



MUSTEL GROUP
MARKET RESEARCH

Beyond the Polls

Province-Wide Focus

Group Research Findings

May 2005

Presented to:

British Columbia Real Estate Association
Vancouver, BC

Executive Summary

On May 5, 2005, a focus group was held in Vancouver to capture what people from around the province are thinking and talking about in the lead up to the May 17 provincial election. It was conducted in partnership between the British Columbia Real Estate Association and the Mustel Group, and involved 11 REALTORS® who had spoke with more than 70 British Columbians from every corner of the province.

Highlights:

- When residents were asked what “quality of life” means to them, ‘family and friends’ was cited most often.
- British Columbians in all regions rated their quality of life between seven and nine on a scale of one to ten, with ten meaning “couldn’t be better.”
- A positive quality of life was attributed to a good economy with good local job prospects, good personal health, a strong sense of community, healthy relationships and good educational opportunities.
- Factors contributing negatively to quality of life include concerns about the current and future condition of the health care system, personal financial security, education concerns, lack of time to spend with family and community issues related to crime, drugs and homelessness.
- When asked about the most positive things happening in their regions, residents talked about the economy, improvements in health care and education-related infrastructure, potential resolutions to First Nations land claims disputes and the 2010 Olympics, among others.
- When asked about the most negative things happening in their regions, crime, drugs, homelessness, degradation of health care infrastructure, lack of qualified tradespeople, environmental issues and lack of jobs were mentioned.
- Residents responded with guarded optimism about the next one to three years, noting that the improving economy must be balanced to ensure long-term sustainability and growth.
- Almost without exception, the residents interviewed by REALTORS® expressed their intention to vote in the upcoming provincial election.

Background and Methodology

This report summarizes the findings from a focus group that was held in Vancouver on Thursday May 5th, 2005. The focus group, conducted by the British Columbia Real Estate Association in partnership with Mustel Group, was intended to capture what people from around the province are thinking and talking about in the lead up to the May 17 provincial election.

In late April, a group of 11 REALTORS® in regions throughout BC consulted with members of their communities about issues relating to quality of life, including the economy, environment, education, health, transportation, safety and housing. More than 70 people from every region of British Columbia were consulted. REALTORS® conducted interviews with a diverse range of people, including teachers, police officers, environmentalists, students, airport workers, doctors, nurses, mayors, parents, business owners, scientists, retirees, bank managers and engineers.

The REALTORS® spoke with people in every corner of the province, in towns and cities such as Powell River, Fort Nelson, West Vancouver, Chetwynd, Nelson, Parksville, Prince Rupert, Victoria, Penticton and others. On May 5, 2005, the REALTORS® met in Vancouver with Mustel Group moderator Tom Jopling to participate in the Beyond the Polls focus group and report what they heard from people in their communities about quality of life issues.

Key Findings

Quality of Life Defined

When asked to define what 'quality of life' means to them, residents respond with a long list of factors including such things as 'family', 'personal health', 'job satisfaction', 'a safe environment' and 'freedom of choice'. While many of the factors noted are understandably specific to each individual's personal circumstances, there is widespread consensus that 'quality of life' is strongly dependent on the following:

- family and friends,
- health,
- safety,
- economic opportunity,
- education,
- environmental sustainability, and
- transportation.

Assessment of Current Quality of Life

Without exception, residents in all regions of the province give positive assessments of their current quality of life. Using a ten-point scale on which 1 represents 'could not be worse' and 10 represents 'could not be better', overall ratings in each region range from a low of "7 or 8" to a high of "8 or 9". This holds true even in areas in which developments in some of the key issues affecting quality of life, such as the economy, health care and transportation, have failed to keep pace with developments in other regions. For example, despite widespread belief that their regional economy lags behind that of the Lower Mainland, residents of the North remain generally positive about their own quality of life.

Factors Affecting Quality of Life

Reasons given most often by residents for rating their quality of life in more positive ways include the following:

- a strong economy with good local job prospects,
- good personal health,
- strong sense of community where they live,
- healthy relationships with family and friends, and

- good educational opportunities within their region of the province.
- Reasons given most often by residents for rating their quality of life in more negative ways include the following:
- concerns about both the current state of, and future prospects for, the health care system,
 - personal financial security,
 - concerns regarding education – in particular, the high cost of post-secondary education,
 - lack of time to spend with family, and
 - community issues related to crime, drugs and homelessness.

Quality of Life and its Relation to Key Election Issues

To gather feedback on issues being debated by candidates in the current provincial election campaign, REALTORS® asked residents to discuss how their quality of life relates to health care, education, transportation, the economy, the environment, communities and safety and housing.

Health Care

Not surprisingly, health care is a key concern to residents. While recognizing that some improvements have been made (such as the new hospital in Abbotsford currently under construction), most remain concerned about an apparent lack of infrastructure and resources in the health care system, and particularly how that will play out in the coming years with BC's aging population. There appears to be growing awareness that individuals need to take more personal responsibility for their health to help reduce pressures on the health care system.

Education

The chief concerns are the high cost of post-secondary education, large K to 12 class sizes and a lack of resources and support for teachers who face increasing difficulties in the classroom that are related to social issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and so on.

Transportation

The high cost of gasoline is a key concern across the province, while regional issues, such as congestion in the Lower Mainland, the need to plan for light rail transit in the Capital Regional District and poor quality

infrastructure in areas such as the North are also mentioned. In comparison with health care and education, however, transportation is considerably less important to overall quality of life for BC residents.

Economy

The economy has a strong influence on residents' quality of life and most indicate satisfaction with the current state and direction of the provincial economy. However, optimism regarding the economy is widely described as "guarded", with the feeling that, unless managed properly, hard times could all too quickly return. Several REALTORS® also described how residents in their communities were, for the first time in a long time, feeling good about local job prospects and the ability for themselves and other family members to live and work in their communities.

Environment

There appears to be considerable optimism with respect to the environment, with a perceived growing recognition among the public that economic growth must go hand-in-hand with, and not at the expense of, sound environmental stewardship. British Columbians, regardless of where they live, have enormous respect and admiration for the physical environment, understand how it contributes directly to their personal quality of life and are unwilling to see it degraded simply to provide more jobs.

Safety

Crime, drug and alcohol abuse and homelessness are all identified as key issues affecting quality of life. However, whereas in the past these might have been seen as issues that are the sole responsibility of the government, police and judiciary need to deal with, there is widespread recognition that society as a whole – including individual citizens – needs to address the underlying causes of crime if there is to be long-term, substantive improvement in this area.

Housing

At a provincial level, housing issues are of relatively low concern in relation to some of the other issues raised with residents. However, regionally,

concerns about the availability and, especially, affordability of housing for current and future generations are of substantial concern.

Most Positive and Negative Things Happening at a Regional Level

Residents were asked to identify the most positive and negative things happening in their regions today. On a positive note, most talk about improvements to the local economy, identifying such things as expansion of the container port in Prince Rupert, growth of the wine industry in the Okanagan, growth of eco-tourism in many other parts of the province and oil and gas exploration in the North. Other positive regional developments include improvement of health care and education-related infrastructure (for example, the new hospital in Abbotsford and new post-secondary institutions across the province), government, industry and First Nations working together to resolve land claims issues, the Olympics, improvements in the arts and cultural communities and a general improvement in the overall quality of life for residents.

On the negative side, residents point to such issues as crime, drugs, homelessness, a degradation of the health care infrastructure, a lack of qualified tradespeople, environmental issues such as air quality and the destruction of forests by the mountain pine beetle and, in some areas, a lack of jobs.

Most Positive and Negative Things Happening at a Provincial Level

When asked to identify the most positive and negative things happening at the provincial level today, residents talk about many of the same things they identified when speaking about the regional level. That is, when addressing positive developments they point first and foremost to a strong economy and to the enormous potential for future economic growth in BC. On a negative note, they identify such things as crime, health care, education, the need for greater trades training, transportation-related issues and the high cost of gasoline.

The Future

As noted earlier, there is widespread “guarded optimism” for the future in British Columbia. The economy is seen as ‘finally’ running on all cylinders, and the province is seen as having a wealth of untapped potential, it just needs to be managed properly to ensure long-term sustainability and

growth. Further, with respect to such key issues as health care, education and the environment, there is also optimism that people recognize they have a role to play.

Suggestions to Politicians for Improving the Quality of Life for Residents

Surprisingly, when asked to suggest ways in which politicians could bring about a positive improvement to the quality of life for people in their region, residents tend to focus on improvements to the politicians' own personal characteristics, such as honesty and integrity. That is, rather than focusing on improvements in such key areas as health care and education, residents talk about being tired of being lied to, of scandals, of politicians not taking personal responsibility for their words and actions, and so on.

Specific issue-related improvements suggested by residents include supporting crime prevention through greater resource allocation and reform of the justice system to prevent the 'revolving door' of repeat offenders, encouraging development and economic growth in such industries as mining and forestry by reducing the number of regulations governing them and giving the gas tax back to individual communities for use toward such things as highway/road improvements.

Intention to Vote on May 17th

Almost without exception, the residents interviewed by REALTORS® expressed their intention to vote in the upcoming provincial election.