Cities for Everyone

Cities for Everyone supports more affordable housing and transportation, in order to provide security, mobility and opportunity for people with all incomes and abilities

www.citiesforeveryone.org

Municipal Candidates Affordability Survey

Please fill out this survey and return to info@citiesforeveryone.org by 24 September 2018.

Candidate Name: Rebecca Mersereau   **Date: September 24, 2018**

Email: rebecca@voterebecca.ca   **Phone: (250) 532-0215**   **Website: www.voterebecca.ca**

For more information see the *Victoria Affordability Backgrounder* and other documents at **www.citiesforeveryone.org**.

Context	Questions	Comments
Our region is considered unaffordable, based on income-to-cost ratios (households spending no more than 45% of income on housing and transport), and low rental vacancy rates.	1. What priority do you give to local efforts to increase affordability? **Low__ Medium__ High X**	In Saanich, due to our vast size and limited amenities (e.g. places to work, shop & play) we must be extra cognizant of where we're locating new housing so it can be situated in areas where people have transportation options to help reduce their costs of living. Avoiding the expense of a personal vehicle (or two) is a key strategy for young people and young families struggling to stay in the region.
Many middle-income households ($40-80k per year) spend more on housing and transport than is affordable, and so want more middle-priced ($1,200-2,500 per month) housing in walkable urban neighbourhoods.	2. Do you support efforts to increase middle- as well as lower-income affordability? **Yes: X No___ Maybe____**	Yes. As much we should be working with the development community and non-profit housing agencies to add supply that is affordable for lower incomes, we can likely produce more significant results more quickly by addressing housing shortages for middle-income households, to free up older housing stock (so it can filter down) and reduce upward pressure on prices.
Affordable infill (more compact housing types, such as multiplexes, townhouses and low-rise apartment buildings, within existing urban areas) is often opposed by neighborhoods who want to preserve existing conditions.	3. Do you support affordable infill: **In all neighborhoods ____ In some neighborhoods X Only on a case-by-case basis ____ In no existing neighborhoods ____**	Infill needs to be focussed in urban Saanich to retain the food-producing potential of our rural lands outside the urban containment boundary, and to avoid contributing to sprawl that is costly over the long-term for home owners and for municipalities providing services. Caution should also be exercised when considering infill in outlying Saanich communities (e.g. Cordova Bay) that currently are very under-serviced by public transportation and amenities, and that are already experiencing significant traffic congestion. However, these characteristics also indicate that such areas are not the lowest hanging fruit in terms of creating more affordable housing options.

Context	Questions	Comments
Most residential neighbourhoods only allow two stories and limited densities, which excludes most *missing middle* housing (see below). Affordable housing requires upzoning.	4. Do you support upzoning: **Neighbourhood-wide X** **For all corner and larger lots ____** **Only on a case-by-case basis ____**	This approach could be appropriate in some neighbourhoods, such as the area immediately surrounding around uptown), but not others in Saanich that are not in close proximity to services or public transportation options. Corner and large-lot up-zoning (in urban Saanich) may also have appropriate applications in some areas.

The "missing middle" includes moderate density housing types such as multiplexes, townhomes and low-rise apartments. These are generally the least costly houses to develop.

Context	Questions	Comments
Many jurisdictions have *inclusionary* mandates which require that a portion (typically 5-15%) of new units be priced below market rates. However, if this requirement is excessive it can reduce the number of new units built.	5. Do you support mandates: **For all new housing ____** **For higher-priced housing ____** **Only on a case-by-case basis X** **Under no circumstances ____**	In some scenarios, I think a universal inclusionary mandate for all new housing could be counter-productive in terms of the ultimate goal of trying to make housing more affordable. I would favour an approach that incentivizes below-market units, by for example, putting applications that include them at the front of the queue.
Urban parking typically costs $10-60k per space, and an increasing portion of households are car-free. For affordability and fairness sake many experts recommend reducing parking requirements so occupants are not forced to pay for costly spaces they do not need.	6. Do you support reduced parking requirements for infill housing, even if some neighbours object? **Yes X No___** **Maybe___**	De-coupling parking and housing in the right areas where it is viable to live without personal vehicles will make all the difference for young families and professionals trying to make ends meet here. The most logical locations to start moving in this direction in Saanich are around UVic and Uptown, where incomes and age profiles are much lower and use of public transit is the norm.
Infill development often requires variances to allow taller buildings, higher densities and fewer parking spaces than codes require. Neighbors often oppose these variances.	7. Would you approve variances needed for medium-priced infill? **Generally approve X** **Generally reject ___** **Approve if _____**	Depends on the context of course, but generally speaking I would be inclined to approve them in urban Saanich near our corridors and centres.

Context	Questions	Comments
Saanich's *Official Community Plan* allows up to eight story residential buildings in *neighbourhood centres,* but some residents consider these too tall and dense.	8. If a proposed development meets OCP guidelines and includes moderate-priced units (less than $600k), but is opposed by some neighbors, would you: **Reject it** _____ **Approve it** **X** **Approve if** _____	I believe there must be a very compelling reason to part ways with our over-arching policy guidance, which was developed through an extensive consultation process.

9. What other municipal affordability strategies do you support?

In Saanich, we urgently need an overhaul of our development review process and a reset of our relationship with developers and housing agencies in the region. Inefficiency and political uncertainty have added considerably to the costs of building housing in Saanich, and in my opinion both problems need to be addressed before we will be able to chip away at our housing shortage and affordability issue. Concurrently, I think we have an opportunity to do some promising things with respect to improving housing affordability: articulate a clearer vision about the types of housing we want to see where, consider whether our zoning bylaw needs an overhaul to reflect current market conditions, develop a community amenity policy that helps bridge animosity between communities and developers, and incentivize the kinds of housing developments we want to see by putting them at the front of the queue.

10. Please let us know if you have other thoughts concerning our community's inaffordability problems and solutions?

Saanich has a notable lack of 'complete' or even semi-complete neighbourhoods, which I define as places with residential, commercial, and public features that allow people to live, work, and play locally, and importantly without requiring the expense of a personal vehicle. This is a huge problem but also an opportunity to ensure that we do a better job of integrating transportation and land-use planning as we re-develop in the future. Doing it wisely and in a way that will achieve both affordability objectives and improved environmental sustainability requires a better understanding on the part of everyone about the extent of our affordability challenges and the various factors that contribute to our high costs of living. I'm very grateful to the folks at Cities for Everyone for taking on this challenge!