

Municipalities need a 'New Deal' with Province says Crombie



Municipalities need a 'New Deal' with the Province on funding and housing, according to Ontario Liberal Leader Bonnie Crombie.

At a pre-campaign stop at the Aurora Seniors' Centre on January 23, accompanied by Newmarket-Aurora Ontario Liberal candidate Chris Ballard, Crombie said a re-think is needed on municipal funding while billing herself as a 'different kind' of Liberal.

'Being a former mayor, I know acutely well that municipalities rely on development charges as a critical source of revenue, so municipalities do require a New Deal on funding - long-term, sustainable funding,' said Crombie, just hours before Progressive Conservative Premier Doug Ford made it clear he would ask the Lieutenant-Governor to dissolve the legislature the following week.

Should voters send a Liberal Government to Queen's Park on February 27, Crombie said their plan would replace development charges (DCS) - that is, money paid by incoming developers to the municipalities to account for growth and its impact on infrastructure - with a re-tooled Ontario Building Fund.

Going forward with a re-branded Better Communities Fund would, she said, take the 'cost of the building' off the home purchaser.

'The Better Communities Fund [will] repay to the municipality the DCs because they rely on that,' said Crombie. 'That's the short-term fix and eventually we would like to ensure that municipalities will have a New Deal.'

Key in such reforms, she added, will be making sure that the impact of eliminating development charges in favour of this new approach will be felt on the price of homes rather than any extra revenues being pocketed by developers.

'How do we know what prevents the developer from putting it in his pocket? The price is still the price. The idea is there is enough market pressure that they will all have to do it because down the street one guy is playing by the rules and their price is cheaper, their product is moving,' she said. 'The idea is to get their shovels in the ground, so they need to see that savings, too.'

Such a deal would make municipalities whole by the Province, with further moves including waiving land transfer tax for first-time home-buyers and not-for-profits, and 'really fix' the Landlord Tenant Board to clear a significant backlog of cases.

Speaking to a group of seniors before sitting down with media, Crombie said a further re-think needs to take place on where homes and seniors' resources are built, suggesting working with bodies like churches and shopping malls to identify surplus land, such as lesser-used corners of parking lots, to increase housing stock.

'We need to start being creative when we see excess asphalt,' she said. 'Let's combine the usage.'

In addition to addressing the specific needs of seniors at last week's roundtable, Crombie said her plan aims to attract and retain doctors and nurses in the public system, with a focus on bringing on 3,100 family doctors. She also addressed the issue of rising crime. She put forward reforms to Ontario's Bail Court system and getting tougher on repeat offenders.

She also stressed that that a Liberal Government at Queen's Park will not result in a carbon tax on consumers, on families, on farmers. Dubbing PC leader Ford on being 'the father of the carbon tax' in Ontario for scrapping the Cap & Trade system, and Ballard noting scrapping the system 'threw away' \$3 billion Ontario revenue, Crombie said they would 'find a way to make polluters pay' and there are options.

Calling herself a 'different kind' of Liberal, Crombie said she sees herself as a 'centrist'.

'I had a business background before I entered politics,' she said. 'I have worked in business and had my own company for many years. In my training as mayor, I always had to balance my budget. The revenue you raised is the revenue you spent, and you better do it for the most common good. I feel like I am passionate about issues that aren't traditional 'liberal' issues like bail reform and bail courts, about public safety, but then I am passionate about public healthcare and public education as well. But, I believe in tax cuts.'

When asked whether she believed a winter election was necessary, she said an emphatic 'absolutely not,' adding the Ford government approached the election with a majority already.

'This election will cost \$175 million why, so Doug Ford can hang onto his job?' she said. 'He says he needs a new mandate. He didn't need a new mandate to spend billions during COVID; he didn't need a new mandate to issue \$3.1 billion worth of pre-election cheques. He didn't need a new mandate to give \$2 billion to Therme Spa at Ontario Place; he didn't need a new mandate to build a tunnel under the 401? now suddenly he needs a new election in the dead of winter?so he can hang onto his job because he sees an opportunity.'

By Brock Weir