

NORTH DELTA REPORTER

Kahlon the lone candidate to attend Delta Chamber-hosted debate



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B.C. NDP incumbent Ravi Kahlon was the only candidate of four to take part in the Delta Chamber of Commerce's all-candidates meeting for Delta North, held at Seaquam Secondary on Thursday, Oct. 10, 2024. | James Smith/North Delta Reporter

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B.C. NDP incumbent Ravi Kahlon once again had the stage all to himself Thursday evening (Oct. 10) as the sole participant in the Delta Chamber of Commerce's all-candidates meeting for Delta North.

The event, which had been on the books for weeks, was meant to include all four local candidates — Kahlon, Raj Veauli with the Conservative Party of B.C., Nick Dickinson-Wilde with the B.C. Green Party, and Manqoosh Khan with the Freedom Party of B.C.

However, Veauli and Khan declined to participate, and Dickinson-Wilde, who had accepted the chamber's invitation, missed his ferry from Vancouver Island that afternoon and so was unable to attend.

About 60 people came out to Seaquam Secondary Thursday night for what was the second of two all-candidates meetings planned in the riding, following one hosted by the Delta Residents Association on Sept. 28 that also saw Kahlon as the only participant.

Dickinson-Wilde was given the opportunity to provide a two-minute statement, which the chamber's board chair, Rosanne Horner, read ahead of Kahlon's opening remarks.

In his statement, Dickinson-Wilde said he is running "to provide true representation for the community."

"Nick believes that the first priority as MLA should be to represent the residents of their riding, and as such he is extremely proud of the B.C. Greens' lack of a party whip, which enables an MLA to fully represent their riding, unlike historically other parties whose members have to follow party lines in most cases," Horner said, reading from Dickinson-Wilde's statement.

Dickinson-Wilde, who lives in Sooke, acknowledged he is running from outside the riding, explaining that no one in North Delta had answered his party's call for nominees.

He also touted his party's platform as the first to be released and the only that is "costed."

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Kahlon began his opening remarks by saying he thought the lack of other candidates on stage was "a little sad," noting how important meetings like this are to democracy.

"This process that we have of people engaging and asking tough question and hearing an exchange of ideas, how important that is to democracy. To be here, the second debate to not have candidates show up, I think it's sad," he said.

Kahlon pointed out former B.C. United candidate Amrit Dhot in the audience, noting "it's ironic that he's not a candidate and he's still here, and the other candidates who are running don't show up to the job interview, which I think is a real shame."

Kahlon spoke to the importance of knowing and living in the community when running for office, and how hearing about local concerns helps government make better decisions on behalf residents.

Though not stated, the remark was clearly aimed at Dickinson-Wilde and Conservative candidate Raj Veauli, who lives in the Green Timbers neighbourhood of Surrey but has worked at the Staples on Scott Road for over 20 years.

Housing dominates the discussion

Over the course of the next 48 minutes, Kahlon answered 32 questions on a broad range of topics, largely posed "from a business lens perspective" per the event's theme.

A quarter of those questions directly or indirectly touched on housing affordability, a top-of-mind issue for many voters this election.

Kahlon, who most recently served as housing minister, acknowledged that it's a "really challenging time for renters," noting a report by B.C.'s seniors advocate that found the fastest path to homelessness among seniors was so-called "personal use" evictions.

He said his NDP government took steps to better protect renters, and the party's platform includes a rental insurance program for landlords to cover rent lost when tenants refuse to pay, which he hopes will help encourage more people to rent out their spaces, thus increasing supply for renters.

On working with the "largely disincentivized development community" (as the question by presenting sponsor Fraser Valley Real Estate Board put it) and municipalities to bring more housing online, Kahlon said government has a role to play in increasing the supply of both market and non-market housing.

He said homebuilders are facing high interest rates and challenges getting loans from banks, so his party is providing access to capital for purpose-built rentals and government-owned land on which developers can build "truly affordable housing."

One questions asked what financial help an NDP government would provide for cities like Delta facing density increases spurred by provincially-mandated housing targets, to ensure municipal infrastructure and amenities can support those new homes and residents.

Kahlon explained the housing targets were necessary so those working to address the housing crisis – municipalities, the province and the federal government – are starting from the same baseline.

He said Delta has until the end of 2025 to update its Official Community Plan, giving the city time to engage with residents about where they would like to see more housing built and what amenities

are needed.

He also said the NDP government provided \$1 billion to cities last year for infrastructure, which in Delta went to a new soccer pitch at Mackie Park, a new track at Seaquam Secondary and other projects. He added his government would continue to support cities with infrastructure dollars so long as they keep building much-needed housing.

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Kahlon said the province is "so far behind on the housing we need" that debating who should be responsible for building it is a luxury we don't have.

"We need everyone to do what they can. So that means removing some red tape around getting housing approved, and it means historic levels of investment in affordable housing, which we're making," he said, claiming new housing is opening every couple of weeks.

He also said it is important to protect existing housing stock, pointing to the government's Rental Protection Fund, which enables non-profits to purchase and manage residential buildings.

"This year, for all of the purpose-built rental buildings that were sold, 53 per cent of them were bought by not-for-profits. That's a significant number, but we know we need to do more."

Kahlon was asked where in Delta he would prioritize building new homes and what parts of the city he would protect. He answered that the best opportunity for building housing is doing so where it already exist, as "that's where the best use of infrastructure is."

He did say that the city, as part of updating its OCP, should look at balancing building homes in North and South Delta while protecting green spaces and parks, noting North Delta is already home to about 52 per cent of Delta's population.

"We are taking a lot of housing on here in the north, and it's important that everybody in Delta do their part so that it's not be just one community, or one part of the community, which sees housing, because it creates a lot of frustration when people say, 'Well why is it all being built here? Why are we getting a 20-something-storey building in our community when other parts of our community are [getting] six-storey buildings?'" Kahlon said.

SEE ALSO: [Greater density on the horizon as Delta adopts new OCP](#)

On B.C.'s recent small-scale multi-unit (SSMU) housing legislation allowing construction of three to six units on all single-family and duplex-zoned lots, and cities that are struggling to meet those requirements because they lack necessary infrastructure, Kahlon said a provision in the law allows

cities to put off building SSMU housing until they can update infrastructure like water and sewer services to support it, a detail he said has been lost in some of the conversation around Bill 44.

As for schools, hospitals, parks and other kinds of infrastructure, Kahlon said it's important to expand those at the same time as building housing, again pointing to his government's providing of infrastructure funding to cities.

Kahlon said his party would not consider removing land not suitable for farming from the Agricultural Land Reserve so it could be developed for housing, but did say he would be open to making it possible to use that land for food processing, which he thinks is still in line with the original intent behind the ALR's creation.

"California is projecting to lose a million acres of farmable land in the next 10 years because of climate change. That's huge, and they're a major food production state that we rely on. We're going to have to become self-sustaining here in British Columbia. We're going to have to be able to produce more food going into the future, and so that means we're going to have to find new opportunities for that to happen."

Other topics touched on Thursday night include the George Massey Tunnel replacement, the province's goal of having 100 per cent of new car sales be zero-emission by 2035, transit funding and reforms at TransLink, supporting Delta youth, addressing teacher shortages, expanding access to health care, the carbon tax, tying immigration to housing availability, addressing labour shortages, keeping seniors in the workforce, Fraser River diking and secondary channel dredging, protecting/enhancing Burns Bog and other peatlands, and how to pay for campaign promises.

Kahlon urges residents to vote, even if not for him

In his closing remarks, Kahlon thanked everyone for coming and said it gives him hope to see people engaged in the election.

"Sometimes I wonder, does anybody care about our democracy? Does anybody care about the important things in our communities?" he said, noting his last few years in office have been very hard on both him and his family.

"But, that being said, I love the community, I love this work, I feel strongly about what I do, and that's why I'm putting my name forward. So I hope you consider supporting me, but if you don't, please vote anyways. Because every time I see the voting numbers drop, it makes me sad that we're losing something really important, which is the democratic values that our society is built on."

Final voting day in the 2024 provincial election is Saturday, Oct. 19, but advanced and mail-in voting is

available now.

For information on how to vote, and to learn about voting history in Delta North, [click here](#).

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James Smith is the founding editor of the North Delta Reporter.

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