

# Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 17, 2010

## Affordable Housing Community Consultation

**Mrs. Sarich (Progressive Conservative MLA for Edmonton-Decore):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several communities in Edmonton have repeatedly raised concerns over housing projects in their communities and have come to the realization that these concerns, quite frankly, are not making a lot of progress. My questions are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. What will the minister do to slow the growth of government-funded housing projects in Edmonton communities?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I first have to say that I disagree with the hon. member's sentiment that somehow affordable housing is creating ghettos. In fact, it's many times just the opposite in a particular situation. We are in the process of building 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012; we're about 8,700 along the way. I can tell you that we're already looking to address this issue by promoting things like mixed-use housing and projects that do not contribute to overconcentration in any community, including this member's.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. Given that it's not very appropriate to ignore community concerns, the community would like to know: why won't this minister recognize that there seems to be a growing disconnect between the concerns of the community and the wishes of the residents and the will of government to have a concentration of low income housing in Edmonton?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While I thank the member for that question, I do again disagree with its premise. Most people, if not everybody, involved in affordable housing or housing for the homeless do intend to be good neighbours. We do address issues on an individual, case-by-case basis. The reality is that with this government's commitment to increase affordable housing and deal with our homelessness problem, there is going to be some throwback, but at the same time we will continue to deal with this through individual community consultation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Given that there is a request for proposal process and it's ultimately the minister's responsibility to look after this particular area, what will he do to ensure that project developers step up and appropriately address community concerns?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I thank the member for that question. Realistically, as we move forward, there is going to be some opposition, and we deal with that through our RFP process, which we're very proud of. It keeps our costs down but also ensures that developers with whom we partner have to engage in active community consultation in most of the projects that we have, particularly in the high-needs one in this member's constituency.

## Panhandling

**Mr. Xiao (Progressive Conservative MLA for Edmonton-McClung):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs was very outspoken about the panhandling issue this past spring and promised action by this fall. Since then, the Calgary Homeless Foundation released a report saying that panhandling, according to the research, is not an issue. My questions are to the minister. How long has this minister been out of step with one of the biggest stakeholders, and why does he pick on such a disadvantaged section of society?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just before I answer, I also want to wish the member a happy birthday. But that's where my smiling ends because, in fact, that report does not indicate that panhandling is not an issue. It indicates that instances of it have gone down. This is a good thing, but we also have to monitor the panhandling issue through the entire province just to ensure that it, like our homeless problem, does not get out of hand and that we

have a good handle on the problem but also the root causes that individuals may be having to actually end up on the street as a panhandler in the first place.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This minister promised action this fall. It's now mid-November. To the minister: are you doing anything about panhandling, or are you planning more grandstanding?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite this member's unduly caustic and self-serving comments I want to assure him that I've actually met with the mayor of Edmonton on this issue, and I'm looking forward to meeting with the new mayor of Calgary as well on this issue. He has been a little bit busy. Overall, I want to assure him as well that we are dealing with municipalities because they are the people that we'll deal directly with and who are closest to the issue.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: if he has nothing planned, whether he has a real handle at the provincial level, and instead is dumping this issue on cities to address it, what will he do if the cities have no plan or intention to address panhandling?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had some difficulty understanding this member's question, but I want to assure him that we are working with municipalities. At the end of the day 1260 *Alberta Hansard* November 17, 2010 there is one voter; there's one taxpayer; there's one person who is on the street. I don't think that they look at which level of government is addressing the problem. They want action. That's what we're doing.

### **Homelessness in Calgary**

**Mr. Amery (Progressive Conservative MLA for Calgary-East):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. This minister has stated publicly that his 10-year plan to end homelessness is working because, according to his numbers, shelter use is down. This is hardly enough evidence to make such a statement. Besides shelter use, what other empirical evidence does this minister have to make the claim that the plan is really working?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much. I did not have trouble understanding that question. This member is correct that one indication that the plan is working is, in fact, that shelter usage is down month over month, down 6 per cent from 2009. In addition, we've also created 940 homeless units, 400 in Calgary. Also, a third-party verification was released this week by Homeward Trust showing a 21 per cent decrease in the homeless population in Edmonton. Mr. Speaker, to this member: we're on the right track.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that he understood the question. My next question is to the same minister. Some Calgarians see this minister's plan as a plan to hide away homeless Albertans so that they can live their destructive lifestyle out of the public eye. How can this minister assure my constituents that homeless Calgarians are getting the supports they need besides a safe place to live a destructive lifestyle?

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, I can assure this Assembly and the public at large that our first priority is getting people off the streets, not putting them away in shelters. We are focusing on permanent housing. In addition to that, we also recognize that there is not one cause of homelessness; there is also not one solution. We look at things like homeless identification, that can help people get off the streets and get bank accounts and start feeling like everyone else does in society, treating people like individuals, and also showing that you don't always need a good government outlay of a lot of cash to get people . . .

**2:20**

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The plan to end homelessness will require funding support for years to come. How can this minister realistically commit to funding this plan at its current rate in the midst of the province's tightening fiscal situation?

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago I remember the Member for Edmonton-Riverview talking about how governments set goals, set regulations with no plan on meeting them. We are meeting the 10-year plan to end homelessness. We've constructed 1,700 homeless units throughout the province. We are going to be moving forward and working harder because we realize that homelessness doesn't just affect those who are homeless; it affects communities. We will be helping all Albertans through this process.

## Group Home Placement

**Mr. Sandhu (Progressive Conservative MLA for Edmonton-Manning):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of Edmonton-Manning, especially in the Fraser community, are worried they are not being told that group homes are being made in their neighbourhoods and that they are not being evenly spread out. My first question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: Mr. Minister, can you explain the process of the placement allocation of the group homes within the municipality?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our municipalities set out the specific standards for land development in their land-use bylaws. Their municipal development plans may also provide general information on suitable sites for things like group homes. Ultimately, the location of a group home or any other development is based on whether the site meets the development requirements that the municipalities have set.

**Mr. Sandhu:** To the same minister: can you explain what options residents have to make their concerns heard about the placement of the group homes and the treatment of the residents?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, someone who wants to build a group home needs to first find the site, and if that particular proposal is not permitted by the municipality, the applicant may apply to amend the land-use bylaws. When bylaws are amended, that's when the public needs to be informed and given a chance to speak before their individual councils. If the use is permitted then or discretionary, a development permit is issued. That particular approval can be appealed to the local subdivision and development appeal board.

**Mr. Sandhu:** My next question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Can you explain what the province's responsibility is with regard to group homes?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The responsibility of my ministry is to license group homes that have four or more residents who are receiving care and supports. We inspect each group home or each licensed residence at least once a year. Before a licence is issued, an operator must receive a zoning permit from the municipality. They must meet provincial building codes, and they also must have passed an inspection both by the fire department and the health inspector.