

January 31st, 2025

Minister Brenda Bailey
PO Box 9048 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC
V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Bailey,

On December 16, 2024 the City of Burnaby received a correspondence from the Ministry of Finance inviting the City to provide feedback as part of the sixth annual consultation on the Speculation and Vacancy Tax (SVT). We are pleased to hear that the SVT data continues to show that the program is working as intended. With respect to feedback, we have provided below, our comments and suggestions for improvement.

With respect to funding, all revenue collected from the SVT is directed into the Housing Priority Initiatives Special Account (HPI) for the subsequent funding of housing, shelter, and rental projects within the taxed regional districts. Although we agree that the intended use of the funds is appropriate, it is noted that the primary recipient of the funds is BC Housing and not the regional districts or even the municipalities where the funds were collected. As such, municipalities with a higher portion of homes left empty would presumably benefit from more housing projects but are not guaranteed to receive the corresponding funding assistance. We believe this is an opportunity to adjust how the SVT collected is redistributed. As municipalities like Burnaby actively take on an increased role in the provision of housing options within their borders, a portion of the funds otherwise provided to BC Housing could be invested in municipalities using an amount proportionate to the taxes collected from their citizens. Funding received directly from the HPI would be of great assistance in providing the flexibility to complete locally-appropriate housing projects with a reduced concern over how to fund them.

In addition to the above, the Province can bestow additional authorities to local governments. An example of which the ability to administer our own property vacancy tax, similar to the Empty Home's Tax administered by the City of Vancouver. Such a tax would act within the confines of Burnaby, encourage the sale or rent of unused homes, and generate funding for housing initiatives undertaken by the City of Burnaby.

The City of Burnaby is appreciative of the information provided by the Province on the merits of the SVT and the opportunity to provide input and insight into the SVT. Regardless of the distribution method used, funding for housing projects has a positive impact on the livability of the region. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Mike Hurley
Mayor, City of Burnaby