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COVER STORY

Housing costs bringing pain, poll finds

Both Torontonians and Vancouverites rate affordability as their most pressing concern, but it's the West Coast city that is in constant misery, study shows



MELANIE GREEN
STARMETRO VANCOUVER

As Toronto sees a new spike in misery over housing affordability, according to a new opinion poll, the same study suggests that Vancouverites know how to do misery right.

Where housing surpassed transit for the first time as the most pressing issue in the Greater Toronto Area, the poll found the vast majority of Metro Vancouver residents have held onto a prevailing sense of defeat and hopelessness about housing.

Seron MacKay, who was born and raised in Vancouver, was one of the 80 per cent of people who has considered leaving the city. Last week, the 36-year-old single mother was “feeling the pain” so she drove across Canada with her daughter to set up shop in Toronto.

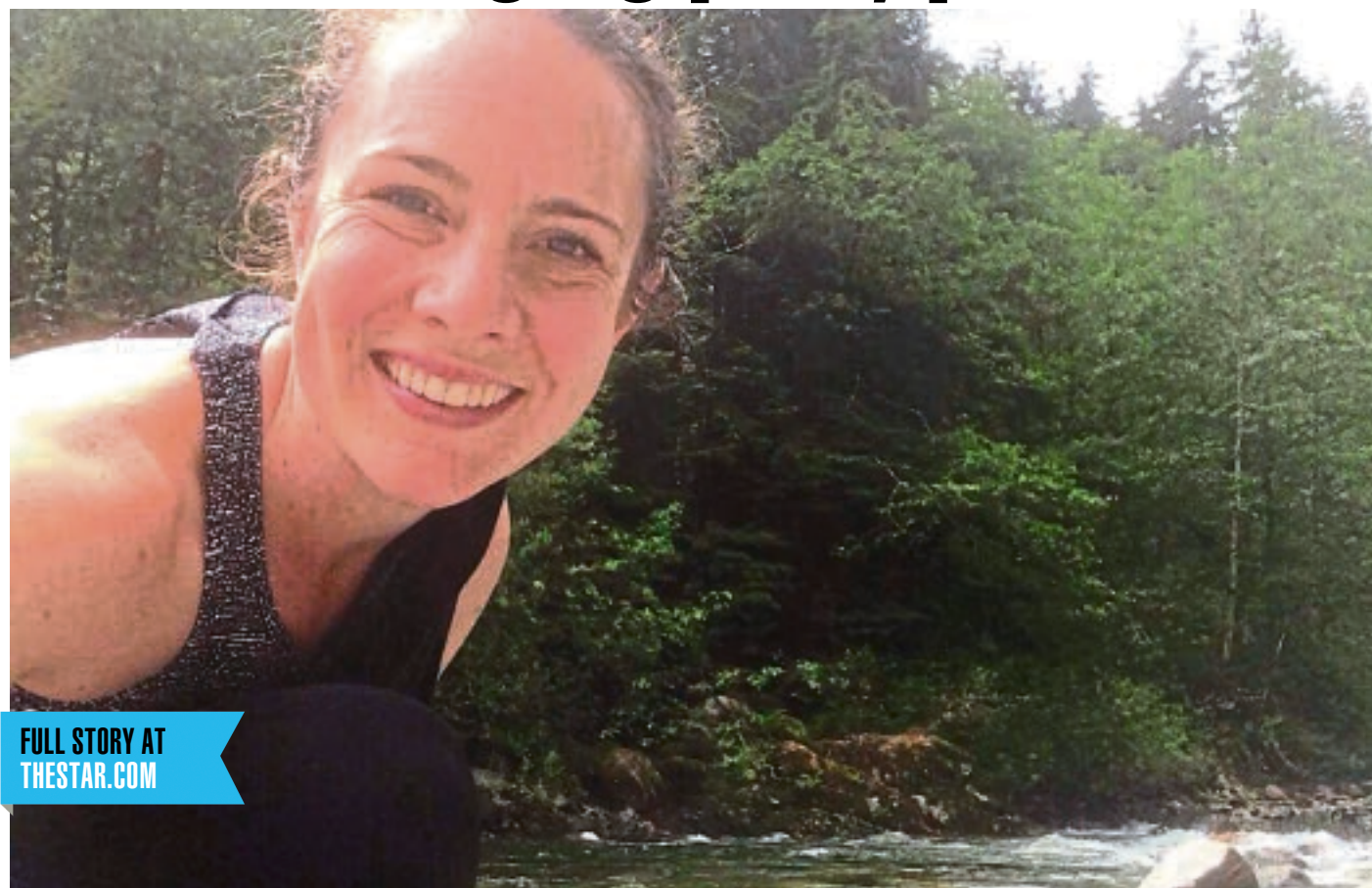
“I maxed out my affordable housing situation,” she said in an interview.

“I knew I would never own something, but was shook to realize that I might have to leave or live in poverty forever.”

MacKay had a rental which was geared to income, but she became ineligible after taking on another job. After being on a provincial housing wait-list for five years and desperately searching the rental market, MacKay said she was “heartbroken” at the prices which “rip communities apart.”

The vast majority of Metro Vancouver respondents said high housing prices are damaging the region as a whole. According to the Canada Mortgage Housing Corp., housing is considered affordable if it costs less than 30 per cent of household income.

Yet, owning a home in Vancouver



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Seron MacKay stops to take a selfie on her cross-Canada trip. The 36-year-old single mother moved away from Vancouver with her daughter because housing prices were just too high. MacKay said that she “maxed out” her affordable housing situation. SUBMITTED

is the most unaffordable it has ever been in any Canadian city, according to a recent report from the Royal Bank of Canada. Economists found the costs associated with condo ownership are more than 50 per cent of household income.

Meanwhile, two-thirds of Vancouverites now say that regardless of what the government does, housing won't become more affordable — though both regions felt more needed to be done. And it's renters who are feeling shut out from real estate.

“This is very much a tale of two cities,” said Shachi Kurl, report author and executive director of the Angus Reid Institute.

“In Metro Vancouver, the pain

“IN METRO VANCOUVER, THE PAIN AND MISERY CONTINUES.”

Report author Shachi Kurl

and misery continues with a sense of cynicism and hopelessness now attached. Those on the West Coast are not perceiving any relief and instead feeling resigned, whereas Torontonians are awakening to this pain.”

The study is a pain index which scores answers to housing and transportation questions based on the relative amount of pain each answer indicates.

Even a change in government did not ease the misery in Metro Vancouver. Despite a commitment from the NDP government on new speculation and vacancy taxes, the study found most people were equally dissatisfied with the government's response to housing in 2018 as they were in 2015, when the B.C. Liberals were in power.

But most residents in both

regions are open to a myriad of proposed solutions including new taxes, increased data collection and even a more “radical” approach limiting the number of homes that can be purchased by foreign buyers.

Though the issue of foreign ownership was more heightened for Toronto than three years ago, it is not at the top of mind as it is on the West Coast, Kurl said.

“There is a sense that communities have been given over to a speculative market, regardless of where it is coming from,” she said.

“The region is more viewed as a safe place to park money for the wealthy than it is a place to access the market and live.”

With files from Tessa Vikander