

- Albertans are asked to help the government determine the direction for Alberta over the next few years through a pre-budget consultation questionnaire. Please visit www.budgetconsultation.alberta.ca/ for more information.
- The City will build 300 new affordable housing units, and provide rent subsidies for up to 1,000 people, using the \$63 million allocated by the Province

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Fair Fares!

Vibrant Communities Calgary is pleased to announce that it has partnered with Calgary Transit to commission a survey of Low-Income Transit Pass users to assess the outcomes and benefits of the pass on Low-Income Transit Pass users.

The survey will determine if recipients who accessed the Low-Income Transit Pass program's participation in employment, structured activities or social outings increased from the previous year.

Approximately 400 pass purchasers will be interviewed by telephone.

Vibrant Communities Calgary's Fair Fares Action Team will present the study's results to Members of Calgary City Council at the September 5th City of Calgary's Standing Policy Committee on Land Use, Planning and Transportation. Please join us at this meeting at 9:30 on Wednesday, September 5th at the Engineering Traditions Committee Room, First Floor, City Hall to show your support to City Council for permanent

funding for the Low-Income Transit Pass program. For more information, please call (403) 283-2197, or email nicole@vibrantcalgary.com



Low Wages in a Boomtown

74,700 employed Calgarians over the age of 15, or 13.3% of employees in Calgary, earned less than \$12 per hour during the first six-months of 2007; over 60% of all Calgarians earning less than \$12 per hour during the first months of 2007 are women; and, 50% are over the age of 25.

It seems clear that there are a significant number of hardworking Calgarians earning less than a Living Wage (\$12 per hour with

benefits, or \$13.25 without benefits).

In order to identify why some employers have not raised wages to a Living Wage, Vibrant Communities Calgary commissioned Neil Ladell and Angie Quennell to survey 150 business owners and managers across Calgary.

As part of their study, Neil Ladell and Angie Quennell are also interviewing 70 employees who earn less than \$12 per hour to identify

why they continue to work for less than a Living Wage.

The complete study will be available the first week of September. Watch for it at www.vibrantcalgary.com!

For more information on the study, or to request a copy of the study by email, please call (403) 283-2180, or email jordan@vibrantcalgary.com.

Alberta's Minimum Wage is Increasing to \$8 Per Hour

Vibrant Communities Calgary is pleased to offer its support for the Government of Alberta's recent decision to increase the minimum wage from \$7 to \$8.00 per hour, effective 1 September 2007.

"This increase to Alberta's minimum wage is good news for Albertans," said Premier Ed Stelmach. "Minimum wage offers protection for workers," said Iris Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. "It sets the minimum rate of pay that employers must meet and ensures that workers, especially women and youth, who traditionally are in the lower income occupations, are making a better wage. This will help recruit and retain new employees in Alberta's labour force."

Three per cent of Alberta's workforce, approximately 41,000 people, earn less than \$8 per hour.

Future minimum wage changes will occur on April 1 of each year, and will be indexed to changes in the average weekly wage. Indexing minimum wage to the average weekly wage will reflect the actual wage changes that occurred the year before.

Minimum wages are moving in the right direction across Canada. Minimum wages, for example, will rise this year in eight provinces and territories (YK, AB, SK, MB, ON, QC, NB and NL). Ontario will raise its minimum wage by \$2.50 to \$10.50 by 2010.

While Vibrant Communities Calgary commends the Provincial Governments for their decisions to increase wages, minimum wages are still too low.

In Calgary, for example, a person earning \$8 per hour will have to work 83 hours per week to afford a 1 bedroom apartment without spending more than 30 percent of his or her net income on shelter. A single parent with a child will have to work 101 hours per week to afford a 2-bedroom apartment. More information on the required numbers of hours minimum wage earners will have to work per week to afford housing without spending more than 30% of net income is available in the following table.

Unit Type	Calgary Average Rent in April 2007 ¹	Required Hours of Work per Week to Afford Housing at 30% Net Income for an \$8 per hour Minimum Wage Earner ²
Bachelor	608	59
1-Bedroom	849	83
2-Bedroom	1,037	101
3+ Bedroom	968	94
All Units Average	925	83

1) 1) CMHC (Spring 2007), Rental Market Report: Alberta Highlights

2) Net Income includes vacation pay and the following deductions: federal tax, provincial tax, EI, and CPP

Did You Know?

- Alberta has the second highest prevalent rate of income-related food insecurity in Canada at 10.7%. The Canadian average is 9.2% (Health Canada, 2004)
- 6 out of 10 clients at the Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre are employed (Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre, 2007)
- It is estimated that the average Canadian housing price will double by 2026 (CIBC World Markets, 2007)
- The 2006 before-tax Low Income Cut-Off for an individual in Calgary is \$21,202 (Statistics Canada, 2007)
- In June 2007, the average sale price for a single family home in Calgary was \$496,890. the average sale price in June 2006 was \$408,771 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2007)
- 74,700 (13.3%) of employed Calgarians over the age of 15 earn less than \$12 an hour (Statistics Canada, 2007)
- Individuals living in households with combined incomes of less than \$20,000 are almost three times more likely to experience a decline in self-rated health than people with the highest incomes (Statistics Canada, 2007)
- Average family market income among the 10% of families with the highest incomes rose by 22% from 1989 to 2004. It fell by 11% among families with the lowest income (Statistics Canada, 2007)

Calgary-Cross MLA, Yvonne Fritz, was appointed the Associate Minister of Affordable Housing and Urban Development. "With it being seriously the number one issue for Albertans, it has a very high priority with this premier - which is why there's an associate ministry that's been developed," Fritz said at a news conference at the McDougall Centre. "It's the hottest issue in Alberta."

Shelter: Homeless in a Growing Economy

In a report released in June, titled Shelter: Homeless in a Growth Economy: Canada's 21st Century Paradox, Gordon Laird, a Media Fellow for the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership, suggests that poverty is now the leading cause of homelessness in Canada, that Canada's true homeless population ranges between 200,000 and 300,000 and that "maintaining" Canada's homeless population between the years 1993-2004 cost taxpayers an estimated \$49.5 billion, or \$4.5 to \$6 billion annually, inclusive of health care, criminal justice, social services, and emergency shelter costs.

Gordon explains that "roughly half of all Canadians live in fear of poverty, and 49 per cent polled believed they

might be poverty stricken if they missed one or two pay cheques". He also explains that "the most direct way to stem homelessness and housing insecurity is to relieve low-income Canadians from making hard economic choices between food and shelter". Eight provinces are increasing minimum wages across Canada this year, but more must be done. Gordon suggests that the provinces should index welfare, shelter and social assistance to inflation. Vibrant Communities Calgary believes the private sector can also play a pivotal role to reducing poverty by paying a living wage.

Other recommendations made in the report include the following: developing alternative to traditional home ownership, such as affordable

housing ownership options; investing in affordable housing for higher needs Canadians; reforming municipal policy to include zoning for new basement suites, and providing inspection and code to protect renters; providing rent supplements; and, building upon existing research and program success.

Perhaps the most important point that Gordon makes in the report is that Canada can no longer afford a high incidence of homelessness, something must be done.

To read the report in its entirety, please visit the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership's website, www.chumirethicsfoundation.ca.





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Vibrant Communities is a Pan-Canadian Learning Community convened and supported by The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, Tamarack - An Institute for Community Engagement, and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. Nationally, Vibrant Communities provides a process and a working environment where diverse community leaders from fifteen communities across Canada work together to share ideas, practices and policies that strengthen their community-based poverty reduction initiatives. For more information, please visit: www.vibrantcommunities.ca

VCC accepted an invitation to join Communities Collaborating Institute 2007! In joining this community of practice, we will share our common passion, strengthen our individual skill and make the work of communities collaborating easier and more effective for the entire field.

For more information, please visit <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/>

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