A City Divided

Together We Are Stronger

The City of Victoria was incorporated in 1862 and by 1901 had a population of nearly 30,000, while the District of Saanich, at the time of its incorporation in 1906, was an agricultural area confined to the Shelbourne valley with a population of only 6,000.

Today, Victoria is a city of 86,500 and Saanich has expanded to 115,000. Together with Oak Bay, Esquimalt and View Royal, the urban core has a combined population of a quarter of a million − roughly two-thirds of the nearly 400,000 living in the Capital Region District. (The remaining third is scattered among eight other municipalities and three electoral areas!) A merger of Saanich and Victoria would qualify our Capital City for the Big City Mayors' Caucus of the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, alongside smaller cities such as Regina, Saskatoon, Windsor, Longueuil and St. John's, which presently enjoy membership in this important and influential body that advocates for big city issues with the Federal Government.

Why does Victoria and Saanich together make sense?

"We were already living together; it just made sense to get married."
- Comment by a Councillor after the Abbotsford-Matsqui amalgamation

We already share venues located in each other's municipalities, such as the Royal and MacPherson theatres, Royal BC Museum, Conference Centre, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Save-on-Foods Arena and Royal Athletic Park in Victoria, and the UVic Farquhar Auditorium, Cedar Hill Arts Centre, Camosun College, Commonwealth Pool and Centennial Stadium in Saanich.

Events such as the Victoria Day Parade, Canada Day fireworks, Symphony Splash and Harbour Cats baseball held in Victoria, and the Strawberry Festival, Saanich Cycling Festival and Elk Lake regattas in Saanich, are enjoyed by all, regardless of where they live.

Both municipalities treasure their neighbourhoods and urban villages, e.g. Fernwood Square, Cook Street Village and James Bay in Victoria; Cadboro Bay, Broadmead and Cordova Bay in Saanich.

The University of Victoria is actually in Saanich and Oak Bay, the grounds of Victoria General Hospital in View Royal are partly in Saanich, and Royal Jubilee straddles the Victoria/Saanich border.

We enjoy each other's parkland and open spaces, including Victoria's Beacon Hill Park, Dallas Road waterfront and Fisherman's Wharf, and Saanich's Gyro Park, Swan Lake and Mount Douglas, while the CRD's Galloping Goose-Lochside trail threads through both municipalities.

We attend meetings, concerts, social events, schools and churches without giving a second thought as to whether they take place in Victoria or Saanich. Where we have our home is not necessarily where we work, shop, study, play or pray.

The Douglas corridor -- from Victoria's Downtown to Saanich's Uptown via Mayfair Mall -- is one continuous stretch of retail and business that imperceptibly crosses the municipal boundary and is regulated and planned by two autonomous Planning Departments.

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1

Finally, we all identify ourselves to outsiders as citizens of Victoria, the Provincial Capital of British Columbia. Likewise, visitors to the region believe they are in Victoria, even when staying with friends in Gordon Head or admiring the view from Mount Tolmie.

But how are Victoria and Saanich different?

Unlike Victoria, Saanich has a rural component, some of it in the Agricultural Land Reserve. The environment around Prospect Lake is obviously very different from downtown Victoria, but no more so than it is from Uptown and other busy parts of Saanich. All residents value this contrasting urban-rural mix.

Victoria experiences 'big city' problems of crime, homelessness, drug trafficking and anti-social behaviour because it is the 'downtown core' for the entire region. Saanich is more suburban, with no recognizable downtown of its own, although it does have homeless camping in its parks.

Despite its smaller population, Victoria has more police officers than Saanich, resulting in a higher percentage of its budget being spent on policing vis-à-vis Saanich. VicPD (which also polices Esquimalt) has one of the higher caseloads per officer in the Province.

Victoria and Saanich independently manage their own budgets, public works, engineering, transportation planning, planning and development, building inspection, protective services and emergency response plans with civic staff. This separateness sometimes leads to such anomalies as bus lanes abruptly ending on a main thoroughfare, speed limits changing for no visible reason, snow clearance stopping at a municipal boundary, uncoordinated emergency response plans, different regulations for buildings and businesses on adjoining commercial streets.

A road that runs along the boundary between the municipalities may have proper curbs (and a bike lane) on one side only. However, Saanich maintains about 600 km of paved road compared with only 260 km in Victoria.

Victoria residents, with proof of residency, can drop off garden waste at the Garbally Road yard. Residents of Saanich, even those in the Gorge area who live just a few blocks from Garbally Road, must travel to McKenzie Avenue to drop theirs off.

Minor, but nonsensical differences: street signs in Victoria are blue, in Saanich green; plastic bags are banned in Victoria, but not in Saanich; fire trucks in Victoria are painted yellow, in Saanich red; certain garden chemicals prohibited from sale in Victoria can be bought at stores in Saanich.

What could change if Victoria and Saanich amalgamated?

If we were to follow the examples of Saskatoon and Regina, which are cities of comparable size, we would elect one mayor at large plus 10 councillors representing specific wards, e.g. James Bay and Gordon Head. They would replace the present combined total of two mayors and 16 Councillors.

The mayor would represent a sufficiently large population that an application could be made for membership of the Big City Mayors' Caucus. It is very unfortunate that the Capital Region has never had access to this lobby group, simply because it is divided into 13 small municipalities.

Administrative departments would be consolidated under one city manager. Planning for land use, housing, industrial/retail parks, infrastructure renewal, arterial roads, sanitary/storm sewers, etc. would be fully integrated.

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2

Victoria and Saanich police departments would merge into one department. Since VicPD already serves Esquimalt, and Saanich has an agreement to assist Oak Bay police when needed, this could be the precursor to the creation of a regional police force.

With one paid fire department rather than two, and all 6 fire halls (three in each municipality) would be under one command; and specialized equipment would be deployed from the appropriate fire hall.

The costs of infrastructure projects, such as those for the Craigflower Bridge (borne by Saanich and View Royal) and the Johnson Street Bridge replacement (borne by Victoria) would be spread over a wider tax base.

The core region could have a stronger voice on the CRD Board, and in all its dealings with both the Provincial and Federal governments.

A renewed sense of civic identity and pride might replace the "us and them" attitude that so often hampers progress and cooperation in the Capital Region.

And what wouldn't change?

The character of our local communities, parks and urban villages would be unaffected by amalgamation. Local neighbourhood associations, which could have an even stronger and more influential voice under a ward system, would continue their efforts to protect local interests and community plans. Rural Saanich would remain rural, retaining the existing urban containment boundary.

Despite their budgets and administration becoming consolidated under the new council, local recreational centres would continue to provide the same activities and be open to all residents.

The CRD would still be responsible for regional services such as water supply, sewage treatment, regional parks and waste management (recycling and the Hartland landfill site).

BC Transit, Greater Victoria Public Library, and the CREST emergency communication system are all separate entities that would not be affected.

So what can I do?

- Question municipal candidates in the forthcoming 2018 elections about the proposed merger of Victoria and Saanich and seek their views on forming a Citizens' Assembly to study the matter.
- Lobby your MLA for provincial support.
- Support Amalgamation Yes at www.amalgamationyes.ca

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Capital Region Municipal Amalgamation Society, April 25, 2018

3

Facts and Figures (Note: Inconsistent reporting has negated some comparisons)

	Saanich	Victoria	Reference Notes
SIZE per BC Min of Municipal Affairs, & Housing			BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing, Schedule 201 http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/infra/municipal_stats/municipal_stats2016.htm
Population	114,148	85,792	As above
Size (ha)	11,178	1,956	As above
Taxable Land Area (ha)	6,481	1,148	As above
Parks (ha)	1,628	131	As above
Roads (km)	574	287	As above
Storm Sewer (km)	571	257	
Sanitary Sewer (km)	568	233	
Water Supply pipes (km)	547	331	
EXPENDITURES 2016 ($ millions) per Saanich Statements of Financial Information per Victoria Statements of Financial Information			Most recent available data: http://www.saanich.ca/assets/Local~Government/Documents/Saanich Stmt Fin Info 2016 Final.pdf pg 7 http://www.victoria.ca/assets/City~Hall/Documents/2016 SOFI.pdf, pg 6
General Government	16.9	19.5	As above
Protective Services	53.8	72.4	As above
Transportation	-	24.4	As above. Info. For Saanich unavailable due to inconsistent reporting
Engineering – Public Works – Waste Management	30.9		As above. Info. For Victoria unavailable due to inconsistent reporting
Parks & Recreation	39.8	29.4	
Planning	2.6	17.1	As above
Environmental – Public Health	-	7.9	As above. Info. For Saanich unavailable due to inconsistent reporting
Social Services – Housing	-	0.7	
Sewer & water utility	30.8	16.7	As above
Total	**174.8**	**188.1**	
REVENUES 2016 ($ millions)			
Property Taxes (all types)	112.5	126.1	As above
Grants in Lieu	2.3	5.9	As above
Revenue from Own Sources	11.5	2.8	As above
Sale of Services	19.6	48.8	As above
Sale of Water & Water Service Charges	21.2	19.7	As above
Government Transfers	1.7	9.9	As above
Sewer Use	17.6	-	As above. Info. For Victoria unavailable due to inconsistent reporting
Fines, Penalties		4.2	As above. Info. for Saanich unavailable due to inconsistent reporting
Grants & Contributions	8.6		As above. Info. For Victoria unavailable due to inconsistent reporting
Rentals & Leases		1.4	As above. Info.for Saanich unavailable due to inconsistent reporting
Development Cost Charges	4.2		As above. Info. for Victoria unavailable due to inconsistent reporting
Licences and Permits		5.2	As above. Info. for Saanich unavailable due to inconsistent reporting
Miscellaneous	1.0	7.9	As above
Total	**200.2**	**231.9**	
ASSESSED VALUES 2017 ($ billions) per BC Min. of Municipal Affairs & Housing)			Most recent available data, Schedule 701 **http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/infra/tax_rates/tax_rates2017.htm**
Tax Base:			
Residential	26.6	17.4	
Business	2.1	4.8	
Light Industrial	.022	0.68	
Heavy Industrial	0	0.11	

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4