

Affordability top-of-mind issue for candidates at first meeting

Affordability was a top-of-mind issue for the men and women who are vying to be Aurora's next Members of Provincial Parliament when they came together for their first all-candidates meeting last week.

Hosted by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce over Zoom on May 11 and hosted by Chamber President & CEO Sandra Ferri, participants included Newmarket-Aurora candidates Denis Heng (NDP), Carolina Rodriguez (Green), and Dr. Sylvain Roy (Liberal), and Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill candidates Catherine Dellerba (Ontario Party), Marjan Kasirlou (Liberal) and Michael Parsa (Progressive Conservative).

"As businesses struggle to find employees, an entire generation is currently priced out of the real estate market," said Ms. Ferri, posing the first question to candidates. "This directly impacts our business community as young, hard-working people move away, resulting in long commutes and higher expenses such as car depreciation and gas costs. What will you do to help young people find an affordable place to live to ensure they're able to continue to work in the riding?"

The candidates, grouped by riding, responded as follows:

Newmarket-Aurora:

DENIS HENG ? NDP

"Housing affordability means a lot of things to a lot of people and I find that right now we need to have choices; we need to have choices for all levels of income here in Newmarket-Aurora. I live in a townhouse in Aurora and have lived here for 16 years. It's something where if I had to buy my townhouse right now, I would not be able to afford it because my townhouse has quadrupled in value [since I bought it]. I think the big thing here is really what the NDP will do is we will actually put the power in where the municipalities are and build the communities we want to build 20, 30, 40 years from now, not the communities we have been building for the last 20 years. We want to be building mixed housing. We don't want the single-dwelling homes the Conservative party is kind of promoting right now with regards to their urban sprawl; we're looking for middle density along public transit corridors and this will provide the affordable housing that will bring workers in to the same communities where they can live, work and play."

CAROLINA RODRIGUEZ ? GREEN PARTY

"I am one of those young people who won't be able to afford a house. I am 22-years-old and don't see myself as a future homeowner with the way things are currently. Our policy is not that it is just about building more. While we understand we need more supply, it's about building with a purpose. You need to create access in our communities to be able to live within them. In Newmarket-Aurora, they are so car dependant [and] so many people don't have access to a car and don't have access to live within the community, even if they can afford a home. We propose not only restructure with the help of municipalities, municipal zoning laws, so we can build triplexes, quadplexes, tiny homes, and homes that represent more than just one type of family. We also want to build 15-minute communities, which would be an affordable place to call home within a walk, a cycle, a short transit away from work, services, grocery shopping and everything else you would need. Specifically for new homeowners we would also propose to end blind bidding. This would significantly decrease the amount spent after a blind bid and would ensure transparency in a home purchasing process. Another important policy that we have is the multiple home speculation tax. This would be intended to stop speculators [from] driving up housing prices and leaving homes to actual families to live with."

DR. SYLVAIN ROY (LIBERAL)

"Beyond 1.5 million homes we want to build [referenced earlier in the meeting by Ms. Kasirlou] one (policy) that really piqued my interest and it is really around something we're going to call the Ontario Home Buyer Corporation is going to be specifically to build

homes for first-time home buyers because that is definitely something I am hearing around the door. Parents with kids who are going to university, there is that hopelessness that is really attached to folks right now in terms of the future and being able to afford a home in the riding. When we think about \$1 million homes, that is really out of reach for so many people. I work with homeless people in the Region as well and even basic things like rent and affordability, the affordability of rent when you're on ODSP or social assistance, there are two sides of the coin we really have to pay attention to. It is about community, building up, and affordability more generally. We're committed to reducing transit fares to a dollar so folks from other regions can actually come to work in this riding and they can stay in their homes if they do have one elsewhere, but the idea of creating communities where people can access Newmarket-Aurora is top of mind for us.?

Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill:

MARJAN KASIRLOU (LIBERAL)

?Housing is really crucial to our community. I am hearing [that at] every single door that I go. Especially our youth are concerned about their future where they actually can live. We're going to build 1.5 million new homes, which will actually create?housing jobs in Ontario. We will actually have 138,000 deeply affordable homes that our even younger generation can afford to buy. One of the issues we face right now is we do have so many empty homes, especially non-residents, investing in and sitting on. We're going to tax those empty homes and also ban new ownership for non-residents in Ontario. We will also create ?Use It or Lose It' tax that the land developers who are sitting on the lands, which have received a permit to build housing in Ontario. This will eliminate a lot of pressures in municipalities and will create the homes that people in Ontario need to live in.?

MICHAEL PARSA (PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE)

?There's no doubt about it, we're in a housing crisis in the Province of Ontario, but it is important to note that this didn't happen overnight. It happened because we weren't ready. We didn't take the proper measures. When we look at population growth of our Province, the right supply did not come in and that is why we are facing the problems we're having right now. For us, when we came in, early on Minister Clark talked about this and said this is something that needs to be dealt with. We need to make sure that we bring in more supply. It is as simple as supply and demand? As a result of the Bills we put in, More Homes, More Choice, as a result of two following bills from Mr. Clark, we had 100,000 housing starts in Ontario last year and the year before. That was the largest housing start in the Province's history since the early 90s. A lot of those were rental units which we certainly did not have and it is important to make sure when you talk about housing, you talk about all sorts of housing, a variety of options for people who would like to live in homes, apartments, rentals ? those who have dreams of owning a home.?

CATHERINE DELLERBA (ONTARIO PARTY)

?Home prices in Ontario have risen 180 per cent in the last decade, while incomes are only up 40 per cent. It is a huge issue, we're all aware of it. Last year alone, the average price of a home rose 25 per cent in Richmond Hill, Aurora, Oak Ridges ? are especially affected being in the Top 5 of all of these regions. Simply put, the supply of homes is too low, demand is too high, and I believe our current politicians are mostly to blame. Some solutions we would put forward is government funding funnelled to new home owners. Currently, the policy of the Ford Government is to restrict types of homes that significantly alleviate our province's housing crisis, so we need duplexes and fourplexes which are forbidden in most areas where they are most needed. The increase in prices purchased by foreign investors and in some cases foreign ownership is linked to money laundering schemes. We would propose a no nonsense ban on foreign ownership, on residential and commercial ownership, so only Canadians who work and live here should be able to own property and buy homes. Foreign investors shouldn't own between 50 and 100 houses and charge rent at inflated rates, which affects our current constituents.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter