Ipsos Reid Public Affairs

Report for:
BC REAL ESTATE ASSOCIATION

2007 Housing & Community Priority Study – Topline Summary Report

Submitted by:
IPSOS REID PUBLIC AFFAIRS
1100 – 1199 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC V6E 3T5
Phone: 604-257-3200
Fax: 604-688-9568

January 2007

BRITISH COLUMBIA
REAL ESTATE
ASSOCIATION

OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

Quality of Life

- Overall perceptions of quality of life are positive, with 92% of British Columbians rating the quality of life in their community as either "very good" or "good".
  - Those living on Vancouver Island are the most likely to rate their quality of life favourably (95% "very good/good"), while those living in the Fraser Valley report the lowest quality of life rating (88% "very good/good").
- Reasons for rating quality of life favourably are diverse and include "good economy" (7%) and "able to meet everyone's basic needs" (7%).
  - Those living in the North or South Interior are much more likely than those in the Fraser Valley to mention "good economy" (9% vs. 3%, respectively).
- Perceptions of a poor quality of life are primarily driven by social concerns including those focussing on housing-related issues such as "homelessness" (12%) and "unaffordable housing" (9%); "lack of hospitals and healthcare services" (10%) also contributes to perceptions of a poor quality of life.
  - There are no significant regional differences in the reasons behind perceptions of a poor quality of life.

Issue Agenda

- When asked to identify the most important local issue facing their community, 26% of British Columbians point to social issues. Social concerns predominately focus on housing-related issues such as "homelessness" (9%), "affordable housing" (9%), and unspecified "housing" mentions (3%). While social issues were also the leading concern in 2005, concerns are even more pronounced this year (up 4 points).
  - Social issues are much more of a concern in Greater Vancouver (30%) and the South Interior (27%) than in the North (17%).
- Other local issues that are on the minds of British Columbians this year include crime (12%, down 5 points compared to 2005) and growth (9%, not significantly different from 2005).
  - Crime-related concerns are more prevalent in the Fraser Valley (23%) and Greater Vancouver (15%) than on Vancouver Island (5%).
  - Growth is much more of a concern on Vancouver Island (14%) than in the North (5%) and Greater Vancouver (7%).

Growth and Development

- The majority (60%) of British Columbians say that managing growth and development should be a "very high" or "high" priority for government. The importance of managing growth and development has increased 5 points since 2005.
  - Greater Vancouver residents place the greatest emphasis on managing growth and development (64% "very high/high priority"). In comparison, those living in the North are the least likely to say this should be a top priority (52% "very high/high priority").
- When specifically asked to identify the most important issue related to growth and development, 10% of British Columbians mention "affordable housing" and another 8% provide unspecified "housing" mentions. These results are different from 2005, when the top growth and development-related issue was "employment" (11%).
  - Those living in the South Interior are the most likely to mention "affordable housing" (17%), followed by those in Greater Vancouver (11%) and the Fraser Valley (9%). In comparison, only 3% of Northern respondents mention issues around housing affordability.
- British Columbians support most of the different initiatives related to growth and development included in the research. Overall, the highest level of support is seen for "building or expanding transit systems" (94% support, up 5 points from 2005).
  - Northern respondents are the <u>least</u> likely to support this initaitive (76%, compared to 98% in the South Interior, 96% in Greater Vancouver, 94% on Vancouver Island, and 93% in the Fraser Valley).
- High levels of support are also seen for "building new roads and widening existing roads" (80% support, unchanged from 2005), "encouraging retail and commercial development" (78% support, unchanged from 2005), "encouraging growth that results in the expansion of outlying communities" (75% support, unchanged from 2005), "increasing construction of multi-family dwellings as opposed to single-family homes" (68% support, unchanged from 2005), and "building commercial, retail, and residential buildings in the same neighbourhood" (67% support, up 5 points from 2005).
  - Building new roads and widening existing new roads: Higher levels of support are seen in the Fraser Valley (90%), North (89%), and South Interior (85%) than on Vancouver Island (72%) or Greater Vancouver (78%).
  - Encouraging retail and commercial development: Support is <u>lowest</u> on Vancouver Island (68%, compared to 86% in the Fraser Valley, 86% in the South Interior, 83% in the North, and 78% in Greater Vancouver).
  - Encouraging growth that results in the expansion of outlying communities: Support is higher in the Fraser Valley (83%), South Interior (83%), and North (83%) than on Vancouver Island (67%).

- Increasing construction of multi-family dwellings as opposed to single-family homes: Support is higher in the South Interior (77%) and lower in the North (61%), Fraser Valley (63%), and Vancouver Island (63%).
- Building commercial, retail, and residential buildings in the same neighbourhood: Support is higher in Greater Vancouver (71%) than in the North (54%).

♦ However, fewer British Columbians support "building houses, condominiums, and apartments closer together, with more stories and smaller lots" (41% support, unchanged from 2005) and "replacing agricultural land with residential or commercial developments" (19% support, unchanged from 2005).

- Building houses, condominiums, and apartments closer together, with more stories and smaller lots: Support is higher in Greater Vancouver (46%) than in the North (31%) or on Vancouver Island (34%).
- Replacing agricultural land with residential or commercial developments: Support for this initiative is consistent across the province.

Growth and Development and the Government

♦ Nearly six-in-ten (56%) British Columbians think the provincial government has done a "very good" or "good" job managing growth and development in the province. This is not significantly different from 2005.

- Residents of Greater Vancouver are the most likely to say the government has done a "very good" or "good" job in this regard (60%). Conversely, those living on Vancouver Island are the least likely to feel this way (49% "very good/good").

♦ Overall satisfaction with the level and quality of municipal services is also high this year (83% satisfied, not significantly different from 2005).

- Those living in Greater Vancouver (85%), Vancouver Island (84%), or the Fraser Valley (83%) report the highest satisfaction ratings. Conversely, those living in the North are less satisfied (72%).

♦ Most British Columbians are also satisfied with specific municipal services. For example, 89% are satisfied with "providing parks and other recreational services or facilities" (unchanged from 2005), 84% are satisfied with "providing safe drinking water" (unchanged from 2005), 70% are satisfied with "encouraging economic investment that brings jobs to your area" (up 6 points from 2005), 67% are satisfied with "taking steps to ensure your community is safe and free of violent crime" (unchanged from 2005), 64% are satisfied with "maintaining or upgrading the condition of local streets and highways" (unchanged from 2005), and 62% are satisfied with "providing convenient and accessible public transportation" (unchanged from 2005).

- Providing parks and other recreational services or facilities: Satisfaction is higher in Greater Vancouver (91%) than in the North (84%).

- Providing safe drinking water: Satisfaction does not siginficantly vary by region.
- Encouraging economic investment that brings jobs to your area: Satisfaction is highest in the Fraser Valley (83%, compared to 62% on Vancouver Island, 70% in Greater Vancouver, 70% in the North, and 71% in the South Interior).
- Taking steps to ensure your community is safe and free of violent crime: Satisfaction is higher on Vancouver Island (79%) and the South Interior (71%) than in the Fraser Valley (58%).
- Maintaining or upgrading the condition of local streets and highways: Satisfaction is higher in the Fraser Valley (72%), Vancouver Island (69%), and Greater Vancouver (67%) than in the North (44%) or the South Interior (54%).
- Providing convenient and accessible public transportation: Satisfaction is higher in Greater Vancouver (65%) than in the Fraser Valley (53%).

♦ Respondents are less complimentary of steps their local government is taking to address traffic congestion and to make homes more affordable. Specifically, 44% are satisfied with "easing traffic congestion on local roads and highways" (down 13 points from 2005) and 33% are satisfied with "taking steps to ensure there are homes to buy at affordable prices" (down 11 points from 2005).

- Easing traffic congestion on local roads and highways: Satisfaction is much <u>lower</u> in Greater Vancouver (26%, compared to 69% in the North, 61% in the South Interior, 60% on Vancouver Island, and 59% in the Fraser Valley).
- Taking steps to ensure there are homes to buy at affordable prices: Satisfaction is much higher in the North (51%) and the Fraser Valley (44%) than in the South Interior (28%) or Greater Vancouver (29%).

♦ Turning our attention to specific growth and development-related initiatives shows British Columbians support all of the initiatives included in the research. Overall, British Columbians are most supportive of "increased provincial government investment in water supply and infrastructure" (91%). This is followed by "compensating property owners when their property is expropriated or property use is restricted in any way" (82%), "the development of a provincial housing strategy for owners and renters" (78%), and "elimination of the Property Transfer Tax" (72%).

♦ When asked which one of these should be the greatest priority, "increased provincial government investment in water supply and infrastructure" again comes out on top, selected by nearly half (46%) of respondents.

- Those living in the South Interior or Greater Vancouver are the most likely to identify "increased provincial government investment in water supply and infrastructure" as the greatest priority (50% and 48%, respectively). In comparison, only 36% of those in the North say this should be the greatest priority.

- The emphasis placed on the development of a provincial housing strategy is consistent across all regions.
- Elimination of the Property Transfer Tax is more important to those living in the North (21%) or Vancouver Island (20%) than to those in the South Interior (10%).
- Those living in Greater Vancouver place a much lower emphasis on compensating property owners when their property is expropriated or property use is restricted in any way (7%, compared to 28% in the Fraser Valley, 19% in the South Interior, 16% in the North, and 14% on Vancouver Island).

♦ Given budgetary pressures, British Columbians express a clear preference for increasing taxes to enhance or expand services (56%, not significantly different from 2005) rather than reducing taxes by cutting services (32%, up 7 points from 2005).

- British Columbians' preference for tax increases versus service cuts does not significantly vary by region.

♦ Property taxes top the list of taxes respondents would be willing to raise (40%, down 8 points from 2005), while respondents are most willing to support cuts to arts and cultural services (65%, not significantly different from 2005).

- While half (49%) of those living in the Fraser Valley support raising property taxes, this drops to only 32% among those on Vancouver Island.
- Arts and cultural service cuts are much more likely to be supported by those living in the Fraser Valley (83%) than by those living in the North (46%).

Housing Decision Drivers and Motivators

♦ Overall, the three factors that have the greatest impact on British Columbians' decision of where to live are "the level of crime", "affordability of homes", and "family-oriented neighbourhood". The level of crime has increased in importance this year as compared to 2005.

- The top three factors (the level of crime, affordability of homes, and being a family-oriented neighbourhood) are consistent across all five regions

♦ Other important considerations this year are "access to doctors, hospitals, and other healthcare services", "proximity to amenities", and "proximity to work". "The level of traffic" also plays a role.

♦ In comparison to the above considerations, British Columbians place less emphasis on "proximity to schools" and "access to public transportation".

♦ All of the housing features included in the research are important to British Columbians when buying a new home. Overall, "price" is the most important consideration (98%), consistent with what was seen in 2005.

- The importance of price is consistent across all regions.

- Other important housing features include "the type of home" (90% important, unchanged from 2005), "privacy from neighbours" (89% important, unchanged from 2005), "condition, for example, are renovations needed" (84% important, up 3 points from 2005), "a garage or other parking facilities" (83% important, unchanged from 2005), "a large yard" (69% important, unchanged from 2005), "the age of the home" (69% important, unchanged from 2005), "uniqueness, that is, all the homes in the neighbourhood do not look alike" (64% important, unchanged from 2005), and "a view" (57% important, down 6 points from 2005).
  - The type of home: Importance does not significantly vary by region.
  - Privacy from neighbours: Importance does not significantly vary by region.
  - Condition, for example, are renovations needed: Much less important to those on Vancouver Island (75%, compared to 88% in the North, 87% in the South, 85% in Greater Vancouver, and 85% in the Fraser Valley).
  - A garage or other parking facilities: Much more important to those in the Fraser Valley (87%) or Greater Vancouver (86%) than in the North (78%).
  - A large yard: More important to those in the North (81%), Vancouver Island (75%), or the South (74%) than to those in Greater Vancouver (63%).
  - The age of the home: Importance does not significantly vary by region.
  - Uniqueness, that is, all the homes in the neighbourhood do not look alike: More important to those on Vancouver Island (72%) than to those in the South Interior (60%).
  - A view: More important to those in the South Interior (72%), the North (63%), and the Fraser Valley (61%) than to those in Greater Vancouver (51%).
- When deciding what price of a home they can afford, British Columbians are most likely to consider the home's "location" (21%), followed by "the level of financing or mortgage required" (13%) and "the size of the house" (10%).
  - Those living on Vancouver Island are much more likely to mention "location" (31%) than are those living in the Fraser Valley (18%) or Greater Vancouver (19%).
- When asked for words or phrases to describe what their home means to them, British Columbians' responses can generally be grouped into one of five broad categories: comfort, safety, community/family, utilitarian, and getting away. Overall, the top three responses are "comfort and comfortable" (22%), "family" (11%), and "safety" (11%).
  - These words and phrases are consistent across all regions of the province.

BCREA

- Half (51%) of all British Columbians have heard of BCREA. However, awareness of the organization has dropped 13 points since 2005.
  - Those living on Vancouver Island are the most likely to have heard of BCREA (61%), while those living in Greater Vancouver (48%) or the North (48%) are the least likely to be aware of the organization.
- Of those aware of BCREA, 26% say they have seen, read, or heard something about the organization within the past twelve months (down 7 points from 2005).
  - Recall of recent BCREA-related news is consistent across all five regions.
- While many are unable to recall the specific content of this information (15% provide general "mentions of the medium only" and 16% say "don't know"), others recall information on "real estate news or listings" (12%), "what BCREA does" (10%), and "how the market is doing, including market trends" (10%). In 2005, the most often recalled message was "real estate prices" (15%).
  - Recall of specific BCREA-related information is similar across all five regions.
- While very few British Columbians who have heard of BCREA have a negative impression of the organization, it generally does not have a strong public image. Specifically, nearly half (44%) of those aware of BCREA say they have "no opinion" of the organization and another 6% say they "don't know" how to rate their impression, suggesting a lack of familiarity with BCREA. Encouragingly, those who do have an opinion are inclined to feel favourably, with 39% saying they have a favourable impression of BCREA. Only 11% have an unfavourable impression of the organization.
  - Impressions of BCREA are consistent across the province.
- Overall, 67% of those aware of the BCREA agree "BCREA represents the real estate sector in a professional manner" and 64% agree "BCREA is a credible association that speaks on behalf of REALTORS® in BC".
  - Perceptions of BCREA's professionalism and credibility are consistent across the province.

Real Estate Agents

- Four-in-ten (41%) British Columbians are aware that real estate agents actively volunteer in the community, not significantly different from 2005.
  - Those living in the Fraser Valley (53%), the South Interior (49%), or Vancouver Island (47%) are the most likely to be aware that real estate agents are active volunteers in the community, while those living in Greater Vancouver are the least likely to be aware of this information (34%).
- Knowing that agents are active volunteers only moderately sways the public's perceptions of the real estate profession. Specifically, 60% of British Columbians say this information has "no impact" on their impression of the profession, while 37% say it would make them feel more favourable towards real estate agents. In 2005, 43% said this information would make them feel more favourable towards real estate agents.
  - Those living in the Fraser Valley are the most likely to feel more favourably towards real estate agents knowing they are active volunteers (44%). Those living in Greater Vancouver or on Vancouver Island are the least likely to report an improved impression (34% each).

METHODOLOGY

A joint telephone-online methodology was used to conduct BCREA's 2007 Housing & Community Priority Study. This is a slight change from the 2005 study, which used a straightforward telephone methodology. By conducting a mixed methodology this year, BCREA is able to accurately and reliably track the results to previous years using the telephone survey, while at the same time achieve significant cost savings via the online survey.

In total, 1,392 surveys were conducted with a randomly selected representative sample of BC households aged 18 years or older. Overall, 800 interviews were conducted via the telephone, while 592 were conducted online using Ipsos Reid's Canadian Advisory Household Panel sample balanced to the general population of BC. Interviewing used a "head of household" approach whereby we targeted the person who is either primarily or jointly responsible for paying property taxes or rent. All interviews were conducted between the dates of January 4 and 14, 2007. The overall margin of error for the survey is ±2.6 percentage points, nineteen times out of twenty.

Given that BCREA represents the interests of real estate boards and their licensees across the province, the research was designed to allow for regional analysis to determine whether different regions are faced with different needs and priorities. A summary of the final number of interviews completed in each region, along with the associated margins of error, can be found in the table below.

Region	Number of Completed Surveys	Margin of Error (19 times out of 20)
Greater Vancouver	421	±4.8%
Fraser Valley	228	±6.5%
Vancouver Island	273	±5.9%
South Interior	231	±6.4%
North Interior	239	±6.3%
Total	***1,392***	***±2.6%***

Overall results have been weighted to ensure that the age/gender and regional distributions reflect that of the actual population in BC according to the 2001 Census data.

Note on Reporting

Prior to reporting, analysis of the telephone and online survey results was conducted in order to determine what impact, if any, the data collection methodology had on the overall results. This analysis shows similar opinions between the two survey samples when looking at attitudes towards housing, BCREA, and the real estate profession. However, some differences in opinion are observed when considering attitudes towards specific policy-related questions and perceptions of the government's performance.

While these differences are not systematic or consistent across all questions, Ipsos Reid recommended that the interpretation of the 2005 versus 2007 comparisons be made using the telephone results for both years. Thus, only the telephone survey results are reported for any questions related to policy or government performance (includes the sections entitled "Growth and Development" and "Growth and Development and the Government"). The remainder of the report focuses on the combined telephone and online results, where opinions are similar regardless of the data collection methodology used.