

The Federal Election will be held in 2015 so the budget for this year can be expected to be an election warm up. What is important to the people living in Kitchener and Waterloo Region? On Saturday December 13th, a pre-budget consultation was held in Kitchener, co-hosted by the Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo and Stephen Woodworth, MP, Kitchener Centre. Points raised at that session are included in this submission.

From the perspective of the Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo, a small community based social development organization, the needs of our local community are similar to those of communities all across Canada. In general, we are facing a number of crises for which we believe the Government of Canada has an essential leadership role.

1. The primary issue challenging countries around the world, Canada included, is the economic decline and subsequent insecurity and poor employment environment.
2. Growing income inequities is being increasingly recognized as a significant issue affecting vulnerable population groups such as youth, seniors, persons with disabilities and immigrants.
3. There is a significant erosion of the Canadian social safety net which has been the key to Canada being a strong society.
4. There is a democratic deficit wherein people do not have a meaningful role to influence decision making resulting in them being disconnected from government decisions and distrustful because they don't understand what is being done and believe decisions are being made unfairly.
5. There are serious concerns about the health and healthiness of the environment and the impact of climate change, both short and long term.
6. Local communities have eroding physical infrastructure and limitations in developing their infrastructure in view of new knowledge and changing technologies so as to be affordable, economically prosperous and livable for people in a changing demographic reality of inclusion and diversity.

These issues are not being addressed, at all or well enough, by the current Government of Canada, in the view of those who participated at the December 13, 2014 pre-budget consultation session held in Kitchener. Attendees at that session validated a list of values to guide our Federal Government leaders in making budget decisions:

- Fairness and equality
- Legacy for the future
- Compassion and
- Community of voices.

In consideration of what we have heard from local residents and from other areas of our local community work, we propose the 2015 Federal Budget include the following measures:

Leadership

- Invest in federal leadership to create national strategies, in particular for poverty elimination, housing, health, transportation, support to cities, employment and economic recovery, family support, immigration, First Nations and the environment.
- Provide a community capacity building fund to support local communities and, in particular, less advantaged populations, to be effectively supported to:
 - Contribute to both the development and the implementation of the above mentioned national strategies and to
 - Increase citizen understanding of, and participation in, government policy and budget processes.

Taxation

- Raise personal exemption to the defined poverty line, which in Ontario is the Low Income Measure.
- Do not go ahead with the income tax splitting; this measure will not benefit low income earners and will reduce tax revenues to invest even less in supporting local communities.
- Apply a rigorous fairness test to all tax rules and changes so that any rule or change must benefit all citizens and not only those who have higher incomes or are wealthy.
- Ensure that efficiencies and service cuts done to pay for any tax deduction not come from programs that support vulnerable populations or are intended to re-distribute wealth in support of those who are less advantaged.

Transfer Payments

- Increase social, health and education transfer payments to the provinces.

Federal Programs

- Reinstate funds to support affordable housing and homelessness prevention.
- Increase support to CMHC to enable that body to do its work.
- Invest in capital projects that repair and replace ageing infrastructure and enable municipalities to leverage and/or be ready for emerging technological changes.

- Invest in employment development programs that are sufficient to provide decent, decent pay and decent futures and help people weather uncertain economic times.
- Increase Canada Pension Plan payments and ensure these are harmonized with other retirement income programs to ensure those who have not earned income during their adult years or, who have had insecure and low paid work, can retire and not have to live in poverty.
- Provide additional resources to Statistics Canada to ensure gaps created by the elimination of the long form census to be addressed, in particular missing data from smaller geographies and more vulnerable populations such as those living in poverty.

We look forward to the 2015 budget and trust that this budget will be a down-payment on a fairer, healthier and more democratic Canada.

Sincerely,
Trudy Beaulne

Executive Director