

## samaustin -obra

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[Céline]

So, hi Sam, thank you very much for coming here today and meeting with us. First, I'd like you to explain why you're running in our district now.

[Sam]

Yeah, yeah, so I've been the councillor for the last eight years in the on the other side of Alboro Lake Road and so now the two districts Dartmouth North is getting back together again and so this section that was in district six is now getting all added on to district five. I've been the councillor on the other side for eight years and yeah, yeah, it's a time flies and it's work that you know it's very I'm very passionate about and you know the role of councillor you get to nudge a lot of different things in different directions and I can see the impact around the community and there's that's deeply fulfilling and I still think there's lots I can contribute so I'm re-offering and hoping to be the representative for all of district five which includes a reunited Dartmouth North.

[Céline]

Awesome, yeah, I've seen your work with the stopping the infill of Dartmouth Cove and I think that's the kind of passion that Dartmouth North needs to be able to you know get some solutions going so thank you for that. All right.

[Sam]

You're welcome.

[Céline]

So recognizing that you were on council but not councillor of Ocean Breeze when the property was sold to the new owners, developers, today with the benefit of hindsight what do you think could or should have been done differently to avoid the situation we're in now with a thousand plus residents facing imminent demolition?

[Sam]

Yeah that's a good question I've asked myself that too you know from where we are on development right I think like drawing trying to do well we'll just try and block all development and then things will stay the same I don't think that's actually how things would have played out right you know under the old rules they could have applied made an application we've certainly seen the province has stepped in whenever hrm council was seen to be standing in the way of development so I honestly I don't think we would

have ended up with a different outcome had the centre plan gone differently what I think might have helped a little bit this could have been a future growth node and then that would have kept a political kind of peace platform in play at council because rather than as if right it would have then had to come to council but I don't think the fundamental reality of townhouses coming down and redevelopment happening would have been any different had the centre plan made different choices about the zoning

[Céline]

right, what about as as I've heard I believe you mentioned to me in the past what about you know bringing in some propositions to prevent developers from building until they've duplicated the buildings and the homes they're taking away

[Sam]

so yeah now we're talking like, so to me the challenges of ocean breeze is not that we have development it's that we have an absent government on the other side right we do not get affordable housing by expecting the private sector to provide it right at three four hundred thousand dollars per unit it's not a can't it's not a won't it's a can't right the economics don't work the way we get that to work is the same way that we pay for all public goods whether it's hospitals roads schools we use the collective right you know tax money I on tulip street should be helping to pay for affordable housing through my taxes as much as everybody else in the community rather than expecting it all to be done basically on having 20 you know for-profit units subsidizing 10 you know non-market units the role this is the role of government and where we've gotten to in a society is we stopped building public housing we just gave up on that

[Céline]

I'll agree with that but I do think that there's a certain civic responsibility because sure you can make taxes from this kind of development and stuff but it's also going to cost you if people end up in services and need to get you know housing and get on lists and and end up in you know tents encampments this is going to cost the city as well so a little foresight yeah is is hopefully moving forward what we're going to see

[Sam]

yeah so, they kind of to me it's it's public housing is uh having a right of first refusal the way they do in Quebec where you know the the public housing agency could potentially acquire units that are coming up for sale it's these kinds of things that are needed and that have been non-existent on the government side

[Céline]

definitely agree with that so a follow-up question here is for example with regards to

working with the private sector non-profits is there a role you can play to secure collaboration with the new owners to ensure that there will be affordable units built in the new ocean breeze that will be made available to current residents before they are evicted we refer to the um mount hope village across Dartmouth where Clayton developments has agreed to work with the YWCA to include affordable town housing in that new development is something similar possible with that at Basin Heights

[Sam]

it's certainly possible the challenge with housing in the city is you bump up against provincial jurisdictions so like in the current way that things are set up um the city is in charge of development so like what the zoning is what's allowed on different properties but all the public housing or non-profit housing all of that falls into the provincial realm and so you know the Eisner's Cove development is a good example where the province partnered with a non-profit who's gone in there and reached a deal with the developer so that kind of thing absolutely could happen here it's hard to drive that from city hall where all the jurisdiction for it is comes from the province what I think we can do as a city is offer much more favorable terms for non-profits right now um 50% of a non-profit's taxes they pay are forgiven by the city when they're doing affordable housing I'd like to see that be 100% so that we can put more money back into non-profits who then have more capacity to do this kind of work

[Céline]

that would be good are there any questions on housing from the the people here today want to say anything nope all righty um so question number two in your view what should be done moving forward to ensure that this does not happen again in the HRM more specifically what needs to be done to avoid demolition of affordable homes and the eviction of their residents with their new their replacement by new high-end um cost condos now I think that plays to what you just said a little bit but I think uh you had mentioned a few thoughts that you could do to represent us and perhaps the provincial government and help us be heard so this doesn't happen again to other communities

[Sam]

yeah I think in the immediate situation here I mean the council could have a role in terms of advocating to the province I mean if if the world changed simply because HRM council sent a letter to the province we live in a very different place sometimes we get traction sometimes we don't but I think that's something that we certainly could do is we can ask the province well what are the plans to accommodate and manage the fact that people are you know over the next several years going to lose their homes or Canada lands yeah that's another one especially where they've had the announcement about housing there right so there seems to be an intent so I think council can definitely fill that kind of role fundamentally I think we need to get back to having an activist metro

housing right an activist public sector public housing thing and I think it belongs at the city level because um right now development comes in and city just worries about that and then you have metro housing over here and the provincial responsibilities and they're not involved in that process and they have not been on an activist kind of building units in 30 years if the city had this responsibility it would pair well with the fact that we're taking in applications and we would build stuff we build all kinds of stuff you I want that to come back to the city yes because I think at the city level we would get more done because we build and operate stuff and I think it would pair very well with the fact that we're doing planning anyway so then when a development comes in with an application if we had our own housing court that housing court could say thanks we want to buy you know a chunk of land we want to buy x number of units and we want that in your project and that could happen right at the ???

[Jenn]

right question yes yes so for me with the housing perspective with provincial housing and the city like the problem is that there's been over a 10 year and even for priority access it's a two plus year wait list and that's mostly in hrm that's not like an SPHA problem and it seems that the city and the province are both okay with 1500 people being evicted and most of them are kids and everybody wants to turn a blind eye

[Sam]

to it I can't speak for the province but I'm not okay with it and it's not you know this is this is a collective failure of government and you know that wait list you talked about about priority placement it's even worse here in hrm

[Jenn]

I know I work in it

[Sam]

okay so like the 2021 A.G. report that was done if you kind of crunched well how many units did we place and what's the total wait list it would be seven years they kind of say I think part of it depends on people giving up finding other spaces passing away in the case of seniors before they ever get their unit right because if you actually just took 300 versus the wait list it was seven years to get to the end and that's because we we didn't build anything right like 30 years we have 200,000 more people in our municipality but the but basically the same number of rent to income properties as we did 30 years ago and I mean you don't have to have a fancy degree or be a statistician or anything just to say look at that and say those numbers don't work right

[Jenn]

so while this is I mean it's adequate housing it obviously needs updating it's been here since the 50s the city and the province were okay just throwing it aside instead of stepping in and saying you know what this would be a better option for us to get something that's already existing and then add on because there was 52 acres of land here while we want green space still there was still space to build new things and integrate it in and then slowly take on the responsibility of maintaining and upgrading what already exists.

[Sam]

You're not wrong it shouldn't happen this way and I mean the challenge is that we have not as government done the job on affordable housing for 30 years right and unless we can rectify the actual fundamental failure at the beginning which is we don't have a government active in housing you know ocean breeze's will happen again.

[Jenn]

So this city and or the province I mean anybody anywhere has the opportunity to buy this phase specifically phase two yeah for seven million dollars minimum from what the owners have shared with us shared with us um and it's been up on what is it CBRE commercial real estate yeah it's been up on CBRE probably for nine months now, and it's still there.

[Sam]

yeah so right now the way it's set up in government is the city doesn't build housing right I think that fundamentally that's what we need to change

[Jenn]

they can buy the land though

[Sam]

because we have not done any kind of thing like that is belongs for metro housing and the non-profits the city doesn't have any of that and to be blunt like our dollars are very stretched right the province the mayor is describes the situation on housing very well in terms of the feds have the money the province has the responsibility and the cities have the

[Céline]

Nova Scotia residents have the highest taxes home taxes right yeah property taxes so I mean this is a big....

[Sam]

so fundamentally I think it needs to come back to the city and the way to do it and actually pay for it is there's about 200 million dollars of property tax revenue that is collected by HRM that we never see that comes in and then goes over to the province to pay for provincial services mainly education which is also lacking if the province were willing to hand us affordable housing the easy way to pay for it would be to that to also have them agree to stop deducting that because then we would actually have the funds to do something right there's no point giving us housing unless it comes with the actual resources to make a go of it right because otherwise we're just repeating the same mistakes of 30 years

[Céline]

right and I think many of us understand it's a provincial problem to solve but I think city has a role having the city you know write that letter yeah right is a lot stronger than having us little ocean breeze residents association uh sending a letter so we need that kind of representation in my opinion in council uh I just and I'm glad to hear that you say that you didn't you know the government itself as a body did not live up to what they're supposed to and I think a lot of people here want that that admission because obviously we are the product of no foresight for this situation so we're just going to add to the 1200 homeless that already it is yeah yeah so again question number three and the last question here is what do you propose to do now presuming uh you will be re-elected as councillor for district five if you are um to try and ensure that the a thousand plus residents of ocean breeze do not end up on the streets or in fact in in encampments in the coming years

[Sam]

yeah so the city doesn't have an immediate lever to pull here right like it's an engagement piece with the problem

[Céline]

if we end up on the street aren't you responsible for that

[Sam]

we end up responsible for that yes yeah, I mean if you end up in a park right you know it's a it's the city's uh situation that is then dealing with it but you know the city cannot fix this problem on their own we need the province to be able to do it

[Céline]

right we need you we need all level of governments to respond to this to me it's not an emergency anymore it's a crisis uh a third of the residents here have told me if they leave here they're going to live in their car on the streets or in a tent somewhere in the

forest because you know there's lots of lovely land around here is we are going to become a problem for you like there is a certain number of no no not everybody a lot of people here have solutions and are just staying here until they have no choice because they can save money yes right because it is below market here we know we're blessed but we're trying to be proactive and get some solutions ahead of time

[Sam]

so what i'll say is like over the last four years in particular like since covid and the housing crisis and the homelessness crisis went into high gear um it's been very eye-opening on this side um in terms of like what the actual kind of situation is and how dysfunctional so many of our systems are and as a society it's like if you're a homeless you get 380 a month and who can do anything on 380 a month well exactly if you get 380 bucks you're basically telling people um steal panhandle or sell yourself right like this is and that we don't have a universal basic income to make sure that everyone has the means to survive in our society is that's another good thing to support is yeah we're starting to get off but like i mean it's so frustrating like um it feels that as a collective and society we are often willing to pay money for things like policing and corrections when an ounce of prevention in the first place would have avoided a whole lot of the social issues that we're now

[Jenn]

i think that's the point of view of many uh would stretch the system a heck of a lot less yes if we assistance is it's not even enough it's not good enough for rent

[Sam]

you couldn't pay for rent even here one of the best deals in dartmouth on what social assistance provides unless you're gonna get a rent supplement on top

[Jenn]

yeah and most of us don't qualify for that

[Céline]

yeah so are you planning to go door-to-door here to talk to people?

[Sam]

i haven't i haven't settled on my last week here at door-to-door okay um the district is huge i'm not going to get to every door um if there was a time i'd be happy to come down

[Céline]

so if there's some residents who'd like to talk to you they can..? (Sam: absolutely) online and you'll come out and speak with you in your office yeah okay well is there anything you'd like to tell the community

[Sam]

um jeez i mean i feel like we've covered it all i mean um i guess my main message would be that um i know government has collectively failed here the fact that you know this is happening at all in this way without a planning kind of thing around it um it is a collective failure um i recognize that um i also have like you know as a platform piece right pieces that are aimed exactly at this situation such as getting public housing back to the municipality where it will actually be an active not just a passive you know metro housing authority getting funding for non-profits in terms of tax relief and pursuing no law no net loss provisions the big challenge is and we're going to have a provincial election next year uh is two or three of these require provincial cooperation and so we as the city will uh we can try but we're not guaranteed success without the province being there as well because the no net loss requires a charter amendment public housing requires a whole lot of negotiation the one thing we can do clearly is provide more relief to non-profits

[Céline]

we need to elect people that are going to make change. i want to thank you Sam for coming out thank you there's any other questions or no i also want to say this used to be jen's home jen here who was asking some questions she used to live here and got relocated so elsewhere down here down at the four bedrooms

[Jenn]

but again like everybody else we have no idea what the time frame is so it's a little emotional

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