

IN THE  
NEWS:

- On April 1, the monthly living allowance for recipients of the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program increased by \$50 to a maximum of \$1,000.
- Effective May 1, Alberta Works recipients in the "not expected to work" category will benefit from a five percent increase in support.

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# VCC in motion!

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

SPRING 2006

## Fair Fares: En Route To Affordable Transportation

The Fair Fares Action Team has made great progress this year. During the first three months of 2006 the Action Team welcomed a number of new volunteers, including Aldermen Joe Ceci and Gord Lowe. The committee met a total of eight times during January, February and March, including a successful presentation to Calgary Caucus.

Over 6,000 Calgarians living on low incomes have registered for the new Universal Low Income Transit Pass, and each

month an average of 3,500 Calgarians purchase the \$35 pass. However, City Council has only approved



funding until the end of 2006 and Fair Fares is working hard to secure sustainable funding in order

to maintain this important program.

Since 1999, Fair Fares has been asking the Government of Alberta to provide affordable transportation to its low income residents, as a way to ensure equitable access to all of the wonderful social and economic opportunities our communities have to offer. Fair Fares is now proposing that the Government of Alberta partner with municipalities to offer affordable transportation to low

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## Labour Shortage? Try Paying a Living Wage!

So far, 2006 has brought a booming economy and, as of February, a provincial unemployment rate of 3.1 percent. In response to a growing labour shortage – and designed to address future demands on Alberta's labour force – the Government of Alberta has created a new strategy, *Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce*.

Vibrant Communities Calgary (VCC) had the opportunity to participate in the public consultation on this strategy by making written recommendations

and attending a consultation session with other local non-profit organizations. It was an excellent opportunity to raise awareness about the issues facing low wage workers in Calgary and to highlight the need for employers to be educated about the benefits of paying a Living Wage, providing health benefits and adopting progressive workplace programs (e.g. flexible work hours, child care etc.). If Alberta is to attract and retain workers from across the country and around the globe, serious

attention needs to be paid to improving the conditions awaiting those who will enter low wage positions.

Other hot issues discussed at the consultation included a call for significant reforms to the way foreign credentials are recognized in Canada. Participants emphasized that if Alberta wants to attract and retain workers from outside of Canada, then people who immigrate must be able to quickly enter the workforce in their field of expertise, rather

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## LOW WAGE FACTS:

### In 2005:

1. 64,800 (13%) of employed Calgarians over the age of 15 earned less than \$10 an hour
2. Women are disproportionately represented among these low wage earners, with 38,300 earning less than \$10.00 an hour
3. Not all low wage earners are teenagers; 29,800 Calgarians over the age of 25 were trying to support themselves on less than \$10.00 per hour
4. 64% (19,100) of these adult workers were women

Source: Statistics Canada, 2005

According to a recent Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) report, "Canada's newest generation of citizens—aged 18 to 25—is by far the largest constituency demanding a role in the country's political processes."  
— *Towards an Action Plan for Canada: Our Visions, Values and Actions, CPRN 2006*

## Living Wage: Labour Shortage? Try Paying a Living Wage! cont...

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than subsisting in survival jobs until they grow tired and migrate to the United States where their skills and knowledge are welcomed.

The consultation also revealed considerable concern regarding workforce development and retention in the non-profit sector. Significantly, the issues of adequate compensation and access to health benefits were at the forefront of the dialogue, highlighting the relevance of VCC's current Living Wage work in the non-profit sector.

VCC congratulates Alberta Human Resources and Employment on this new labour strategy and their efforts to consult the community on building a vision for the future of labour in Alberta. VCC looks forward to seeing the new labour strategy implemented this Fall.

Living Wage took another step forward at the

provincial level in March when Public Interest Alberta (PIA) launched a new Living Wage initiative. PIA brought together over 50 community partners from across the province to begin looking at



*Living Wage Action Team Members at Public Interest Alberta meeting (left to right): Lynda Laughlin, Fred Robertson, Jenny Saarinen, Jessica Leech, Ramona Johnston (missing: Derek Cook and Carol Lawson)*

the issue of low wages in Alberta communities and building a provincial Living Wage movement. In total, seven members of the VCC Living Wage Action Team attended the meeting to contribute to preliminary discussions. We look forward to the coming year as this provincial initiative gets underway.

On the national front, Jessica Leech, VCC's Living Wage Coordinator, and Jenny Saarinen, the Chair of VCC's Living Wage Action Team, had a chance to attend the 2006 National Conference on Community Economic Development and Social Economy held March 15 – 18 in Vancouver.

The conference, hosted by the Canadian Community Economic Development Network, brought together people from across the country to share their knowledge and experience of working to support economic development in their communities. Jessica and Jenny presented a series of cracker barrel sessions on Multi-sectoral Collaboration and a Living Wage. It provided an excellent opportunity to share new information about Living Wage and the lessons we have learned in carrying out this initiative with people from across Canada.

## How Do Calgarians Feel About Their City?

Results from the *Comparing Canadian Cities* poll conducted by Ipsos-Reid and the Dominion Institute were released on March 10. The survey of Canada's four largest cities, including Calgary, looked at how confident Canadians are with their municipal government and how they feel about the future of the city in which they live.

When asked what the most important local issue facing their community was, 3 percent of Calgarians said homelessness / poverty. Other responses included:

- 60 percent of Calgarians agree their city looks after the needs of the poor and disadvantaged
- 61 percent of Calgarians believe their city community is becoming more "just"
- 85 percent of Calgarians agree a lot of people who live in their city volunteer in the community and are civic minded

## Did You Know?

- In 2005 the average price of a single family home in Calgary jumped to \$315,000 from \$239,437 in 2001. (Calgary Herald, 2005)
- 54% of Calgarians agree that housing prices in their city are so high that many people can't afford to live there. (Ipsos Reid, 2006)
- In 2004, the average family income among the top 20% of income earners was \$125,000, compared to just \$22,300 among the 20% with the lowest incomes. This \$102,700 gap is up by \$20,200 from 1996. (Statistics Canada, 2006)
- An online poll of 1,000 Canadians aged 18 to 34 shows that 73% think poverty and homelessness is a problem in their city. (DOSE, 2006)
- Alberta ranked highest in Canada (28%) for the percentage of people who agreed with the following statement: "I have had to use a food bank." (DOSE, 2006)
- 44,598 Calgarians received assistance from the Calgary Interfaith Food Bank in 2004. (The Calgary and Region Socio-Economic Outlook 2005-2010)
- Single mothers are five times more likely than those with partners to end up with a low income. Between 1981 and 2001, the proportion of children aged 18 and under in a single mother family rose from 14% to 21%. (Statistics Canada, 2006)
- An estimated 58,555 Calgary households are in need of affordable housing because they earn less than \$38,000 and spend more than 30% of their income on housing. (The Calgary and Region Socio-Economic Outlook 2005-2010)

"A Low Income Transit Pass allows me to leave my home and access the city for my employment, doctor appointments, community activity, personal needs, groceries, other shopping, visits with my children and personal contact with my relatives. To be independent on transportation keeps my moral up to achieve things by handling them myself and keeps me sane. Thanks."  
 - *Calgarian Living on Low Income*

## Fair Fares: En Route to Affordable Transportation cont...

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income Albertans by providing conditional grants of \$2.25 per capita to urban and rural municipalities throughout the province. This would be a total provincial investment of less than \$8 million.

In February, Fair Fares launched a province-wide letter writing campaign to the Government of Alberta. Letters of support have poured in from across the province, including Peace River, Cold Lake, Banff, Grande Prairie and Sylvan Lake. Communities without public transportation systems are already thinking of creative ways of using a conditional grant to create affordable transportation for low income residents.

On March 24, Aldermen Ceci

and Lowe joined six other Fair Fares members in a presentation to Calgary Caucus.



*The Fair Fares Calgary Caucus Presentation Team (left to right): Colleen Huston, Lindsay Postill, Alderman Joe Ceci, Koji Miyaji, Murray Crosbey, Ramona Johnston, Alderman Gord Lowe, Bonnie Pacaud*

The six Caucus members present asked a number of questions, recommended that Fair Fares present to a provincial standing policy committee, and offered to meet with City of Calgary

representatives to further discuss the division of responsibilities between the provincial and municipal governments.

In April, Alderman Ceci will meet with Alberta Human Resources and Employment Minister Mike Cardinal to discuss the role of the provincial government. Fair Fares is hopeful that their request to present to the provincial Standing Policy Committee on Education and Employment will be approved.

Over the next few months Fair Fares will continue its efforts to engage other municipalities from across the province to mobilize local community support for provincial funding of affordable transportation for Albertans living on low incomes.

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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 fourteen 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](http://www.vibrantcommunities.ca)

### **VCC NEEDS YOU!**

**VCC is looking for volunteers for the following initiatives:**

**Fund Development  
Communications  
Living Wage  
Fair Fares**

## Vibrant Communities Calgary Partners

Cathy Abel, *RBC Financial*  
Amy Alexander, *City of Calgary*  
Barb Ames, *United Way of Calgary and Area*  
Julie Ball, *Calgary Talent Pool*  
Kristi Baron, *United Way of Calgary and Area*  
Andrea Blaikie, *Calgary Health Region*  
Donna Bonertz, *Calgary Drop-in Centre*  
Casey Boodt, *Canadian Outcomes Research Institute*  
Terry Bullick, *Bullick Writing & Communications*  
Greg Campbell, *Calgary Catholic Family Service*  
Rob Campbell, *Community Volunteer*  
Debra Carnat, *Alberta Children's Hospital*  
Lisa Caton, *MCC Employment Development*  
Alderman Joe Ceci, *City of Calgary*  
David Chakravorty, *Canadian Mental Health Association*  
Gordon Christie, *Calgary and District Labour Council*  
Derek Cook, *City of Calgary*  
Murray Crosbey, *Disability Action Hall*  
John Currie, *Calgary Homeless Foundation*  
Tasha Dobrovolsky, *Community Volunteer*  
Joan Farkas, *City of Calgary*  
Christy Fisher, *Progressive Alternatives Society*  
Michael Fitzpatrick, *Take A Break Catering & Fine Foods*  
Richard Fries, *MCC Employment Development*  
Audrey Gardner, *Bow Valley College*  
Susan Gillies, *Women's Centre of Calgary*

Elliot Hewitt, *Human Resources and Skills Development Canada*  
Walter Hossli, *MCC Employment Development*  
Samantha Hubka, *Killfish Media*  
Colleen Huston, *Disability Action Hall*  
Patricia Jones, *Calgary Catholic Family Service*  
Noel Keough, *Sustainable Calgary*  
Paula King, *Anadarko Canada Corporation*  
Candice Koch, *Aspen Family and Community Network Society*  
Michelle Kristinson, *Multiple Sclerosis Society*  
Mezaun Lakha-Evin, *Cerebral Palsy Association in Alberta*  
Lynda Laughlin, *National Anti-Poverty Organization*  
Carol Lawson, *Public Interest Alberta*  
Sylvia Loewen, *Calgary Health Region*  
Jeff Loomis, *Federation of Calgary Communities*  
Alderman Gord Lowe, *City of Calgary*  
Loraine Lundquist, *Calgary Housing Company*  
Bonnie Mallach, *Homeless Awareness Calgary*  
Bob McInnis, *Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids*  
David McInnis, *Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre*  
Donna McLeod / Varina Russell, *The Calgary Children's Initiative*  
Koji Miyaji, *Calgary Transit*  
Bill Moore-Kilgannon, *Public Interest Alberta*  
Tim Moro, *Ipsos Reid*

Maryam Nabavi, *United Way of Calgary and Area*  
Carol Oliver, *United Way of Calgary and Area*  
Bonnie Pacaud, *Community Volunteer*  
Karen Paulitzki, *Community Volunteer*  
Rev. John Pentland, *Hillhurst United Church*  
Gayle Peters, *Governors' Council*  
Tammy Poirier, *Community Representative*  
Lindsay Postill, *Potential Place Clubhouse*  
Fred Robertson, *National Anti-Poverty Organization*  
Ken Rukiidi, *Community Volunteer*  
Jenny Saarininen, *MCC Employment Development*  
Gurbir Sandhu, *Calgary Workers Resource Centre*  
Yvonne Schmitz, *United Way Board*  
Paula Shaw, *Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre*  
Bev Sheckter, *Jewish Family Service*  
Maureen Sheppard, *Innovation Inc.*  
Mona Smart, *Wildrose United Church*  
Leanne Squair, *City of Calgary*  
Carmen Sparrow, *MCC Employment Development*  
John te Linde, *City of Calgary*  
Lori Villebrun, *United Way of Calgary and Area*  
Brenda Wadey, *Sunrise Community Link Resource Centre*  
Cameron Warren, *MCC Employment Development*  
Tom Wildey, *Community Volunteer*  
Lori Willocks, *Calgary Immigrant Aid Society*  
Joy Zerke, *City of Calgary*



Click here to visit the Tamarack website for more engaging content! [www.tamarackcommunity.ca](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca)