

August 14, 2025

To: Honourable David Eby, Premier of British Columbia

Honourable Christine Boyle, MLA, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs, Province of BC

Re: Advancing Housing Affordability Through Bold, Evidence-Based Policy

We are a Metro Vancouver region-based group of urbanists, urban planners, architects, and UBC/SFU academics, most with decades of experience, some with a background in development, who have joined together to broaden the search for enduring housing solutions. While our primary focus is on Vancouver, our comments below are also applicable to cities across British Columbia that are also struggling with affordability issues.

On July 22, 2025 we sent a letter to Prime Minister Mark Carney and Housing Minister Gregor Robertson, of which you were copied. BC and Canada's housing crisis demands a reset in how we use public policy to achieve affordability. The current market correction presents an opportunity—not a threat. Governments should not bail out speculative development models. Instead use this moment to invest in non-market housing, preserve existing affordability, ensure that public subsidies serve long-term public outcomes, and also reconsider BC Bills 44 & 47 (2023) for better affordability outcomes.

1. BC's housing strategy must deliver affordability—not just more supply

BC's housing crisis is, above all, a crisis of affordability. Supply has increased significantly in cities like Vancouver—where housing starts have outpaced population growth for decades—yet prices remain disconnected from incomes. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F8vBdAL7iUWlsceT7wtorlCt58_sh_LT/view?usp=sharing Current inventory supply of unsold condos and new vacant market rentals are at record highs.

Without addressing land value inflation, financial speculation, and tenure security, supply-side interventions risk worsening the very crisis they aim to solve.

2. Use the market correction as an opportunity—not something to resist

- Do not use public funds to bail out overleveraged speculative developments.
- Do not reflate prices artificially by reintroducing foreign capital, or reducing BC foreign buyer taxes, or by increasing investor speculation and demand, such as MURBs that use tax write-off subsidies.
- Thank you for Premier Eby's recent statements in the media resisting opening foreign capital to BC.
- Take advantage of falling land costs and freed-up skilled labour to invest in non-profit, co-op, and public housing that will remain affordable long-term.
- Policy—not just construction—can influence affordability. Recent short-term rental regulations, adjusted immigration targets, bans on foreign buyers, and other demand-side measures have already helped reduce pressure on rents and sale prices as we are now seeing in the market.

3. Public subsidies must deliver public benefit outcomes

- Prioritize BC and federal financing and grants for co-ops, land trusts, and nonprofits.
- Since CMHC-backed programs like MLI Select are not producing the right kind of supply that is affordable and livable, while it puts CMHC at undue risk, work with the Feds for more of CMHC resources to go towards co-op housing with permanent affordable housing instead.
- Require minimum livability standards, especially for family-friendly housing.
- Ensure affordability is defined relative to **local incomes**, not market medians, and is long term permanently secured through strong covenants and housing agreements, not subsidies to REITs.

4. Preserve what's affordable—don't displace it

- Make tenant protection and zero net-loss of affordable units, mostly through protecting existing rental buildings from demolition, a condition for accessing BC and federal infrastructure or housing funds.
- **Retain existing rental buildings** by supporting rehabilitation and retrofits of existing rental buildings as climate-resilient, affordability-preserving alternatives to demolition.
- Recognize the human toll of displacement—**the best tenant protections are to protect existing rental buildings.**
- Ensure that public funds do not create the wrong kinds of supply that inflate land values and market rents, like CMHC's MLI Select financing is currently doing, with the impacts on land values of tower development in particular, and instead work with the Feds to use more subsidies for true affordability.

5. Reform delivery and financing models to align with residents' needs - amend BC Bills 44 & 47

- Provide tax, financing and policy incentives to encourage individual end-users to build more secondary suites and infill developments that can create both more rentals and mortgage helpers.
- Support gentle, ground-oriented density options that better match household needs and local context while **supporting the forestry sector** through the use of more affordable wood frame construction.
- Avoid making towers the default solution. Towers have their place—particularly in transit-rich areas—but they are not always the best form. The right supply is livable, secure, and suited to local neighbourhoods and larger units for families, without triggering demovictions.
- **Reconsider the BC zoning Bills 44 & 47 (2023) & 18 (2024)** that are not providing affordable housing. They are inflating land values, massive speculation, demovictions and displacement, while creating the wrong kind of supply that is mostly small expensive units in oversized market towers.
- **Restore land use and planning authority to municipalities and regions, with more flexibility in how Official Development Plans and Transit Oriented Areas are implemented.** Cities are built on grids, not arbitrary circles around transit which should only be a guide in principle, not for literal implementation. Allow more civic discretion for form of development near transit to better align with infrastructure, amenities, and community local context. **Avoid one-size-fits-all approaches.**

6. Rebalance costs and benefits between all orders of government

- The costs of growth—especially infrastructure and amenities—should not be downloaded to municipalities (i.e., local taxpayers and communities), with more funding for growth instead coming from the Province and the Feds, especially since their income taxes are collected from businesses and residents in municipalities. More of the tax base should go back to municipalities.
- Do not infringe on the municipal tax base by the province extracting land value and development based taxes, such as property surcharges, that municipalities need for funding services and growth.

Conclusion: We encourage and support building more affordable livable housing rather than continuing to build the wrong kinds of housing, in the wrong places, for the wrong reasons. The Province of BC can lead the way on affordable housing by restoring affordability as the central objective of housing policy. That means resisting short-term pressure to rescue flawed models and instead embracing long-term investment in public, non-profit, and community-led housing. It also means preserving existing affordability, and building new homes that serve real people, not just markets.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you to explore how these strategies can shape a more sustainable and just housing future for all British Columbians.

Please see the following page for those signing this letter.

Cc: Honourable Ravi Kahlon, BC Minister of Jobs & Economic Growth; Mayor Ken Sim and Council, CoV

Signed:

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Christina DeMarco, Urban and Regional Planner, former lead planner for the Metro Vancouver Regional Growth Strategy.

Penny Gurstein, PhD, MCIP (ret.) Professor Emeritus and Former Director, School of Community and Regional Planning, Co-Director, Housing Research Collaborative, UBC

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