businesses and politicians placing a much higher priority on investments in planning and permitting to enable new development than the general population who don't tend to see that as a priority, could create conflicts.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is another top concern. It is ranked second by residents (16%) and businesses (16%) and third by politicians (12%). Residents in Surrey and Langley rank transportation as the most important issue in the local government elections, with businesses and Burnaby/New Westminster and North Shore residents ranking transportation as their second-highest priority. Over two-thirds of the region's residents think their local city council has done a poor job managing the capacity of roads and public transit as the population grows and new housing is built. Politicians tend to think they have struck the right balance between housing and transportation, but acknowledge residents are dissatisfied.

While there is strong support for better transportation infrastructure across the region, Metro Vancouver residents generally support the priority investments now being advanced as part of TransLink's 10-Year Vision. Although there are sub-regional differences where certain projects have higher levels of local support, residents (79%) and the business community (72%) picked region-wide transit expansion as a top transportation priority, with residents also showing strong support for replacing the Pattullo Bridge (58%) and developing rapid transit in Surrey (52%). In Vancouver, support for the Broadway Corridor SkyTrain expansion is strong. Among businesses, the Massey Tunney replacement (64%) and Broadway expansion (60%) are considered more important than Surrey rapid transit (52%) or the Pattullo Bridge (35%).

TAXATION AND INVESTMENT

Taxation failed to factor as a major concern for residents surveyed, with businesses more likely to express dissatisfaction with the value they receive for municipal tax dollars. The majority of homeowners believe they are receiving at least fairly good value for the property taxes they pay.

In terms of spending priorities, residents think it's most important to invest in road maintenance and traffic management, social housing and poverty reduction (again, suggesting a widespread concern about affordability), and core city services such as garbage collection.

The top three priorities for municipal spending among each group is as follows.

General Population

1. Local road maintenance and traffic management
2. Social housing and poverty reduction
3. City services (waste collection, water and sewer, bylaw enforcement/policing and public safety)

Business Community

1. Local road maintenance and traffic management
2. Planning and permitting to enable new development
3. Economic development

Politicians

1. Planning and permitting to enable new development
2. Local road maintenance and traffic management
3. Social housing and poverty reduction

The lowest three priorities for municipal spending among each group are as follows:

General Population

1. Addressing the opioid crisis
2. Arts and culture
3. Climate change adaptation and resiliency

Business Community

1. Climate change adaptation and resiliency
2. Addressing the opioid crisis
3. Arts and culture

Politicians

1. Addressing the opioid crisis
2. Public realm cleanliness (street cleaning, litter removal)
3. Climate change adaptation and resiliency

Preferences vary across the region. In the City of Vancouver, residents choose housing, core city services and traffic management as priorities, with environmental initiatives trending higher compared to other communities. In Surrey and Langley, residents' top priority is crime reduction. In Richmond, Delta and the North Shore, climate and sustainability initiatives are a much higher priority compared to other communities, possibly reflecting concerns over flooding risks or other climate change impacts.

OTHER ISSUES

The study also asked respondents about a number of other potential civic election issues.

- Policing: Most residents (59%), businesses (69%) and politicians (68%) believe that police resources are adequate to address crime and safety issues in their community. Only residents of Surrey, Langley and White Rock disagree, with 52% of residents in those communities wanting to see more resources for police.
- Amalgamation: The public (50% yes vs. 27% no) and businesses (68% yes vs. 15% no) support some degree of amalgamation of local governments within the Greater Vancouver region. Politicians (44% yes vs. 47% no) are divided on the issue.
- Mobility Pricing: Business (54%) and politicians (60%) tend to support local governments working with the province to pursue mobility pricing. Views are more divided among residents, with 42% in favour of pursuing mobility pricing and 43% opposed. City of Vancouver, Burnaby/New Westminster and North Shore residents tend to support mobility pricing and those in other regions tend to oppose pursuing it.
- Ridesharing: There is strong agreement among residents (70%) and businesses (85%) that local governments should work with the provincial government to allow ridesharing services, such as Uber and Lyft.
- Economic Development: Among those with an opinion, there is support among the public (46% yes vs. 21% no) and businesses (67% yes vs. 15% no) for a single economic development agency for the Metro Vancouver region. Politicians are almost evenly split (42% yes vs. 45% no).