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British Columbia 2013 Provincial Election

Metro Vancouver Questions

1) New Relationships

Metro Vancouver and its Member Municipalities are seeking a new relationship with the Province of British Columbia that provides local governments with broader authority to effectively deal with the scale, scope, and complexity of their mandated responsibilities, which includes the maintenance of respectful and constructive relationships with local First Nations.

The Green Party of BC shares your objective of providing local governments “with broader authority to effectively deal with the scale, scope, and complexity” of your “mandated responsibilities.” The Green Party of BC, like all Green Parties, functions from a series of guiding principles that flow from the Global Green Charter. All policies and behaviours of the party, its members and its elected officials are measured against these principles.

I have attached a copy of the Ten Green Principles that guide the BC Green Party. The three that are most relevant to the changes you seek are those of Grass Roots Democracy, Community Based Economy and Decentralization. They are defined as follows:

- **Grass Roots Democracy** Every human being deserves a say in the decisions that affect their lives and not be subject to the will of another. We will work to increase public participation at every level by directly including citizens in decision-making processes.
- **Community Based Economy** Rather than people being subservient to the economy, the economy should provide for human needs within the natural limits of the earth. Local self-reliance to the greatest practical extent is the best way to achieve this goal.
- **Decentralization** The people most affected by a problem must have the authority to solve it. Distant administrations cannot be responsive. Power must be returned to local communities.

How will The Green Party of BC recognize the needs of Metro Vancouver and its Member Municipalities, and how do we see this reflected in a new legislative framework for local governments?

BC Greens believe the Community Charter and the Local Government Act need to be amended to better reflect the needs of communities and to transfer both power and resources to the Local Government level as per our commitment to decentralization. This would, of course apply to other regions, not just the Metro Vancouver Region.

The ways of determining how to improve the legislation would be done in consultation with Regional Districts, member municipalities and electoral districts and the general public as well as looking at best practices in other countries and engaging the services of experts. The Green Party does not subscribe to “one-size fits all” philosophy so the process and resulting changes to legislation would need to address the variety of regions and circumstances throughout BC.

The results of this process will look at and potentially propose changes to the functioning and effectiveness of Regional Districts. In all likelihood it will open consideration of issues such as amalgamation, electoral methods for Regional District positions, weighting by size of community for the purposes of voting on resolutions, the role of staff and elected officials on Regional Districts, campaign finance and terms of office, amongst others.

The Green Party believes change is necessary in virtually all aspects of governance if we are to transform BC into a sustainable jurisdiction. We also think the necessary changes will be positive and exciting if citizens are engaged in a meaningful way throughout the process.

How will the Green Party of BC ensure that it adheres to the spirit of the Local Government Act as it relates to the need for notice and consultation for Provincial actions that directly affect regional district interests?

The Green Party of BC would return to Regional Districts the right, in conjunction with First Nations, to participate in the decisions related to approval of projects within the district. We believe in consultation and think there should be government-to-government (including First Nations) discussions on issues that affect Regional District interests. The results of the process described above would provide clarity around the relationship between the Provincial Government and Regional Districts.

How would the Green Party of BC ensure that local governments are included in negotiations and consultations between First Nations and other orders of government on issues that have a direct impact on local governments?

We would make sure that local governments are part of the process. The relationship between the provincial government and First Nations must improve and a Green government would make changing the nature of the provincial government's relationships with First Nations a priority. Local governments and Regional Districts would be active participants in helping the province and First Nations define a more respectful and more effective relationship.

2) Municipal Financing

Local governments are responsible for providing services that help keep people healthy, safe and active every day, including police and fire, clean water, air quality, liquid and solid waste management, transportation, parks, and recreation. However, our ability to do so is often severely constrained by limited sources of revenue, which forces local governments to rely primarily on property taxes, user fees, and transfers from other orders of government to provide these services.

What will the Green Party of BC do to improve local governments' long-term financial capacity, and how would you provide more flexible and permanent means to finance the range of services and infrastructure that local governments now provide?

The Green Party is committed to expanding the authority of local governments and to providing secure and reliable financing commensurate with that authority.

Green MLAs will propose redefining the role of local government and determining new funding formulas for municipal and regional governments to ensure there is sufficient financial support for their new decision-making and programming responsibilities. We do not specify the how of the new funding formulas but as a general rule of thumb, BC Greens believe the money available to the local government level should double – from 8% of the overall tax income in Canada to 16%. We also think money and/or taxation power should be transferred in a predictable and transparent way.

We see an end to the grant making process that forces municipalities to squeeze projects and priorities into the requirements of grants. To a great extent, the current grant system is too reflective of senior government priorities, is often designed for political purposes and it forces municipalities to compete with each other for scarce resources.

Greens would also reform the policing system; localize and make more effective social, educational and health services; implement regional resource management, health trust and social trust boards; and create more opportunities for citizen participation in oversight. All of these changes would have implications for the local government level and for Regional Districts.

Specifically, what sources of provincial revenue would the Green Party of BC be willing to give local governments' access to so that they can provide the critical services British Columbians demand?

The Green Party of BC believes that the specifics of funding arrangements need to be determined in consultation with local governments, the Union of BC Municipalities and other political parties. Making change of this magnitude needs to have the support of all and we need to be confident that the decisions will actually make for better governance. We believe there are many potential sources of increased revenue for the local government level from a transfer of a percentage of the government revenue to consideration of new taxation powers for municipalities.

How would the Green Party of BC suggest revising and enhancing infrastructure programs such as the Building Canada Fund to better meet the needs of local governments, and do we support the traditional $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ funding formula (federal/provincial/local government contributions) for financing local infrastructure?

BC Greens believe that the Building Canada Fund does not provide the local government level with the needed flexibility for it to prioritize and address its infrastructure needs because the program presupposes priorities or targets areas that are of particular interest to the federal and provincial governments. Local government priorities must be made to fit into those determined by the senior levels of government. The decisions about what infrastructures to fund often carry political and partisan overtones that are to the benefit of the senior level of government.

It would likely be very difficult for a Green government to negotiate a different way of thinking with the federal government. However, we could try to build on programs such as the gas transfer that give targeted money with fewer restrictions or to negotiate transfers similar to what the federal government is proposing for health care so there is greater provincial and, therefore local government control of the distribution of funds.

Will the Green Party of BC require local governments to use public-private partnerships (P3) agreements to finance future large infrastructure projects, or will you allow them to secure funding arrangements that best meet the needs of local taxpayers?

The Green Party of BC would not impose P3s for large infrastructure projects. We support local control over funding arrangements assuming the needs for accountability and transparency are met.

The recent introduction of new national wastewater effluent regulations requires Metro Vancouver to upgrade two of its wastewater treatment plants at a total cost of over \$1.4 billion. What commitment is the Green Party of BC willing to make to help finance these mandated upgrades?

The new regulations regarding the treatment of wastewater are creating a mandatory financial burden for Metro Vancouver and other Regional Districts in BC. BC Greens believe that wastewater management provisions must be subject to more effective negotiation with the federal government. We believe these new regulations are part of an effort to standardize based on a limited number of measures that may not always be appropriate for all regions and that may not ensure a qualitatively better environmental outcome. The new standards are also based on the typical “one-size-fits-all” thinking that does not address local realities.

BC Greens support the need to move toward zero waste in both solid and liquid waste management. Achieving zero waste in wastewater management requires new ways of thinking and new approaches to dealing with the wastewater. From our perspective, the resource recovery principles of Integrated Resource Management (IRM) could be made standard practice. The overall reduction of waste and water usage and integrity of the underground infrastructure must be addressed in improving our wastewater management. As well, accurate measures of current Greenhouse Gas emissions and an estimate of the reduction of GHGs should be a significant factor in treatment proposals.

The money to pay for the necessary changes will need to be a shared responsibility. There is only one taxpayer. The Green Party believes we need to look at tax reform that employs strategies like taxation on pollution, carbon and waste.

3) Affordable Housing

The lack of affordable housing in the Metro Vancouver region – which includes lower-end market housing, rental stock, subsidized housing, and social housing – is a critical and growing concern, with the demand for affordable housing outstripping the supply by a significant margin. Metro Vancouver, its Member Municipalities and key regional stakeholders have collaborated in the creation of the Canadian Rental Housing Coalition, which advocates for provincial and federal actions that will facilitate the expansion of the rental housing stock throughout the province and Canada.

What will The Green Party of BC do to support and advance the objective of the Canadian Rental Housing Coalition (www.rentalcoalition.ca)?

The Mission and Principles of the Canadian Rental Housing Coalition are consistent with Green Party of BC policy. The goals related to a “National Economic Strategy” and reinstating federal tax incentives are federal in nature and other than working to influence the federal government, fall outside provincial jurisdiction. In principle, BC Greens would support new and innovative financing strategies and the use of government owned land for rental housing. A Green government would make sure property assessments and the property transfer tax do not negatively impact the development and maintaining of an adequate supply of rental housing. We agree with the Charter’s goals of engaging the non-profit, cooperative and private sectors in finding creative solutions to increasing and maintaining the supply of high quality, affordable rental housing. The Green Party would commit to participating in these initiatives.

BC Greens see safe, healthy and affordable housing as a human right because it is a matter of social justice and equity. We are aware that there are already many innovative approaches already being developed at the local by municipalities, non-profits, cooperative, co-housing and the private sector. The Green Party of BC would look to being a supportive partner in those initiatives.

What commitment will The Green Party of BC make to address the growing affordability crisis in Metro Vancouver?

The Green Party believes we must work collaboratively to find solutions to the affordability crisis using whatever levers the government has to make housing more affordable. This is a broad discussion that must involve the government, non-profit and private sectors but that also must involve the public.

What measures would you introduce to encourage the participation of the private sector in the development of more affordable housing in the Metro Vancouver region?

There may be tax incentives that could be used to encourage the construction of more affordable housing by the private sector. We would expect local government to use their powers to require that a percentage of projects be dedicated to affordable housing as part of the approval process. If this became the norm throughout the Metro Vancouver region, developers would come to understand that projects would need an affordable component before they will be considered.

Will The Green Party of BC commit to ending street homelessness through an increase in funding for shelters and social housing?

Shelters are not a long-term solution to ending street homelessness but in the interim, BC Greens are committed to ensuring there is enough shelter space to house the homeless. We would commit to providing supportive housing with appropriate services provided to the hard to house and to those suffering from addictions, mental health or both.

As a general premise, the Green Party believes there are better alternatives to social housing where people of like circumstance and social condition are housed in a purpose built complex defined as “social housing”. We think better results can be achieved when people have choice in the kind of housing in which they reside and when the population of a development or an area represents diversity in income, employment, ethnicity and circumstance. Greens do not believe that it is appropriate to prescribe lifestyle choices on others unless the safety of a person in need or others with whom they are involved is at risk.

BC Greens support a Guaranteed Livable Income (GLI) as a strategy for providing choice and allowing people to maintain dignity in how they live their lives. We know that some individuals will always require assistance in the skills of daily living but the vast majority of people will be more effective when they have the dignity of choice and control over their lives. Even those who need support for daily living should have the ability to participate in the decisions that are made about what level and kind of support they receive.

4) Protecting the Environment

Metro Vancouver and its Member Municipalities are directly responsible for a number of initiatives and policies that help protect the environment, including air and water quality, liquid and solid waste management, and parks/conservation areas; yet often, local governments are given neither the legislative authority nor the corresponding funding instruments to fully support the implementation of policies and plans that protect the local environment.

What will The Green Party of BC do to ensure all local governments have the appropriate legislative authority to monitor and where appropriate level sanctions against violators of environmental laws and/or regulations (for example, Metro Vancouver currently has limited ability to impose fines against businesses that illegally discharge oils and grease into municipal sewer systems.)

These authorities are consistent with Green Party policy. In collaboration with local governments we would draft and pass the legislation to give this authority to local governments.

What assurances can the Green Party of BC provide that local government real assets – which include parks and conservation areas – will be maintained to help protect, preserve and enhance the local environment?

The Green Party of BC supports a collaborative discussion and decision-making process around issues like this that recognize that the relationship between the province and the local government level needs to improve. We believe we need to end the treatment of local governments as serving at the pleasure of the Province. We would like to see constitutional recognition supported in legislation.

5) Public Transit

Efficient and affordable transportation systems are critical for the regional movement of goods and people, and directly link regional economic and livability objectives. To help achieve regional transportation objectives, local governments require predictable and stable sources of funding, and a stronger relationship between regional land-use and regional transportation plans and objectives.

How will the Green Party of BC provide local governments and regional transportation authorities with the capacity and long-term predictable funding sources to support major transit infrastructure.

We clearly need different thinking about how to fund transit and more importantly, how to shift more people out of their vehicles. All transportation issues need to be looked at holistically including involving private and public sector employers reducing employee travel by car.

In terms of financing, BC Greens support a variety of strategies including road pricing, parking pricing and congestion pricing. Predictable, long-term funding sources would be identified as part of a review of government priorities.

As a society, we need to find ways to encourage people to live close to where they work. The one to one and one-half hour commutes are contrary to healthy living and diminish the health of BC communities. We also need to look at issues of urban sprawl that encourage long commutes.

Specifically, what changes would the Green party of BC make to allow greater flexibility in the use of the Strategic Priorities Fund under the Canada/British Columbia/UBCM Gas Tax Agreement, so that financing would be available to local governments in support of important transportation expenditures currently not permitted under the Fund?

The Green Party would discuss changes to the program with local governments to ensure the program is flexible and can better address the priorities of local government.

What is the Green Party of BC's view on the transit funding position recently put forward by the Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation: that the provincial government develops a road pricing policy for the Metro Vancouver region by February 28, 2013?

We support road pricing. The deadline is not relevant to the Green Party because we are not represented in the legislature at February 28, 2013. The nature of the relationship changes discussed above would be relevant to this issue.

Does the Green Party of BC support the option of directing a portion of British Columbia Carbon Tax revenues to Metro Vancouver and Translink to advance regional climate change and transportation priorities, where funds collected in the Metro Vancouver region are spent in the Metro Vancouver region?

The current structure of the carbon tax is revenue neutral which means that 100% (or more) of the carbon tax is offset against individual and corporate income tax. To provide a portion of the current revenue from the carbon tax collected in Metro Vancouver would require the raising of income tax to fund this change.

The Green Party of BC supports a more robust carbon tax and would reform the application and collection of the tax. While we support the tax being fully revenue neutral offset against income, we believe there is an argument to be made for applying some of the increase in the carbon tax (that the Green Party would implement) toward transit, including Translink. In the long term, however, carbon taxes are most effective if they provide people with a financial incentive to choose a lower emissions lifestyle.

What changes to the Translink governance structure would the Green Party of BC support to more closely align the transportation and land-use requirements of the Metro Vancouver region and provide more direct input into the decision-making process from the general public through their elected representatives?

The Green Party supports partly elected Boards for public bodies like Translink. We think some combination of elected board members, local government representation and potentially appointed members to ensure the board is truly representative of the people of Metro Vancouver would be preferable.

6) Regional Planning

Metro Vancouver's Regional Growth Strategy, Metro Vancouver 2040 – Shaping the Future, was adopted on July 29, 2011, after being unanimously accepted by all local governments in the region. The Regional Growth Strategy looks out to 2040 and provides direction on how we will accommodate the over 1 million extra people and 600,000 new jobs that are expected to come to Metro Vancouver in the next 30 years. The five goals of the plan address the management of this growth in a way that enhances the livability and sustainability of the region, and help ensure that our communities remain connected, engaged and resilient in and increasingly complex world.

How would The Green Party of BC support Metro Vancouver and its Member Municipalities in advancing regional land use objectives as set out in the Regional Growth Strategy?

As we transfer more power to the local government level, this question would be moot because Metro Vancouver and the member municipalities would be responsible for meeting the RGS objectives. The question itself illustrates the need for change.

How would The Green Party of BC support the development of major investments in water mains, trunk sewer lines, public transit, dyking and other key infrastructure, that will be needed for the Metro Vancouver region to keep pace with anticipated population growth?

The Green Party does not subscribe to the belief that we can continue with unlimited growth. We encourage municipalities to determine the amount they can grow based on the ability of the infrastructure and resources (air, water, land, waste management, infrastructure costs) to support a population size. There are examples of municipalities like Okatoks, AB that have limited their growth by assessing what level of population their resources and infrastructure can accommodate. Whistler has used the Natural Step process as a way of planning for a sustainable future.

How will the Green Party of BC help prevent the encroachment of industrial uses onto viable, protected agricultural land in the Metro Vancouver region?

While British Columbians are justifiably proud of the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), its existence has not ensured that the farmland it protects is kept in productive farming. The ALR is often popular with urbanites but can be experienced as punitive to farmers. Farmers often cannot make a reasonable income from farming alone and the ALR restricts their ability to realize a reasonable return on their investment on retirement. BC Greens would work with farmers to find solutions to these issues.

BC Greens would reform the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) in membership; implementing a method of selecting members that ensures qualified commissioners are selected through transparent and open competition that is not subject to political appointments.

We would freeze all further withdrawals of Class One and Class Two agricultural land from the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) pending study of ways to ensure, in collaboration with farmers, that farm land is kept in farming. We would prohibit landowners from degrading Class One and Class Two ALR lands by activities such as removing topsoil and depositing sand, gravel or construction wastes on these lands.

BC Greens believe we could employ farmland covenants, trusts and long term tenure as tools to increase the amount of land used for agriculture. These strategies would provide access to land for those who want to farm and for whom the cost of land is a barrier to entry. Matching new farmers to existing farmers might provide an exit strategy for retiring farmers.

BC Greens would establish locally grown food procurement policies for government and government agencies, re-establish a Buy BC program to identify BC grown agricultural products and promote agri-tourism, and provide small grants to support municipalities and school boards that wish to maintain and expand community gardens and urban agriculture.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jane Sterk".

Jane Sterk, leader