



Partnership approach of Chamber's housing affordability report lauded by Minister

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New Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Yvonne Fritz praised the Calgary Chamber of Commerce's major housing affordability report released in May, characterizing it as thorough and an excellent primer on the issue.

"Many of its recommendations encourage further partnership between the city and the province; between the city and industry; between development and transit; and between city planners and city council," said Fritz during the June 10 lunch event. "I commend you for doing such a fine job."

The report investigated Calgary's housing affordability since 1980 and offered comparison with other Canadian cities, discussed the factors that affect housing prices, and provided recommendations to improve the affordability of Calgary's residential real estate market.

"The current price of housing relative to incomes poses a significant challenge to Calgary businesses seeking to attract and retain employees - the number one issue confronting Chamber members," said Heather Douglas, President & CEO of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce at the report's release.

Fritz acknowledged that City Council, non-profit organizations and community leaders like the Chamber are closest to local housing needs, and therefore, best able to identify solutions. She expressed appreciation for the Chamber's submission to the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force last year, and stressed the need for partners and new ideas.

The provincial government has allocated \$142 million in capital funding for affordable housing through a RFP process. The RFP funding is available to non-profit organizations, private developers, and all municipalities.

"Chamber members involved in housing development, or who serve on non-profit boards, can submit their own affordable housing proposal," said Fritz. "And if approved, can receive up to 70 per cent of the total cost."

As part of her remarks, Fritz also supported a key recommendation of the Chamber report that affordability be added to the City of Calgary's list of "smart growth sustainability principles".

The Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry is a new government department. It's the first time since 1984 that a provincial Ministry is dedicated to housing. Premier Stelmach mandated the Ministry to encourage construction of 11,000 affordable housing units in the province by 2012 and develop a 10-year provincial plan to end homelessness.

The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness, which included the Chamber's then Chair Hal Walker, recently released its own 10-year plan. The philosophy of the plan is "Housing First" that puts the highest priority on moving homeless people into permanent housing with the support necessary to sustain that housing. The plan also recommends the creation of 11,250 affordable housing units in the city.



"In Alberta, the need to address housing and homelessness has never affected business so directly," said Fritz.