

PLATFORM: Meet the Candidates

North Vancouver Chamber Questions for Candidates
BC Election 2024



MITCHELL BAKER

Candidate – North Vancouver-Seymour
INDEPENDENT

Mitchell was born and raised in North Vancouver, Seymour, where he lives with his wife and two teenage daughters. He has been self-employed in the construction industry for 33 years and worked for seven years in the film industry. Mitchell has dealt extensively with government bureaucracy across various jurisdictions, employing hundreds of people.

Mitchell grew up in a politically active environment. His mother, Marilyn Baker, was an Alderman and Mayor in North Vancouver for over 12 years, igniting Mitchell's keen interest in service. He is running as an independent candidate to provide a middle ground in a polarized political landscape.

1. What would you do to help businesses keep costs down so they can survive and maintain jobs and services for our community?

There are several key areas that could be addressed to reduce costs for BC business. Business tax is not a significant business barrier as BC has one of the lowest business tax rates in the country, second only to Alberta, which has an 8% rate across the board. While Alberta's tax rate is difficult to compare to BC's, our small business tax rate is 2% lower than the Northwest Territories and lower than Ontario by 1.2%. For big business taxation, BC is on par with other provinces like Ontario and NWT.

A large contributor to business expenses however applies to both owners and lease holders and relates to property taxation based on "highest land use". This needs to be eliminated. The taxation value of land, unless developed or altered, should remain consistent while owned by the business/owner. Burdening businesses holding or leasing



property, making their costs increase simply due to the "potential" of the property is not only driving businesses away but weakening our community fabric.

The recently imposed Employee Health Tax unfairly burdens growing businesses. Independent contractors are not required to pay, and smaller businesses often avoid it due to their size. This tax should be incorporated into income tax, spreading the burden across all citizens as it is in place to cover medical expenses for all. The Employee Health Tax should absolutely be eliminated for businesses.

2. What will you commit to do to ensure North Shore and regional transportation priorities receive sustainable provincial funding?

Rapid transit across the Burrard Inlet is essential, in addition to the twinning of the Second Narrows Bridge. Projects of this scope become victims to ever changing governments and need to be treated as a priority. Having lived in North Vancouver my entire life, I have watched and waited in frustration, along with all of you.

Infrastructure is costly and when budgets are tight, we need to be creative. I propose an ongoing funding model with a small toll on every major bridge in the province. These tolls, or an annual fee paid by users, would go into a fund used only for capital projects NOT general revenue, providing a sustainable and low user impact, capital reserve. A toll of about \$0.25 per crossing is reasonable and affordable and would provide an ongoing revenue stream to ensure that transportation priorities across the province are met, **with the ironworkers crossing being the first in line**. Along with user pay for vehicles, transit fares also need to be addressed—they have not kept pace with minimum wage increases since the 1990s. With rising costs of fuel, electricity, capital, and wages, the current low fares are unsustainable and need to be assessed.

3. What will you do to improve primary healthcare access and availability in North Vancouver?

North Vancouver urgently needs more medical services, including another hospital. This is a critical issue, not just locally but across the province. In 1990, Canada had approximately six hospital beds per 1,000 citizens. By 2021, that number had dropped to 2.58 per 1,000.

On the North Shore, we have only 1.3 beds per 1,000 residents, compared to the provincial average of 1.9 and BC is well below the national average. An increase in residents has not translated into an increase in services. This deficit severely impacts our ability to access healthcare, requiring long waits and travel to other regions. Another addition to our transportation issues.

As MLA for North Vancouver–Seymour, I will push relentlessly for the capital investment required for a new facility and its continued support. While a new wing of Lions Gate Hospital has just been completed, the available beds per 1,000 residents will still not move the needle. The lack of access to family doctors is a provincial crisis, however the North Shore is exponentially impacted due to housing and business costs. We must work with all those issues in unison to successfully address healthcare access.



4. What would you do to ensure affordable housing investments are made quickly to support community needs and the future of local employers?

I believe that more pressure needs to be applied to many municipalities to build higher-density housing, including high rises, in areas identified for that density in local community plans, even if some current residents oppose it. Burnaby is a prime example of densification zones that have significantly benefited businesses and created vibrant community hubs. There are dozens of nonprofits and builders willing to create the needed housing, however the municipal barriers are stalling progress significantly. Innovation of product and form, along with creative partnerships must dominate in any housing discussion if we are to successfully tackle the current crisis.

We cannot benefit from business growth, tax revenues, and job creation while refusing to accommodate the housing needs of employees. We must either expand residential spaces in line with business expansion or face the consequences of bearing the tax burden ourselves. Overarchingly, **I would actively advocate for more crown land to be made available for housing province wide.**

5. What would you do to ensure North Vancouver can train and connect skilled staff to local employers who need them?

We have several excellent educational facilities in North Vancouver, particularly Capilano University with its diverse course offerings. Having a business liaison relationship with students before their graduation, through a formalized program, could encourage more students to feel connected to the community and thus want to remain with local employers.

Skills training for in demand professions could be addressed through the same lens as Trades training is currently, where subsidies towards the fees are available to encourage participation. This allows those with limited resources to re-skill and fill current local job gaps. The Province has a role to play in this space.

The challenge of retaining and connecting skilled staff to North Vancouver businesses remains, however, linked to the issues of affordable housing, healthcare access, transportation, and making it feasible for businesses to remain in BC. My focus would be on generating solutions to these core issues in an effort to subsequently resolve the dearth of skilled workers available to local employers.