

OPINION-EDITORIAL

CHANGES MEAN STABILITY, CERTAINTY FOR B.C. PROPERTY OWNERS

By Kevin Krueger
Minister of Small Business and Revenue
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(507 words)

In light of recent global economic events, the provincial government has taken concrete steps to provide new stability for homeowners who are worried about fluctuating property values.

On November 1, Premier Gordon Campbell announced that effective immediately and for 2009 only, assessments will be maintained for all property classes at their July 1, 2007 levels. New construction that takes place in 2008 will be assessed at a value as if it existed July 1, 2007.

As a result of the current international economic crisis, British Columbia's real estate market has experienced a downturn. By taking the initiative to hold assessments in this way, the B.C. government will ensure that assessments reflect current market realities rather than the peak experienced close to July 1, 2008.

The provincial government is committed to fair and equitable treatment for all property owners.

This action builds on the B.C. government's steps to ensure the province's competitiveness and to provide stability and predictability for property owners and taxpayers throughout the current global economic slowdown.

As legislated under the Assessment Act, property assessments are based on market values as of the annual July 1 valuation date. The appraisal work and analysis is done by BC Assessment Authority over a long period of time each year, with the annual assessment roll finalized in December and notices mailed to property owners in January.

To ensure B.C.'s continued competitiveness, and to provide support for businesses and individuals in this challenging economic environment, the B.C. government is taking a number of other immediate steps to help keep B.C.'s economy strong.

One of these steps is a new property tax deferment program. The program will allow people to defer their property tax payment for each of the next two years. To qualify, the owner must have at least 15 per cent equity in their home and be experiencing financial difficulties due to the current economic climate.

Homeowners will not have to pay the deferred taxes until they sell their homes, but can pay the Province back earlier if they choose. This will help homeowners who might otherwise have to try to qualify for a home equity loan during the current credit crunch. This provision is in addition to the current program, which benefits homeowners who are 55 years of age or older.

The world is facing its worst financial crisis in decades. The ripple effect is being felt everywhere. However, thanks to our diversified economy and fiscal prudence, British Columbia is in far better shape to deal with this crisis than most jurisdictions.

Through prudent and responsible fiscal management of your tax dollars, our actions over the past seven-and-a-half years have established a strong position from which B.C. will manage the current international financial crisis.

As the minister responsible for BC Assessment, my focus is on ensuring a high level of customer service along with fair, equitable assessments. The right to appeal is unchanged, and will continue to be available to any property owners who believe their assessments are too high, even at the July 1, 2007 level.

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Contact:
Christine Wood
Communication Director
Ministry of Small Business and Revenue
250 387-4193