

## Submission to Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, Budget 2021 Consultation

From: Amalgamation Yes, Victoria, BC

June 25, 2020

*Amalgamation Yes is a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to bringing about governance reform for municipalities in the Capital Region District (CRD)*

The Province of BC has constitutional responsibility for the well being of its residents. The *Community Charter* delegates responsibility to local government for the delivery of a wide range of community services, such as water, waste and recycling collection, roads, parks, public safety, etc. However, the Province still retains a vested interest as to how well these obligations are delivered at the local and regional level.

The Greater Victoria area serves as both the Provincial Capital and gateway to Vancouver Island, and generates special expectations as to how well it performs in relation to the social and economic expectations of the Province. In the case of the Capital Region District, with 13 separate municipalities, the quality of those service depends on how well they co-operate.

Currently the Province has, in various ways, expressed its concerns about the failure of these municipalities to achieve some of their shared expectations. These include:

- [ General efficiency of local government and effective service delivery at reasonable costs, particularly as reflected in the escalation of general levels of taxation
- [ Increasing costs of local governments and salaries paid to municipal officials and staff, which create competitive pressure for provincial agencies
- [ Mobility, in the context of urban traffic and the negative economic and environmental effects of congestion on regional and provincial travel patterns, and access links to airports, ferries that constrict flow of goods and tourists
- [ Frustration over the slow response to the housing crisis, particularly the shortage of social housing and market supply
- [ Failure of regional economic planning to stimulate and facilitate business investment and employment, and provide space and service for commercial and technical business opportunities.

- [ Growing awareness of consequences of natural events and disasters, e.g. earthquakes, fires, floods or health pandemics that do not recognize municipal boundaries. The need for a co-ordinated response to mitigate the impacts of climate change have reinforced the recognition of that reality and the need for readiness response to emergencies.
- [ Failure to acknowledge the reality of the modern world requires new policy approaches necessary to respond to international and technology crime. Currently criminals live in one location, commit crimes in another, and live in yet another.

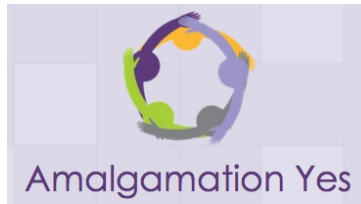
In much of the Province the Regional District model works well as means to plan and deliver local services, particularly water supply, sewerage treatment and landfill – all best organized and financed at regional scale. And it provides a means to organize and fund services to residents of unorganized rural areas and small communities.

The majority of BC regions have one large community of 30,000 - 80,000 residents, with the remainder of residents of smaller towns and villages spread throughout the region. These are examples of how the Regional District model works well. In such cases the largest community serves as the regional centre for hospitals, colleges, airports, etc. (e.g. Kelowna, Cranbrook, Kamloops, Nanaimo)

## **Current Situation in Greater Victoria Area**

The Capital Region (CRD), and the Lower Mainland, are polycentric, with 95% of the urban population clustered with common municipal boundaries and bulk of the region as rural forest or farmland. The CRD urban cluster is distributed between 13 municipalities (9 with populations of 15,000 – 35,000, two with under 5,000, and two with 92,000 and 120,000 respectively). All members of the CRD Board are appointed by their respective councils, but first elected as municipal officials. So there is no local leader who speaks for the region. The Mayor of Victoria represents only 92,000 of the 400,000 regional residents.

The strength and weakness of the Regional District model is that the regional authority can only expand its mandate and assume leadership and responsibility for service delivery with consent of each municipal council. But each member municipality also has veto power, and in that sense localism triumphs over matters of common regional importance and Provincial interests are not dealt with. In the CRD case, 13 is too many.



## Attempts at Reform

The results of the 2014 non binding referendum in 7 municipalities confirmed strong public support (75%) for a review of municipal governance, but municipal leaders simply ignored this advice from the electorate. Also, a 2014 Angus Reid poll reported 84% in favour of governance review. It was only after a repeated expression of voter support in the 2018 election that Councils for Victoria and Saanich agreed to jointly proceed with a Citizens' Assembly (CA) process.

Concurrently, in 2017 the Province initiated its own review. The release of the Capital Integrated Services and Governance Initiative (CISGI) report documented the morass of Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) arrangements, about half via the CRD and another as inter-municipal only. This confirmed that instead of actual co-ordination and formal integrated service delivery agreements, the region is dependent on 400 informal arrangements – a complex, tedious and voluntary process with no public accountability. While the CISGI report provided a useful catalogue of possibilities, it fell short of identifying priorities and any recommendation to rectify the situation when separate municipal jurisdictions simply refuse to cooperate on what are obvious instances where a joint regional approach would be more effective and efficient.

## Evidence of failures within the Capital Region

As currently structured, the regional model does not meet Provincial objectives for integrated transportation, rationale land use, co-ordinated emergency service delivery, climate change mitigation, economic development, and particularly to facilitate housing supply.

There is ample evidence that elected municipal leaders in the Capital Region have NOT been able to develop cohesive voice in critical matters. In the past three years, the Province has had to intervene and lead the planning process and identify policies and priorities for action to resolve local political impasses over such critical issues as:

- [ sewerage treatment
- [ the Mckenzie overpass
- [ the South Island Transportation Plan (pending)

These actions by the Province confirm that the Regional District model is not working well and some reform is necessary. Other instances include:

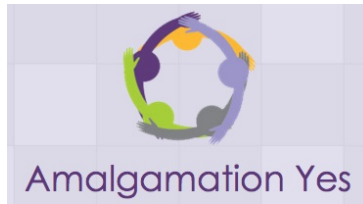
- [ Daily evidence of serious transportation issues that restrict not only daily commuter traffic within the city, but also hampers public, commercial and tourist access to ferries, airport, etc. The parochial municipal members of the CRD Board have defeated attempts to provide leadership for transportation planning.
- [ Several municipalities refuse to accept responsibility to add to housing supply and particularly social housing.
- [ In the Region there are 7 police chiefs and at least 15 fire chiefs. Progress was being made toward co-ordination of a CRD regional emergency dispatch, but several municipalities refused to participate.
- [ There are 7 separate recreation departments, and funding responsibility for regional arts centres is mainly the burden of the City of Victoria.

## Possible Solutions and Recommendations

We urge the Committee include in its report:

1. Assert that Provincial social and economic interests and strategic objectives for Vancouver Island require municipal reform of the regional/municipal model and recommend Provincial leadership in support of policy and institutional changes:
  - [ CRD Board with members elected as regional representatives
  - [ expand the mandate of regional service delivery to include emergency dispatch, policing and transportation planning
2. Confirm that Provincial funding in Ministry of Community Affairs is adequate to facilitate initiatives in support of municipal reform specifically to:
  - [ ensure funding is available to support the Citizen Assembly process for Victoria and Saanich
  - [ provide municipal restructuring grants

It is notable that implementation of the above would not require dramatic amendments to the *Community Charter* nor forced amalgamations. It would only require an amendment to the Letters Patent of the CRD to add service delivery functions to the required mandate, and minor legislative change to amend the voting structure of the Board.



For confirmation of successful alternative arrangements, we refer you to the Waterloo Regional Municipality of Ontario and its roles and responsibilities. This region of approximately 600,000 includes the three separate cities of Waterloo, Kitchener and Cambridge, each with an urban downtown and municipal council. The Waterloo Regional Board has a directly elected Chair and regional councilors, along with a provision for membership of the mayors. The Region is responsible for police services, public transit, water supply, landfill, transportation, etc.

Most notable is that in 2019 this region commenced operation of a regional light rapid transit system that connects the downtowns, hospitals and universities, among other destinations. A remarkable achievement for such small city.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Anderson, Chair

Amalgamation Yes  
250.477.8255

[anderson.jd@shaw.ca](mailto:anderson.jd@shaw.ca)

[amalgamateyes@gmail.com](mailto:amalgamateyes@gmail.com)

[www.amalgamationyes.ca](http://www.amalgamationyes.ca)