



MEDIA RELEASE

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Kelowna Chamber Takes the Lead in Advocacy for Business Okanagan Valley Chambers Gear up for BC Chamber AGM

Kelowna: The proposed speculation tax, the new payroll tax, and electoral reform top the list of policy concerns as the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce prepares for the BC Chamber AGM which is scheduled to begin next Thursday May 24 in Kamloops.

The Kelowna Chamber hosted a review session for all eight valley Chambers of Commerce, prior to traveling to the annual BC Chamber of Commerce policy session in Kamloops May 24-26. Chamber executive directors and board members involved in their Chamber's policy committees came together May 8 to review locally-generated policies.

Carmen Sparg, President of the Kelowna Chamber is attending the Kamloops session, and says, "Garnering the most interest of the valley policies being tabled in Kamloops is the Kelowna-originated policy 'Anti-Canadian Tariff: Pressing the Pause Button on BC's Proposed Speculation Tax.' Even before the draft policy manual was published late last week, twelve chambers throughout the province had heard of our new policy and had signed on to support."

"The Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce recognizes the importance of working together to develop and support policy to increase economic activity," said Markus Schrott, Vernon chamber president. "To this point we are pleased to support the Kelowna Chamber's policy on speculation tax, as we have heard first hand from members the potential negative implications for our region."

The Speculation Tax policy reflects the reaction of business people and residents over the lack of consultation on the sweeping tax changes introduced in February of 2018 which are negatively affecting the economy in certain localities in the province, chief among them, Kelowna. The Co-Chair of Kelowna's Policy Advisory committee, Ron Cannan, weighs in: "The lack of consultation or economic analysis is highlighted in the policy's background. Recommendations to the provincial government include scrapping the tax altogether; clarifying the economic impact and demonstrating how the tax makes housing more affordable; and monitoring supply and demand. We've heard loud and clear from our members that the negative effects of this policy are resonating throughout multiple industries in Kelowna."

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“This [speculation] tax will impede West Kelowna’s growth and progress as it moves from a rural to an urban community. It will seriously impact municipal revenues which means community infrastructure will not progress as quickly as West Kelowna residents expect. Improvements to roads and sidewalks remain a major safety concern here,” says Gord Milsom, Chair, Advocacy Committee of the Greater Westside Board of Trade, who sat in on the all-valley Chambers policy session.

Other policies which were written by the Kelowna Chamber’s policy committee include a call for Agricultural Land Commission Regulation Reform; Engaging Business and Community on Electoral Reform (pre-provincial referendum); increasing the impact of the Digital Media Industry; reducing or removing the inter-provincial trade barriers to the beer and wine industries; and Property Transfer Tax Reform.

Patrick Van Minsel, Executive Director of the Peachland Chamber says, “We wholeheartedly support all the policies tabled by our colleague, the Kelowna Chamber. We’re looking forward to attending the BC Chamber AGM and Conference and we hope to contribute to these policies in a productive manner.”

The Kelowna Chamber is sending four delegates to the conference: President Carmen Sparg, Director and Policy Committee Member Domenic Rampone, Executive Director Dan Rogers, and Policy Analyst Caroline Miller.

On the heels of the BC Chamber policy session at the end of May, policies of federal interest are due to be submitted to the Canadian Chamber in Ottawa, prior to their national policy session scheduled for Thunder Bay in September.

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