

Vote for Gentle Density on October 17th

A voter's guide to asking candidates about housing



Prepared by Small Housing BC



Smallhousingbc.org

In collaboration with Strong Towns



Strongtowns.org

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Housing is on the Ballot in BC

Ask candidates the housing questions that matter to you, and compare their answers before you vote.



Communities across BC are faced with the same challenge: *more people need homes.*

Many BC communities are boxed in by mountains, water, and agricultural land, with no room to grow outward. Even where expansion is possible, the cost of building new roads, water, and services from scratch keeps rising. To make their communities more affordable and livable, municipalities need to make better use of the residential land they already have. That means allowing a wider range of housing types in existing neighbourhoods.

In 2023, the province formalized this direction through legislation that requires municipalities to allow small-scale, multi-unit housing in areas previously zoned only for single-family homes. But the legislation is a starting point, not a finish line.

Your local council controls what happens above that baseline: how fast permits move, how much builders pay in fees, what parking and design rules apply, what the Official Community Plan* says about where housing can go, and whether the municipality partners with non-profits to deliver affordable homes. These decisions shape what actually gets built in your community, how much it costs, and who can afford to live or stay.

BC's municipal elections are on October 17.

The lead up to an election is when platforms get shaped, promises get made, and candidates figure out what voters care about most. Ask candidates hard questions at all-candidates meetings, on the doorstep, or by email. Compare their answers.

Check your voter registration and find your local candidates at elections.bc.ca.

The questions that follow are a starting point. Pick what matters most to you.

A glossary of terms is at the end of this guide. Terms included are marked with an asterisk().*

Getting the Conversation Started



What's the biggest barrier to building housing in our community right now, in your view?

When you think about the housing situation in our community four years from now, what does success look like to you?

When you talk to residents about housing, what are you hearing?

Have you looked at what other BC communities are doing on housing? Is there anything you'd like to see here?





Homes for Every Stage of Life

Ask: “A lot of homeowners want to add a suite or a small home on their property. What will you do to improve access and cut down the time and cost it takes to get approved?”

Why it matters: Some local governments have created homeowner guides, concierge services, and pre-approved plans to make this simpler. Look for concrete tools your candidate would support to get more housing built.

Ask: “Our community needs homes for people at every stage of life: young adults starting out, families looking for more space, seniors ready to downsize. What will you do to make sure those options exist in our neighbourhoods?”

Why it matters: Allowing more housing types creates options at different price points and sizes. While Bill 44 requires 3–4 units on most residential lots, councils still control permitting timelines, fees, and design standards.

Ask: “Where in this community will my parents go when they can't manage their house anymore? And where will my kids live when they're starting out?”

Why it matters: Right now, many communities only offer large, expensive houses or bigger apartments. There's often not a lot of choice in between. A ground-level unit for someone aging in place, a small apartment for a young family getting started. That's what gentle density* does.



Cutting Through the Red Tape

Ask: “If someone wants to build a small home, say a duplex or a fourplex, how long does it take to get approved in our community?”

Why it matters: Every month a project sits waiting for approval adds cost. That cost gets passed on to renters and buyers. Candidates should know how the system is actually performing, and have thoughts on how to improve it.

Ask: “Do you support the use of standardized designs* to improve public awareness and reduce project costs and timelines?”

Why it matters: Standardized designs do two things. They speed up approvals because the plans have already been reviewed for building code and zoning compliance. They also help the public see what gentle density actually looks like, which can reduce uncertainty and opposition. The province and CMHC has developed designs specifically for small-scale housing that any municipality can adopt.

Ask: “Some residents worry we're changing too fast. Others say we're not changing fast enough. Where do you land?”

Why it matters: People in the same community can have very different experiences of change. What feels too fast for one household might feel overdue for another. Understanding where a candidate sits on this spectrum helps you decide whether their approach matches yours.

Ask: “When a small housing project follows all the rules but neighbours oppose it anyway, what would you do?”

Why it matters: This might be the most revealing question you can ask. It's easy to say you support housing. It's harder to stand behind that when people are upset at a council meeting.



Paying for Growth and Planning Ahead

Ask: “Do you have a rough idea of how much it costs our community each year just to maintain what we've already built? Roads, pipes, sidewalks. Can we keep that up?”

Why it matters: A lot of communities are spending more on maintaining existing infrastructure than they're bringing in from the properties it serves. When we add more housing to a community, we make it easier to pay for these things.

Ask: “Should our community focus on building outward into new areas, or on making use of the neighbourhoods and infrastructure we already have?”

Why it matters: Building outward means new roads, water lines, sewers, and schools that the community has to pay for and maintain for decades, while also paying to maintain existing infrastructure. Adding homes in existing neighbourhoods uses infrastructure that's already in the ground while spreading the cost across more people.



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Who Gets to Build, and Who Gets Left Out

Ask: “Not everyone can afford housing in our community. What is your plan for making sure there are homes for seniors on fixed incomes, workers earning entry-level wages, and families who need a hand?”

Why it matters: Non-profits and co-ops have been building affordable housing in BC for decades. Candidates should be able to explain how they'll work with these organizations.

Ask: “What would you do to ensure housing is affordable for our nurses, teachers, and trades?”

Why it matters: When the people who keep a community running can't afford to live there, everyone feels it. Longer commutes. Harder-to-fill jobs. Less connection to the place they serve.

Ask: “What would you do to help regular homeowners, local builders, and non-profits figure out how to add housing?”

Why it matters: Most gentle density gets built by small local businesses: a homeowner adding a suite, a local contractor building a fourplex, a non-profit creating affordable units. They need a process they can actually navigate without hiring expensive consultants.





Accountability and Keeping Up with the Times

Ask: “What role should local government play in supporting and enabling new types of housing?”

Why it matters: Communities where council takes an active role (such as streamlining permits, helping homeowners navigate the process, partnering with non-profits) tend to get more housing built.

Ask: “Are you open to new ways of building and approving homes, like factory-built housing or online permit applications, that could make things faster and cheaper?”

Why it matters: We can't solve today's housing problems using yesterday's methods. Candidates who are open to trying new approaches are more likely to actually move the needle. Bonus points if they can point to a specific example!

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- ✓ Small Housing Academy, educating industry and beyond
- ✓ Monthly newsletters and webinars
- ✓ Free resources at toolbox.smallhousing.ca
- ✓ Visit smallhousing.ca to learn more

Strong Towns

- ✓ [Escaping the Housing Trap](#) book
- ✓ Incremental housing emails and events for concerned citizens
- ✓ Network of advocates at strongtowns.org/local
- ✓ Visit strongtowns.org/housing to learn more

Glossary of Terms

Gentle Density: Housing that adds more homes to a neighbourhood without dramatically changing its look or feel. Think duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and low-rise apartment buildings rather than high-rise towers.

Official Community Plan (OCP): The long-term plan adopted by council that guides decisions about land use, housing, transportation, and services in a community. It shapes where and what kind of development can happen.

Standardized Designs: Pre-approved building plans developed by the province for small-scale housing. Because they've already been reviewed for code compliance, projects that use them can skip months of custom review.