



October 14th, 2020

Thank you for your inquiry into how the B.C. Greens will support co-operatives in British Columbia. Please find our response detailed below, and we hope to collaborate with you on these policies and others in the future.

Sincerely,
The B.C. Greens

Co-operative, non-profit service delivery, including in long-term elder care and child care, have proven to reduce costs – up to 50 per cent for child care, according to the 2019 study Economic Impact of the Co-operative Sector in Canada – and provide better care – higher staff retention and higher quality of care were identified as advantages of co-op elder care in the 2008 report Co-op Elder Care in Canada.

1) If elected, will your Party commit to funding pilot projects to establish seniors long-term care co-operatives and child care co-operatives?

As part of our platform, the B.C. Greens have committed to creating a comprehensive program for early childhood education and care. We believe that early childhood education is the most important investment we can make for our children, and will work with stakeholders to review options to implement best practices for our children, including child-care co-operatives.

We have seen the impacts of ineffective long-term care solutions for seniors as COVID-19 hotspots emerge across the province and the country. The B.C. Greens believe that the care-home sector urgently needs a shift away from the for-profit model. Going beyond establishing pilot projects, we would begin to move the sector to a mix of public, non-profit and community-based care that includes co-operatives, which have better health outcomes than the private sector. Our seniors are not a commodity and we will push for a shift away from the public funding of for-profit care homes. We will work with stakeholders and experts in the field to develop a model to push this shift forward.

2) Will you work with the BC Co-op Association to address regulatory challenges that are preventing co-operative child care from being established in the province?

All families should have access to reliable childcare that allows for parents to go to work, children to learn invaluable social skills and receive high quality early childhood education, and for quality jobs to be available for early-childhood education professionals. High quality and accessible childcare is one of our top priorities, and we will work with all stakeholders including the B.C. Co-op Association to collaborate on strengthening the childcare sector in our province.

Provinces across Canada have established policies that promote co-operative start-ups and development. From preferential tax policy and investment funds to legislative frameworks that encourage local investment, co-operatives in Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Quebec benefit from an environment that promotes co-op growth.

3) If elected, will your Party conduct a cross-jurisdictional review with the aim of identifying policy tools that will drive investment in BC co-operatives and enact measures, including amending the Cooperative Association Act, to do so?

We strongly believe that now is the time to be investing in the sustainable future we want and need, and are committed to supporting innovation and strong economies focused on transparency and shared values for both employer and employee wellbeing. We think the co-op model should play a more significant role in our economy going forward, given their ability to provide better outcomes for workers, generate local benefits, and achieve sustainable prosperity. We will assess all avenues to encourage the growth of co-operatives in BC, including through a cross-jurisdictional review of what works in other jurisdictions.

The recent announcement that co-op retailer MEC would be sold to a private equity firm has been seen as a failure of the brand to respond to changing markets for its primary products, as well as a failure of MEC to abide by co-operative principles of democracy and transparency. The failure highlights the need for enhanced knowledge and training about co-operatives and co-op Governance.

4) If elected, will you build co-op literacy through integration of co-operative models in secondary curriculum and providing funding for development and promotion of Open Educational Resources to be used in universities and colleges?

The promotion of co-op literacy and broader sustainable, ethical business literacy in school curriculum at the secondary and post-secondary level is something that the B.C. Greens will consider as we review ways to support the co-op sector going forward and ensure that the co-op model is upheld through proper governance as the sector grows.

Co-operatives are not well understood within government and as a result, government procurement opportunities often unintentionally exclude relevant co-ops from bidding. To alleviate this situation, Government's Core Policy and Procedures Manual should explicitly guide and support procurement from co-ops and other forms of social enterprise. Further, establishing community-development related criteria for procurement would increase the likelihood of co-op success while keeping jobs and investment local.

5) If elected, will your government commit to amending government's Core Policy and Procedures Manual to explicitly ensure that co-operatives can bid on all government contracts for which they otherwise qualify?

As part of the B.C. Greens vision for a resilient green economy, we believe that we need to use the power of government procurement more deliberately and strategically to help us achieve the outcomes that we want to see as a province, including local social benefits and environmental outcomes. Co-ops and other forms of social enterprise should not be unintentionally prevented from bidding on government procurement opportunities and we will work with the sector to ensure that our policy reflects this.

Despite recent investment in affordable housing, more needs to be done to guarantee every resident of British Columbia has a safe, secure, affordable home. Housing co-ops already play a critical role in the communities they serve, and with appropriate supports they can do even more.

- 6) If elected, will your Party commit to increasing existing commitments to the development of new affordable housing, including a significant increase in the number of new co-op homes?**

- 7) Will you create a new capital fund to support the acquisition of purpose-built rental properties by the community housing sector and the conversion to co-ops where supported by existing tenants?**

While we have made some progress on reducing the price escalations that we were seeing in the housing market prior to 2017, housing remains far from affordable in many parts of BC. Part of the problem, we believe, is that we do not have a clear goal to deliver affordable homes to people across BC. The B.C. Greens' goal is that by 2030, everyone has a home that they can afford and that meets their needs. This requires a comprehensive suite of policies that address the complexity of our housing crisis, as one size does not fit all for a province of different needs and income levels. A key part of our housing platform outlines a rental support program that includes a means-tested grant that applies to low and moderate income earners who are paying more than 30% of their income in rent. We are committed to a housing first approach and accelerating investments in affordable, supportive and social housing. Through this approach we will expand supports for co-op housing by extending leases for existing co-ops about to expire, create a land bank for new co-ops, and provide security of tenure for co-ops on leased land. We will work with local governments to expand the "missing middle" such as townhouses and triplexes. We will also establish a significant capital fund to support the acquisition and maintenance of rental housing by nonprofits to maintain affordable rental units and address the financialization of the rental market. We further commit to closing the bare trust loophole, and the loopholes in the speculation tax that permit too many satellite families and foreign owners to be exempt. We are committed to ensuring housing is affordable and meets the needs of everyone in our province.