

Province Chooses Housing Over Municipal Autonomy



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The BC government's decision to establish housing targets for municipalities, including Saanich, Oak Bay and Victoria, is a significant change from the direction established for decades by successive provincial governments.

That direction was the long-standing policy of municipal self-determination which undermined responsible, regional planning for housing, water and sewer infrastructure, and transportation.

Municipal self-determination is the reason there are 13 municipalities, and therefore 13 Official Community Plans, in a region of 400,000 people.

This form of governance has failed an entire generation of millennials/young families trying to purchase a home.

As housing supply declined and prices increased, the BC government attempted to dampen demand with more taxes - generating billions in revenue from the property transfer tax, speculation tax, land tax, etc.

This was an unwise approach in the face of Canada's fast-growing population.

Municipalities imposed regulations and higher fees in the form of development cost charges, community amenity contributions, development and building permit fees, and more.

Obstruction to new housing was revealed in provincially-mandated Housing Needs Reports. Metchosin and Highlands had zero purpose-built rentals. Non-profits avoided the challenges of proposing affordable housing projects in Oak Bay.

All of this dysfunction did not happen overnight. BC governments of every political stripe supported the policy of municipal self-determination undermining regional planning for housing and transportation such as LRT.

A new governance direction was required. At the very least, new housing supply, both ownership and rental for a growing population, must be prioritized over municipal autonomy.

Perhaps the provincial government is starting to realize, we can have either more housing and improved affordability or municipal self-determination, but we can't have both.

The results remain to be seen, but the mandatory housing targets are a step in the right direction that should have been made years ago.



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