

Advocate

Official news magazine of the B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM)

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Giving gardens: Fighting food insecurity



CRISIS AT
HANDYDART

BC FORUM AGM
Important information
p .12

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In this edition

We celebrate International Workers Day on May 1, recognize Indigenous and Métis history, learn about a crisis at HandyDART that is impacting accessibility for those who rely the service, and examine how inflation and soaring food prices are impacting seniors, especially senior women. Finally, we are especially proud to offer you a special summer insert on the ways you can combat food insecurity through urban gardening and community effort.

- From the president..... 3
- Crisis at HandyDART 4
- Senior women in poverty 5
- Seniors struggle as grocery profits soar . 6
- The beauty of an ugly potato..... 7
- Lawns to Lettuce..... 8
- Seed exchanges and CSA 10
- Celebrating Indigenous history..... 11
- BC FORUM AGM: important info ... 12
- From the office of the Seniors Advocate and the Minister of Seniors 13
- Renew your membership and sign up a friend today 15
- Federal government strike: solidarity gets the job done..... 16

We respectfully acknowledge that the BC FORUM office is located on unceded lands of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations.

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Celebrating workers & working together

By Sam Wiese, BC FORUM President

As I sat down to finish this article, I realized it was May 1st, International Workers' Day. For those that know me well enough you will know that this one fact pretty much changed the complete focus of my comments for this issue of the Advocate.

International Workers' Day (IWD), the day that all the world should take at least a few minutes to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of the trade union movement. From its inception by the International Socialist Congress in 1889, IWD has grown to become a national holiday in many countries. Still not recognized as a national holiday in Canada, it is definitely celebrated by Canadian workers. Strange but true, the majority of Canadians identify May Day as the national holiday set in recognition of Queen Victoria's birthday which was on May 24.

It is my hope that all of you celebrate May Day as May 1st IWD, and recognize all the accomplishments workers and trade unions have made over the years. While we celebrate the fact that B.C. has gone from lowest to highest minimum wage in all of Canada; we need to recognize that pay equity is still not enjoyed by every worker in this country and the lack of it leaves many senior women living in poverty as can be seen in the article written by Marion Pollack, CUPW director to the BC FORUM board. We must continue the work to reclaim and update our Employment Standards and Workers' Compensation Acts to meet all the needs of workers and fight to eradicate precarious work, an issue which came to the forefront recently when Uber driver Aman Sood stepped



forward to share his story of a brutal on-the-job assault by a customer. The often abysmal situations workers find themselves in, thanks to the “gig economy”, is explored in the BCFED paper on gig work “Workers Rights in the Gig Economy” at <https://bcfed.ca/precariouswork>

May Day finds me thinking not only of the benefits of unions, but of the relatively newer involvement in coalitions of different bodies working together on common issues. It is through these coalitions that, even if we can't be on Parliament Hill to lobby MPs, our message is still delivered, as seen by the delegation from the Canadian Health Coalition who managed to lobby 60 parliamentarians on issues from pharmacare to maintaining public healthcare. (The full report

can be found at <https://www.healthcoalition.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FINAL-Health-and-Hope-Lobby-2023-What-we-heard-and-what-s-next-En.pdf>)

It is also through the work we have done with coalitions that we can give well deserved accolades to ourselves, our affiliates and the hundreds of thousands of individuals who have lobbied and kept pressure on our government to get Bill C-228 on the doorstep of receiving royal assent and enactment.

Lest we rest on our laurels too quickly, this year large corporations are realizing untold profits while too many Canadians go hungry and homeless. In a second article from Marion Pollack, she talks about a \$1.2 million raise received by Galen Weston. Yes, folks you read that right, that was his raise, not his full salary! Canadians have called on provincial and federal governments to take steps to abate food insecurity, yet prices in the grocery stores seem to rise every day.

We have taken a bit of a “home-steading” path in this edition with a few ideas about small patch and urban gardening. Whether it's a couple of pots of peas on the windowsill, foraging for wild berries, or sitting by the riverbank with a pole in the water; there is sustenance available we don't have to pay big bucks for.

As always, I hope you find this edition of the Advocate informative and entertaining. Please remember, if you have something you would like to see, or write about for any upcoming editions, feel free to contact us. Have a great summer and don't forget to stay hydrated and use plenty of sunscreen.

Crisis at HandyDART: Accessibility at risk

By Mark Beeching & Sarah Maceda-Maciel

Safe, affordable access to life's basic necessities is a human right. Public transportation is a basic human necessity. Whether as a valuable solution to climate change or providing access to the community, public transit is critical infrastructure, and it should be accessible to people of every age and level of physical ability. Disability is often an unwelcome hitchhiker in our life as we age—a recent study found that 51% of people over 75 have a disability—and as the baby boom generation reaches its late 70s, British Columbia's paratransit system (i.e., HandyDART) grows all the more crucial for providing greater swaths of the population equitable access to public space.

Despite its crucial role in the lives of those who need it most, HandyDART is often forgotten in public planning. Years of neglect and operation by a revolving door of private contractors has brought about its current state of crisis. Even as demand for HandyDART increases—due to the aging population, disability caused by COVID, and outpatient services being more geographically concentrated than they were in previous years—service levels per person have diminished drastically year after year. A recent study found that in 2022, TransLink provided only half the HandyDART service per person 65 and over than it did in 2008. This precipitous decline isn't due to decreased demand from the pandemic: in 2019, service levels were already 22% less per person than they had been in 2008.

In 2017, a report by the Mayor's Council on Regional Transportation asserted that even with plans underway to increase service by 30%, the plan would "still leave Metro Vancouver with about half of the accessible transit trips per capita that are provided in other similar Canadian cities, includ-



HandyDART driver assisting a rider © ATU local 1724

ing the Capital Region. This service is in large part a reflection of the lack of provincial support for this service." In the spring of 2017 during his election campaign, John Horgan committed to funding increases to HandyDART service hours of 5% per year on top of the allotted 30%, for four years starting in 2018. However, despite taking office in July 2017, the NDP government has given no indication they will act.

Importantly, addressing the HandyDART crisis head on would involve more than simply increased funding. Only by bringing HandyDART service in-house could taxpayers count on any accountability in how their money was spent, or ensure that safety standards were being met. The prevailing assumption that private contractors are cheaper than public is dubious: a forthcoming independent report on HandyDART asserted that its cost is "inflated due to the funding of profit and the cost of administering contracted out services." Furthermore, TransLink has never followed through with a commitment it made in 2016 to conduct an objective public sector

comparison that would take into account service quality and safety.

Since 2005, riders' groups and unions representing HandyDART workers have advocated for the service to be brought in house as a subsidiary of TransLink rather than being contracted out.¹ This demand is given force not only by arguments for greater fiscal accountability and cost effectiveness, but also by the mountain of evidence showing that a revolving door of private contractors leads to poor worker retention, inadequate employee training, and abysmal customer service. Seniors' complaints are often bounced through a spiderweb of bureaucracy never with direct access to decision makers. This labyrinth leaves seniors and those with disabilities without recourse.

Instead of providing adequate funding or exploring the viability of bringing HandyDART in house, TransLink has instead gone in the opposite direction: subcontracting the service to private taxis. TransLink publicly committed to reducing taxi use to 7% by 2021, but in 2022 taxi trips soared

¹ handydartriders.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Engaging-Future-2005.pdf

(cont. on page 14)

Senior women are living in poverty

By Marion Pollack, BC FORUM Director, CUPW

The March 16th 2023 issue of the Toronto Star told us what we already know –that senior women are living in poverty. The article “They had families, worked hard and grew old. Now they face their final years in poverty. Why are we failing older women in Canada” outlined the sad reality that senior women are poorer than senior men.

Many BC FORUM members have lived experiences of this. For us, the gender wage gap did not end when we retired but continues to this very day.

The reasons for this are many and varied, but include:

- We often worked in female dominated jobs and did not receive equal pay for work of equal value. Since our Canada Pension is based on our contributions, and our contributions are based on our wages, we are receiving less CPP monthly.
- Many of us worked in jobs where there was no workplace pension; therefore we don't have this to provide a secure retirement.
- Even if we worked in jobs where there was a pension, our work was often undervalued. We earned less than our male coworkers and made fewer pension contributions, resulting in lower pensions.
- Many of us took time out of the workplace for family obligations. The result is we may have contributed less and for fewer years to CPP and our workplace pensions.
- Some of us worked part time for many years in order to raise families, provide elder care, etc. Working part time reduced our CPP and other contributions
- Statistically, older senior women were less likely to work outside the home for long periods of time, if at all.



- Marriage breakdown has left many of us poorer than men. One study found that after divorce there is a smallish rise in economic well-being for men and a 30-40% drop in economic well being for women
 - Women live longer than men. As a result we often have to scrimp to make less money go further.
 - Since we earned less than men over our lifetimes we had less money to put into RRSP's and other savings for our retirement.
- The headlines and facts are clear. Senior women are poorer than senior men. However, even among women, there are significant differences. Compared to senior white men ¹:
- Senior First Nations women's average income is 50% less.
 - Senior Métis women's average income is 53% less.
 - Senior Inuit women's average income is 61% less.
 - Senior Black women's average income is 50% less.
 - Senior Chinese women's average income is 47% less

- Senior South Asian women's average income is 43% less.

Senior women need more than hand wringing and newspaper articles to keep us out of poverty. Here are some ideas to reduce this gendered senior poverty gap:

- Enact real pay equity legislation. The more money we make while working the more secure retirement.
- Raise the guaranteed income supplement so low income seniors will have more income
- Provide accessible, affordable housing so seniors won't have to pay more than 30% of our income in rents.
- Protect our pensions, so we don't lose our pensions if the company goes bankrupt
- Continue making it easier to unionize. Joining a union and achieving coverage under a collective agreement is one of the best ways to increase women's wages

I'm hoping to read a headline in the future “Senior women –having a dignified and secure retirement”.

¹ <https://policyalternatives.ca/ColourCodedRetirement>

Seniors struggle as grocery profits soar

By Marion Pollack, BC FORUM Director, CUPW

The headline that grocery executive Galen Weston received a \$1.2-million raise in 2022, seemed to be an April fool's joke. But sadly, not so. Mr. Weston's total pay is more than \$11.95 million a year. Many of us have seen TV commercials where a friendly Mr. Weston talks about family and food, and has led us to believe that he is concerned about us. But, such a humongous raise when so many people are struggling with food costs reminds us that the drive for profits still rules.

Weston's family controls George Weston Ltd., the largest shareholder of Loblaw, a grocery chain that owns brands such as Shoppers Drug Mart, No Frills, T & T, Real Canadian Superstore and many more.

In 2022 the net earnings of Loblaw Companies Limited reached approximately 1.99 billion Canadian dollars, with a profit available to its common shareholders of \$529 million.

Weston's earnings were so large that it would take one grocery store worker over 300 years to equal it. In other words one year of Galen's wages would have paid the salaries of over 300 workers.

Meanwhile high food costs are negatively impacting seniors and retirees. An American study found that three-quarters of people over age 50 said the rising cost of groceries has affected them somewhat or a lot, and nearly a third said they're eating less healthily because of increased food costs. These growing costs are also

leading to more senior social isolation as people cannot afford to have coffee or meals with friends.

Senior serving organizations are talking to more retirees and seniors who are experiencing food insecurity –many for the first time in their lives. The number of seniors using food banks has also continued to rise.

While inflation is slowing in many areas, food prices are still increasing, meaning seniors and retirees have less access to safe and nutritional foods.

Often when people talk about high food costs they point to global events, supply chain shortages, and climate change. I think we also need to point to Galen Weston's massive wage increase and the high profits his company is making.

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Gardening for sustenance

In this time of high inflation and related food costs, there are resources available to people who need them, and ways to give back. Growing your own food is a low cost and viable option, providing eco-friendly and healthy options for you and your community.

The beauty of an ugly potato

By Sam Wiese, BC FORUM President

I know many of you are outside the lower mainland and may question why I am writing about something if it doesn't relate or apply to all BC FORUM members. I do so as this is a farm close to me that I learned about and I hope that each of you might be able to find similar farms or suppliers in your areas. Also, if not a local farm, your local grocer often has fruits and vegetables that may be bruised or not pretty enough to sit on the shelf that are often on discount.

“It is a way of giving back and supporting the community that has supported us...We want to make sure people don't go hungry.”

Recently someone told me about “ugly potato day”, so I did what any 3rd grader would do (or is that preschooler now); hit the Internet where I found Heppell's farm and a quick video (Tik Tok) created by Ty Heppell in which he discusses their potato giveaway with a news cast reporting the increase in food bank use in the background.

Heppell's is a fifth generation family farm that has been operational for over 100 years. Located in the Lower Mainland their predominant crops are potatoes and squash. They specialize in early production and for over 40 years Heppell's has had the proud distinction of being the first farm in Canada to harvest potatoes for retail. This increases food security in Western Canada by displacing foreign imports with fresh, locally grown produce.

Photo courtesy of Ty Heppell © Heppell's Potatoes

Needless to say a large commercial farm giving away their cash crop was quite intriguing to me, so I reached out to Heppell's Farm giving a summary of what I was after. Not too long after I received a phone call from Ty Heppell, the individual behind “ugly potato day”. Ty said that the rationale for starting this produce giveaway was tiered, from the family's passion for feeding people to decreasing food waste at the farm level. He said “It is simply God's calling, a way of giving back and supporting the community that has supported us for 103 years. We want to make sure people don't go hungry.”

You can find out more about this venture at Local Potatoes | Heppell's Potatoes | Surrey (heppellspotatoes.ca).



Lawns to lettuce

By Marilyn Reichert

The rising cost of living, grocery executive bonuses, and food insecurity have been topical news of late. The rising cost of groceries has amplified the struggle to eat healthy, especially in the senior population where making ends meet can be a challenge.

With the arrival of a warm spring season heading into a sunny dry summer, maybe now is the time to consider growing your own food. Even for beginners, vegetable gardening can be easier than you think.

If you have a limited income, do not have a yard, or little to no gardening experience, growing your own vegetables is still a viable option. Along with encouraging nutritious eating habits and offsetting rising food prices, home gardening is known to improve mental health.

As a child of an urban farming family in North Delta, Theresa Couture of Surrey, B.C. grew up gardening. Couture's parents encouraged her and her sibling to work in their vegetable patch where she inherited a love for growing food. Now a senior with a household of four adults and one child, Couture continues her passion for growing food and helping others to do the same.

“...Anyone can grow vegetables. A condo balcony or a sunny window are all that is required...”

In 2018, Couture increased their household's capacity for growing food by creating a strategic 3-year plan which could optimize the use of their home's front and back yards. Couture, who's yard is filled with raised beds, fruit trees, birdhouses, and a wide variety of fruit and vegetable plants, says the family is eating healthier now as she incorporates more homegrown food into their meal plans. She would rather run to the garden for a nutritious snack than run to the store and pay high prices for something that isn't fresh or healthy. As well, Couture often donates her excess fresh home-grown vegetables to the local food bank.

Having guests for a meal becomes a teaching moment for Couture. Because she is into creating delicious meals that people love, they ask questions which give her the opportunity to talk about gardening and encourage others to grow their own food.

Last summer, Couture's sister-in-law came for a meal. After their visit, she sent her sister-in-law home with fresh veggies from the garden. The next day, she received a phone call from her sister-in-law, whom she described as “not a veggie person,” exclaiming she never knew cucumbers actually had a taste, they always just tasted like water. This year, Couture's brother and sister-in-law set up their own small vegetable garden and now “actually want to grow food that has taste!”

Following are some helpful tips Couture shares to encourage others to venture into the expanding world of home-grown vegetables. She notes that lawns are a waste of time and resources, but even without a yard, anyone can grow vegetables. A condo balcony or a sunny window are all that is required because most vegetable plants and fruit trees grow effortlessly in pots and containers.

One of the easiest and tastiest vegetables to grow is lettuce. Radishes, tomatoes, cucumbers and herbs can all be grown in small pots. Considering lettuce prices are as high as \$6.97 a container, having a planter of fresh lettuce on your doorstep is an appealing option.



(Below) Bounty from the garden © Theresa Couture



There is limitless information available online for growing vegetables in containers on your balcony or in a sunny window.

Chard, spinach, kale, cabbage, cauliflower and other brassica vegetables, which are cold weather crops, can be planted early in the spring and will grow all summer and into the winter where the climate is moderate. As the fall nighttime temperatures begin to drop, you can protect the outdoor plants with a plastic sheet or garden fleece. Some plants, such as zucchini, can produce up to 12 zucchinis each – enough for you to eat as a vegetable, bake into bread or muffins, and gift to a neighbour.

When space is limited, many vegetables like cucumbers, peas and pole beans, sweet potatoes and melons, can be grown vertically using trellises, bamboo poles or other vertical structures. Vertical gardening is also easier on your back! If you're looking for inspiration or advice on what to grow and when to plant, there are friendly local Facebook pages filled with advice, hints, tips, and comical memes.

To maximize the yield from your crops, do intercropping. Plant one crop of seeds and while that crop is growing, a few weeks later plant another batch of seeds within that crop. With intercropping, there is always something coming up. As one finishes the next is ready to go. For example, when you are about to harvest your peas, plant some beans in their midst to grow alongside and be ready to harvest when the peas are finished.

Many vegetables, including the brassicas, can easily be grown from seed. Some of the easiest are the squashes. When growing from seed, it is best to begin in early spring in small pots to allow the seeds to germinate in a bright, warm location with soil that is kept evenly moist. Perhaps on a kitchen windowsill. When the seedlings begin to get their second leaves, move them into larger containers.

“... Growing your own vegetables does not need to be expensive. Many supplies are available through networking in your community”

Seeds can be purchased at garden centres, hardware outlets and dollar stores. Many communities have spring and summer seed exchanges and seed libraries which are advertised online and on community bulletin boards. Once you have grown your first year of vegetables, some of your plants will provide you with seeds for the following year, making your subsequent years less expensive.

Growing your own vegetables does not need to be expensive. Many supplies are available through networking in your community. Facebook Marketplace and your local Facebook Buy Nothing page can have pots, seedlings and even soil. Small hand tools, watering cans, gloves and inexpensive pots are available at Dollarama.



Refrigerator pickles © Theresa Couture



The Giving Garden © Theresa Couture

Some cities, like Surrey, B.C., offer community gardens and gardening resources, including soil and tools for local residents. Twice a year Surrey, B.C. offers inexpensive trees for sale. They can include fruit trees, which can also be grown in pots. Dwarf fruit trees are an appropriate size for your balcony. Be sure to check your municipality's website to see what they offer.

The B.C. provincial government recently invested more than \$200 million in food security. Some of those dollars will be available for grants to community organizations working towards offsetting food insecurity.

Whether it's a few pots of lettuce, tomatoes and cukes, or a full yard of raised beds overflowing with melons, potatoes, and every imaginable fruit and vegetable, home vegetable gardening is easy, fun and a great way to offset food insecurity.

Theresa Couture is an urban farmer and creator and caretaker of the Giving Garden. You can find her on Instagram @the_giving_garden_bc. She is also BC FORUM's only staff member.

Marilyn Reichert is a journalism student and writes for the Langara Voice.

Seed exchanges and CSA

By Meharwaan Manak

Starting from the ground up again, seed swaps in the lower mainland have grown faster than ever. Seed exchange events — critical in helping gardeners and farmers grow vegetables and perpetuate the seed supply — have experienced a huge uptick since the pandemic.

The events help expand their knowledge on producing veggies and add to the seed supply as people continue to grow and harvest their produce.

Seed exchanges are held by municipalities at various scales and levels. Open to anyone along with opportunities to become members of different organized swaps.

“Seedy Saturdays” are held by Langley Environmental Partners Society (LEPS) throughout the Lower Mainland promoting the exchange of seeds. They help to educate the public about seed saving and environmentally responsible gardening practices.

Events like these “connect people to our food system,” said Agriculture Programs Coordinator for LEPS, Amanda Smith. “These types of gardening events are really important because it gets all people, whether they’re new or experienced gardeners, to figure out exactly how they want to grow food.”

“We only really eat like five percent of what is actually out there ...growing your own food, you have way more access through seeds.”

Community supported agriculture includes Canadian wide seed swap groups allowing for more variety through various parts of the country and “it’s fun making pen-pals across Canada,” said Angela Ng, a Vancouver gardener.

“We only really eat like five percent of what is actually out there in this world,” said Ng, and by “growing your own food, you have way more access through seeds.”

Home growers are reaching out through Facebook and other on-line groups because food security is more than just feeding your family. “It’s helping your community as well,” said Ng.

Many companies stopped shipping during COVID and after last year’s flooding as well as unpredictable crops “farmers became fairly desperate for seeds,” says David Catzel of BC Seed Security Program. To ensure seed security Catzel explains, “the more people we have growing seeds the more secure that system is.”

With the rising cost of food, people are happy to talk about and engage in “doing more home gardens, whether it’s on the balcony or in the backyard,” says Smith.

Meharwaan Manak is a journalism student and writes for the Langara Voice.



Resources

Seed banks/exchanges

Borrow Save Share | Supports the free and open sharing of locally grown seed in British Columbia.

UBC Seed Lending Library | Allows anyone to “borrow” seeds free of charge, and provides opportunities to learn.

Your local library! | Many public libraries have seed banks or can help you identify and connect with local community resources. You only need to ask!

Community organizations

BC Food Systems Network | Works to create healthy, just and sustainable food systems in BC.

City Beet Farms | Small scale urban farm located in the heart of Vancouver.

Community Food Centres Canada | Bringing people together to grow, cook, share.

Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks | A network of community organizations across Vancouver.

United Way British Columbia | Food security program.

Celebrating Indigenous history this June

By Aliza Nevarie, with Gord Savard, First Vice President, BC FORUM.

In June, we commemorate National Indigenous History Month. This month, Take time to recognize the rich history, heritage, resilience and diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples across Canada.

In this edition of the Advocate, Gord Savard, BC FORUM's first vice president, shares his Métis history, which can be traced as far back as 1857, when his Great Great Grandpa Charles Savard, trapper and farmer, married Sara Villeneuve from the Huron-Wendat Nation.

The recognition of the Métis as a People has been hard fought, most famously with the Red River Resistance led by Louis Riel. Gord's Great Grandpa La Croix, adopted into the family of the great Chief Sitting Bull, fought in the Resistance when he was twenty, before settling in Manitoba to farm.

Since the 18th century, the word métis has been used to describe those of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry. However, the Métis are not simply defined by this mixed ancestry but also a collective identity, and shared history, traditions and culture, that are unique to the Métis.

Gord recalls, "the Métis way of life still existed for Grandpa Savard and Grandma La Croix in Alberta. The clothes that they wore were in Métis tradition, such as Grandpa's buckskin jacket, sash and bright red shirt. During Grandpa and Grandma's life on the farm people from the Métis and First Nations lived nomadically on their property, on regular occasions during the summer"

These times and connections to Métis and First Nations life and people were remembered fondly by Gord's father, Jack, even in the last days of his



Traditional Métis sashes with Métis flag

life. After setting out on his own at 14, he served in the Canadian Army during WW2, earning several medals, including the Aboriginal Veterans medal, before returning to work the family farm.

Despite this rich history, and because of discrimination and prejudice, there has been shame in being Métis. Says Gord, "grandma never admitted to her connection outside of the family. Such was the situation in her years.

I am now 70 years old and proud of my Métis heritage."

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BC FORUM AGM



**Wed, June 28, 2023
9:30 am-1:30 pm**

**BCGEU Lower Mainland Area Office
130-2920 Virtual Way, Vancouver BC**

Registration will open June 15

Please visit the BC FORUM website to register and for more details:

www.bcforum.ca/bcforumevents/bcforumagm2023.html

After a prolonged delay we are pleased to announce the return of our Annual General Meeting. Along with words from some special guests we have 4 years of financial statements for presentation (2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022), as well as a few resolutions for review, discussion and voting on. There is one Constitutional Resolution for consideration as follows:

Resolution C-1 Gender neutral language

Because the British Columbia Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM) Bylaws no longer conform with the British Columbia Federation of Labour (BC FED) gender neutral language,

The BC FORUM Constitution Committee will update the bylaws so that they adhere to the gender neutral style previously adopted by the BC FED; and

The above noted updates will be complete and presented to the Board of Directors meeting scheduled for the November 14, 2023 Board of Directors meeting.



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From the office of the Seniors Advocate

The following are a few highlights of news from the BC Seniors Advocate, Isobel Mackenzie. Full details can be found at seniorsadvocatebc.ca

BC Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie is urging the provincial government to undertake a fundamental restructuring of home support services.

“When we examine the five-year trends, we find client complexity and frailty is rising, care hours are not growing to meet this need, and more of the care is being shifted to family caregivers who continue to experience high levels of distress,” noted Mackenzie.

Key points from the report *We Must Do Better: Home Support Services for B.C. Seniors*:

- Overall, 34% of family caregivers in B.C. are in distress; 57% for clients who are receiving less than an hour per day of home support.
- Seniors with an annual income of \$29,000 pay \$9,000 a year for a one-hour daily visit of home support.
- While most provinces don't charge for home support services, B.C. does, and is the most expensive.
- 61% of seniors moving into a long-term care facility had no home support 90 days prior to admission, similar to five years ago.

- B.C.'s rate of newly admitted long-term care residents with low care needs is twice as high as Alberta and Ontario who do not charge for home support, and is 34% higher than the national average.
- It would cost government \$14,000 a year to provide one hour of home support per day and \$60,000 a year for a long-term care bed for a senior with a \$29,000 annual income.

The report includes five recommendations:

1. Eliminate the Financial Barrier to Home Support Access
2. Increase Respite Care
3. Standardize and set targets for all aspects of service-delivery.
4. Modernize Care Plans
5. Measure, Monitor and Report on Performance

The full report is available at: *We Must Do Better: Home Support Services for B.C. Seniors – Seniors Advocate* (seniorsadvocatebc.ca)

Accessing health services not covered by MSP

The Jewish Seniors Alliance of Greater Vancouver has put together a resource guide to increase awareness

of seniors supports for services that are not covered by MSP, such as vision care and dental coverage. (<https://jsalliance.org/advocacy/accessing-health-services-not-covered-by-msp/>)

In closing, from Sam Wiese, BC FORUM president:

On May 11, 2023 Isobel Mackenzie provided a media statement which began:

“While I could happily continue this richly rewarding work forever, I am aware that I cannot and should not go on indefinitely. With this in mind, I advised the Minister of my intent to retire from the role of Seniors Advocate for British Columbia on what will be the 10th anniversary of my appointment.”

We at BC FORUM are so fortunate that her retirement isn't until April of 2024 and that we are privileged to welcome Ms Mackenzie as our feature speaker at our upcoming AGM on June 28th. (AGM details on page 12)

I am sure I speak for the thousands of BC FORUM members in thanking Ms Mackenzie for the time and dedication she has given to BC seniors and wish her a happy, healthy retirement.

From Minister for Seniors Kamal Khara

Budget 2023 proposals that may have direct impact on seniors:

Dental care

This year eligibility will open to people who are under the age of 18, seniors, and people with disabilities who meet the income criteria and do not have insurance. Details on eligible coverage will be released later this year.

Healthcare

Our historic investment of \$198.6 billion will ensure that all Canadians, will access to high quality, universal public healthcare.

Grocery Rebate

One-time grocery rebate, providing \$2.5 billion in targeted inflation relief to those who need it most. The rebate will provide eligible seniors with an extra \$225 on average

Cracking Down on Predatory Lending

The government proposes to amend the Criminal Code to move from an effective annual rate to an annual percentage rate (APR), lower the criminal interest rate to 35 per cent APR, and adjust the payday loan exemption to cap interest charged.

(cont. on next page)

(cont. from page 13)

Making housing more affordable for Canadians

In past year, the federal government has taken significant steps towards making housing more affordable including:

- A new, refundable Multigenerational Home Renovation Tax Credit, which will provide up to \$7,500 in support for constructing a secondary suite for a senior or an adult with a disability, starting in 2023.
- Delivering a top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit in December 2022, which provided low-income renters with a \$500 payment to help with the cost of housing.

Automatic tax filing

Expansion increases the number of eligible Canadians for File My Return to two million by 2025—almost triple the current number. Doing so ensures more low income & vulnerable Canadians receive critical supports like the GIS.

Common Chargers for Electronic Devices

Every time Canadians purchase new devices, they need to buy new chargers to go along with them, which drives up costs and increases electronic waste. The government will work with international partners and other stakeholders to explore implementing a standard charging port in Canada for phones, tablets, cameras, laptops and other electronic devices, with the aim of lowering costs for Canadians and reducing electronic waste.

Canadians' Right to Repair

The government will work to implement a right to repair, to make it easier and cheaper for Canadians to repair, rather than replace, their home appliance and electronics.

For complete and regular updates from the Minister of Seniors sign up at - [Canada.ca search: updates from the Minister of Seniors](https://www.canada.ca/search?update=from_the_Minister_of_Seniors)

Crisis at HandyDART

(cont. from page 4)

to 21%. This has been a disaster for riders. Taxi complaints far exceed those of HandyDART. Taxi companies often don't want to commit to providing service during their most profitable hours, and drivers lack the training or time to provide safe door to door service. Complaints abound from riders who have been left stranded by taxi drivers who refuse to take them door to door, neglect to properly strap in wheelchair users, or demand tips from riders who can only afford to use their taxi saver coupons. Taxis are not public transit—HandyDART is.

The revolving door of corporations is also a recipe for labour instability: as this article is being written, First Transit (the French company that operates HandyDART in the lower mainland) is in its second major labour battle in less than a year. The First Transit workers currently striking in the Fraser Valley lack a pension and make 32% less than their publicly-employed counterparts. Last October, First Transit workers in Kelowna engaged in a fare strike for several weeks and came to the brink of a work stoppage, for the same reasons.

Labour strife has marked HandyDART's privatization from the start. In 2009, TransLink awarded massive corporate conglomerate MVT the contract to manage and run HandyDART. For the first time since its inception in the 1980's, HandyDART workers struck. MVT's attempt to gut workers' pension plan, benefits, wages, and seniority had been the final straw. HandyDART workers ended years of labour stability because a for profit company tried to pillage the meager gains that they had fought for.

In searching for solutions to the crisis at HandyDART, we would do well to remember HandyDART's history, and how BC became the first province to provide paratransit service province-wide. HandyDART did not sprout from well meaning

politicians—it sprung from a surge of seniors and people with disabilities who fought hard for public transport for those unable to take conventional transit.

Similarly, the lip service that the BC NDP and Mayors' Council paid to HandyDART five years ago was prompted by widespread campaigning by the HandyDART Riders Alliance, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1724, and other community groups that worked together to bring to light the fact that service levels had been frozen under the Liberal government. This community campaign was galvanized by the further outrage that the Liberal government had engaged in a concerted effort to hide the fact that HandyDART trip denials had soared by 600% between 2008-2012.

Neither TransLink, the Mayors' Council, nor the Province will fix HandyDART without external pressure. Although this crisis is all too real for the thousands of seniors who rely on HandyDART service every day, it is practically invisible in public transit strategy documents such as TransLink's "Transport 2050" plan released last year, which purports to create a "fairer and more just and inclusive transportation system that truly delivers on the promise of Access for Everyone." Despite this promise, Transport 2050 barely mentions paratransit, and ignores the challenge of BC's aging population entirely.

Our current moment demands action from rider groups, disability and seniors' organizations, and unions towards the common goal of a public transit system that is safe and affordable to all; and putting a stop to the ceaseless diversion of taxpayer dollars to corporate bank accounts overseas.

Mark Beeching is the President of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1724, the union representing HandyDART workers in Metro Vancouver

The federal government strike: Solidarity gets the job done.

By Patrick Bragg, Political Communications Officer, PSAC BC Region

Early in the morning of May 1st, after 8 days on the picket lines, the Public Service Alliance of Canada announced their bargaining teams had reached a tentative agreement with the federal government for 120,000 workers working for Treasury Board. A tentative agreement for another 35,000 workers at Canada Revenue Agency was achieved two days later.

PSAC emerged from one of the largest strikes in Canadian history with hard-won gains for over 155,000 federal public service workers, including a fair wage increase, better working conditions, and increased protection from layoff and contracting out.

When a strike was declared on April 26, PSAC members showed true solidarity by answering the call. Over 100,000 members across the country took part in the strike, supported by tens of thousands more who were designated as essential workers.

The solidarity PSAC saw on the picket lines by workers who could not legally strike was also shown by the BC Federation of Labour, affiliated unions, and the public. Every picket line in British Columbia – large and small – was visited by other union members and members of the public over the course of the week.

PSAC's strike helped to build a stronger union for years to come. A whole new generation of PSAC

activists were born on the picket lines, engaging with their union for the first time and setting the foundation for stronger locals everywhere.

The strike, and the tentative agreement that followed, showed that when workers stick together, we win together.



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New address? New e-mail address?

Please send your new address and e-mail address to BC FORUM. You can mail in the form on page 15, or you can reach us by telephone at 1.800.896.5678 (toll free) or 604.688.4565; or by email at bcforum@bcfed.ca.



Please check the expiry date on your label. Is your membership due for renewal?