



CANS 2024 Provincial Election Voters' Guide

The Construction Association of Nova Scotia (CANS) will play an active role in this provincial election cycle, ensuring that the issues important to our members and industry are top of mind for all parties. Use this Voters' Guide to familiarize yourself with the issues facing our industry and make an informed vote this November.

CANS sent each party five questions to determine their stance on major issues facing our industry. We made every attempt to reach out to all parties. Questionnaires were sent on November 8 and a follow-up was sent on November 15. Please note that CANS did not receive a response from the Green Party.

PC Party

Liberal Party

New Democratic Party

How will your party support the expansion and enhancement of training programs for construction trades in Nova Scotia to ensure a skilled and sustainable workforce?

Specifically, what commitments will your party make to increase training capacity, improve completion rates, and ensure that workforce development programs are aligned with the needs of the construction industry?

Our government understands that the construction industry is vital to Nova Scotia's economy, supporting essential infrastructure projects and providing stable, well-paying jobs.

To address the skilled labour shortage and prepare for future demands, we have made significant investments aimed at training and retaining a robust workforce in the construction trades. One of our key initiatives is a \$100 million investment over three years dedicated to recruiting, training, and retaining skilled tradespeople. This comprehensive plan will add 5,000 new apprentices to the system over the next three years. By increasing the number of journeypersons and trades qualifiers who take on apprentices by 1,000 per year, we are working to boost the apprenticeship retention rate to 60% from 43% within five years. These measures ensure that more workers complete their training and join the workforce, directly supporting the timely delivery of housing, infrastructure, and public works projects.

Additionally, our More Opportunity for Skilled Trades (MOST) program offers a provincial income tax refund on the first \$50,000 of income for skilled trades workers under 30. This incentive has already benefited over 2,000 Nova Scotians, making the trades more attractive for young workers and fostering a sustainable workforce. Our commitment is to align workforce development programs with the evolving needs of the construction sector, ensuring that Nova Scotia remains equipped to meet both current and future infrastructure demands.

The Nova Scotia Liberal Party recognizes how important it is to ensure that we continue to grow our construction industry, especially as so many tradespeople are nearing retirement.

A Nova Scotia Liberal government will invest \$10M to increase training for women at NSCC in trades directly related to housing construction, with a goal to double the number of women being trained over five years.

This will address the need for expansion of skilled labour workers in our province, as we will never reach our goals if only half of the available workforce is being trained. Additionally, we will ensure immigration targets are focused on growing the number of professionals we need in critical areas, including construction workers and skilled tradespeople.

An NDP government will increase investments in training and apprenticeships to support strong workforce development and growth in the building trades with growing numbers of well-qualified and highly skilled workers.

An NDP government will engage CANS and other significant industry representatives, the building trades, the Apprenticeship Agency and NSCC to identify key steps in a strategy to ensure that Nova Scotia has the highly skilled and well qualified workers that the housing industry and our economy need. The door should be open to measures like free tuition, incentives for people from under-represented communities, fostering respectful and welcoming workplaces, income replacement to enable participation on a pathway to full-time employment.

A successful strategy is funded and its outcomes are measured to foster improvement.

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Will your party commit to increasing provincial funding for infrastructure projects, and if so, what types of projects will be prioritized? Additionally, will your government commit to a 10-year infrastructure plan, building upon the projects already announced, to ensure long-term planning and stability for both infrastructure and workforce development?

We recognize that our population is growing, and we need infrastructure development to keep pace with the growth.

Green projects - We are also focused on the smart development of our energy and natural resources sectors through Nova Scotia's Clean Energy Plan, which will make our province a world class energy producer in hydrogen and sustainable aviation fuel. The construction of these two industries will provide a decade of new construction jobs along with new high paying long-term jobs that will benefit the entire economy.

Under the MORE, FASTER: THE ACTION FOR HEALTH BUILD, our government laid the groundwork in 2022 for a comprehensive, long-term health infrastructure plan aimed at modernizing and expanding Nova Scotia's healthcare facilities. This plan is crucial for addressing the current and future needs of our province as we introduce new models to better manage the healthcare system and deliver efficient services to Nova Scotians.

Other Major Areas:

Education Infrastructure - We are also building 7 new replacement schools across the province, 4 new schools in Greater Halifax/Dartmouth and surrounding communities. We have also built two new community college residences with five more underway.

Housing - Through our actions for housing plan, we are creating the conditions to build 41,200 new homes by 2028.

Cellular Infrastructure - We are adding 27 new provincially owned telecommunication towers in unserved areas, in addition to four announced in October 2023.

As we grow our population to support a growing economy and an aging population, we must also plan for community infrastructure including roads, schools, doctors, and hospitals. We need to develop an infrastructure plan to keep up with—and continually manage—that growth to ensure we're maintaining sustainable levels.

A few examples of infrastructure projects we will prioritize are as follows: We will invest \$300M over four years to spur economic development and infrastructure growth in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. We will invest in critical highway infrastructure to increase safety on our highways, complete the 100-series highways, and improve the flow of goods and people around our province. We will work with the Halifax Dartmouth Bridge Commission to build a new, six lane bridge with active transportation infrastructure and bus lanes to support rapid transit in Halifax. We will invest in maintaining rural road infrastructure by enhancing maintenance efforts for ditches and culverts to keep our roads safe and protect private property.

Each of these examples would support the construction industry's workforce, while developing province-wide infrastructure.

Although the need for long term planning of road and highway construction was long apparent, it was the NDP that launched the practice of preparing and publishing a five year highways plan, ideally released early enough to facilitate preparation of each year's work. Preparation for similar long term planning of other infrastructure was underway in 2013 but again there is only lip service to solid planning. Short term thinking is costly and it makes workforce development difficult.

An NDP government will adopt a ten year infrastructure plan, involving Health and Wellness, Education, Housing and other departments with major infrastructure responsibilities, plus the active participation of NSCC and Apprenticeship since training and availability of skilled workers is an essential factor in infrastructure planning. The plan will consider the needs of a growing population and delivery of the 30,000 non-market and co-op homes required for secure, affordable housing.

The fiscal and workforce needs of the highways plan and those of the infrastructure plan will be considered in tandem as the plans are updated each year.

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What specific measures will you implement to promote collaboration between the provincial government and construction industry stakeholders to improve planning, project execution, and development across the province?

How will you ensure that experts from industry are brought to the table and their expertise is fully utilized throughout the process?

Effective collaboration between the government and the construction industry is essential for industry development. The construction sector often faces unique challenges and to address these issues, the government must take a proactive approach that incorporates industry feedback throughout the entire process.

Over the past three years, our government has actively engaged with the construction industry to understand and address its labor needs, which has informed strategic policies to create long-term stability. Recognizing the dynamic nature of these needs due to steady population growth, our government has committed to continuous collaboration for industry development.

Consultation with organizations like NSCSC-ICI and CANS has been pivotal in aligning governmental efforts with industry needs. This dialogue has guided initiatives such as the creation of the critical construction worker pilot stream under Nova Scotia's Provincial Nominee Program. This program, which covers 21 key construction occupations, aims to bolster the residential building trades and address the urgent housing needs.

Further, we responded to industry feedback by amending the journeyman-to-apprentice ratios to increase training opportunities on job sites. The updated ratio of 1:3 from 1:2 supports workforce expansion and skill development.

Another initiative, the MOST program, offers a tax rebate to attract and retain young workers in the industry, underscoring our commitment to building a robust construction workforce.

Our government is dedicated to ongoing partnership with industry leaders to ensure that policies and programs continue to meet the sector's evolving needs. By collaborating with industry expertise at different stages—from policy development to project execution, a re-elected PC government will continue to meet the industry needs and create a thriving construction environment that benefits all Nova Scotians.

The Nova Scotia Liberal party recognizes the wealth of knowledge that construction industry stakeholders hold, and believe that communication is key as we move forward with our goals.

We will continue to meet with experts like yourselves to improve methods for planning, project execution, and development across the province.

An NDP government will seek a whole-of-province effort with key stakeholders including the Construction Association of Nova Scotia in marshalling resources and capabilities to tackle the affordable housing crisis. This will segue directly into the situation where stakeholders are at the table for planning and monitoring the ten year infrastructure plan.

An NDP government will promote true collaboration in the planning process and thus the creation of working partnerships, with careful attention to avoid the risk of unfair competition for contracts. The open dialogue on infrastructure which you advocate will include all stakeholders to minimize mistrust and foster informed decision making.

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What steps will your party take to streamline land development approvals and reduce bureaucratic delays that currently hinder construction projects in the province?

We understand the challenges red tape presents to the construction industry and our party is committed to modernizing and streamlining the system to create an environment that supports accelerated construction. This approach builds on recent provincial efforts through our Five Year Housing Plan and introduces additional measures to further expedite development.

Key Actions to Streamline Land Development Approvals:

Implemented Special Planning Areas: Our government made significant progress by designating 15 special planning areas, fast-tracking the approval and construction of 23,000 housing units. We will continue to examine the needs and designate more areas when necessary.

Expedited Approval Processes: We shaved between six and nine months off both the Province's and HRM's approval processes through legislative changes that included: removing the requirement for newspaper notification and reducing notice period allowing digital submission of planning documents and land use by-laws shortening timelines for Provincial review improving development agreement authority expediting development agreement approval process including security and deferral of bonus zoning charges when occupancy permits are issued.

Amended the Municipal Government Act and Halifax Regional Municipality Charter - This enabled the use of inclusionary zoning to address affordable housing needs in all municipalities across Nova Scotia.

Other Legislative initiatives exempting critical healthcare facilities from land-use bylaws to allow urgently required beds to be built faster in communities that need them the most. Creating more flexibility through changes to rules for unit mix for buildings, increasing the minimum floorplan size for high-rise buildings, reducing minimum lot sizes and increasing allowable coverage. accelerating development approvals by giving expert planning staff more authority giving the Housing Minister authority to make decisions on development in HRM without a recommendation from the Executive Panel on Housing or request from the municipality.

Giving HRM the authority to unilaterally discharge existing development agreements that are more restrictive, to enable height and density granting all variances respecting set backs or street walls unless HRM can demonstrate that they materially alter the intent of the municipal planning strategy.

These measures will provide a more predictable and efficient regulatory framework, reducing project costs and accelerating timelines for construction.

By modernizing our systems and repealing outdated practices, we will make Nova Scotia a more attractive place for investment and meet the province's growing housing demands while supporting economic growth and stability.

A Nova Scotia Liberal government will eliminate any cases of restrictive covenants or exclusionary zoning that prevent housing from being built.

We will establish province-wide minimum zoning standards, reduce red tape, eliminate restrictive covenants, and hasten development to build homes faster. The municipal funding formula will ensure adequate infrastructure to accommodate new housing, incorporating metrics like housing starts. We'll build new non-profit housing by investing in organizations, and creating a trusted non-profit developer program that will fast track applications from organizations who have experience managing housing.

This process will rely on the construction sector in the development of these affordable homes for our most vulnerable populations.

An NDP government will: cut red tape and encouraging more development across all non-market housing, work with municipalities to identify land they can commit to needed housing construction and to speed up and standardize construction planning and approval timelines, getting to "yes" faster and without delay, and enabling municipalities to levy a tax on vacant lots that are zoned for residential development but where developers are delaying builds.

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With the province and municipalities contributing nearly 30% of the cost of a housing unit, how will your government reduce fees, permits, land use costs, utilities, and other barriers to affordable housing development, and what role do you see the construction industry playing in these solutions? Would extending the 1% drop in HST for an additional five years be part of your plan to make housing more affordable?

Housing affordability remains a top priority of our party and we are committed to ensuring safe, accessible, and affordable living for all Nova Scotians.

Rising housing costs and restrictive zoning regulations pose significant challenges, limiting the supply of homes and putting pressure on renters and first-time buyers. That's why we took both immediate actions and long-term strategies that evolve as the environment and community needs change.

To directly reduce costs associated with housing development, we implemented a two-year freeze on all municipal permits and development fees. This has already made a significant impact on reaching our 5 year housing targets and we anticipate more growth next year.

Additionally, we have raised the borrowing limit for the housing development fund from \$154 million to \$630 million, ensuring greater financial support for housing projects and facilitating accelerated construction timelines. Our commitment to affordable housing is further reinforced through targeted financial measures in the 2024-2025 budget.

We are allocating \$80-\$100 million annually to rebate the 10% provincial HST on new construction for purpose-built, multi-unit apartments.

This measure reduces cost for developers and stimulates the construction of affordable rental units in.

We are also investing an additional \$5 million to expand the \$28.6 million Affordable Housing Development Program to include student housing proposals, addressing specific needs while easing demand on other housing resources. Furthermore, \$3.6 million has been committed to a rapid housing initiative to develop new affordable housing units in Halifax, focusing on quick solutions to meet urgent needs. The 1% drop in HST will be effective April 1st, 2025 and is a permanent solution for all Nova Scotians to tackle affordability challenges. We recognize that this will also have a positive impact on the construction industry with purchasing building supplies, further reducing total housing costs.

The construction industry plays an essential role in achieving a balanced housing market. To support this, we will continue collaborating with industry stakeholders to identify practical solutions and make housing more affordable.

A Nova Scotia Liberal government will be very focused on reducing these fees and land use costs, and removing barriers to housing developments by working with municipal governments to reduce red tape.

We look forward to working closely with the construction industry, as you folks will continue to be hugely impactful in our province with the implementation of these housing development plans.

We are committed to lowering the provincial portion of the HST by 2% if elected.

Nova Scotians deserve a secure home that they can afford. The Nova Scotia NDP is ready to tackle the housing shortage by focusing on measures of direct benefit to renters and homeowners rather than relying primarily on indirect results.

An NDP government will set the ambitious goal of building 30,000 new, affordable non-market and co-op homes. An NDP government will leverage federal funding for housing construction to make our province's dollars go much, much further.

An NDP government's commitments to reduce delays in development are outlined above.

An NDP government will create a path to home ownership through a new Rent-to-Own Starter Homes Program that combines more home construction with lower up-front costs for first-time buyers.

We will work with the growing factory-built home construction industry to deliver high quality, energy efficient, affordable homes to first-time home buyers with a household income of less than \$100,000 per year. Rents will be used to build equity in the home for the new owner who can choose to continue to work toward ownership or sell after an initial 5-year contract.

An NDP government will bring in the Affordable Homes Rebate that will help hundreds of thousands of renters and homeowners by providing an average annual rebate of \$900 when their household incomes are under \$70,000 a year – so it will benefit approximately half of all Nova Scotia households. This relief will make housing more affordable for low- and middle-income households.