

From: Lesley Ewing [REDACTED]
Sent: June-14-15 6:44 PM
To: Oak Bay Council
Subject: Provincially-funded governance review

Dear Mayor and Council,

You will soon be debating a motion to join most other Greater Victoria municipalities in a Provincially-led and funded governance review of the region. And while it's true that only 4 out of 10 Oak Bay voters endorsed the non-binding question on the November municipal ballot, it was also true it was a question that drew scorn from local media editorials and columnists as "*an ill-disguised attempt at sabotaging the result*"¹ "*the most negatively phrased question*"² and "*guaranteed to elicit a negative response*"³ Despite the flawed question, a significant number voted Yes. What results might have been achieved had the question been phrased to ask residents if they favoured a governance review?

Unlike the independent audits undertaken by the Provincial and Federal Auditors-General, BC municipalities currently have no effective functional oversight body that reports to citizens on an annual basis. Sure, municipalities have their financial reports audited, but that amounts to little more than making sure the numbers add up, a year after the fact.

Participating in the governance study would provide relevant, unbiased information about service and program delivery. Why wouldn't Council want information made available to the public that might point to potential improvements and efficiencies? Is this the best that can be done for our community? (And by the way, here's a 5.1% property tax increase, and have a nice day.)

It's said that information gaps are filled with speculation, and it's a slippery slope to an opaque government when residents are prevented from having oversight information.

Regardless, a regional governance review is imminent, and Oak Bay runs the risk of being excluded if Council doesn't endorse participation. We are geographically, socially and economically linked to the region, not an island unto ourselves, and there are negative implications if Council chooses a path of isolation from our municipal neighbours. We implore Council not to shut your eyes and ears to this opportunity.

It's critical to understand that this the most important regional study ever undertaken in Greater Victoria. It will form the basis for how our region might be shaped in the years ahead, and those residents will be active participants. They will then have the chance to demonstrate their democratic choice for status quo or change, in a future binding referendum. We'd like to have that chance too.

Thank you,

Lesley Ewing

3041 Westdowne Rd.

¹Jack Knox column, Times Colonist, Nov. 16, 2014

²Les Leyne column, Times Colonist, Nov. 18, 2014

³Times Colonist Editorial, Feb. 26, 2015

Maura Jones

From: James Murtagh [REDACTED]
Sent: June-16-15 10:05 PM
To: Oak Bay Council
Subject: Oak Bay's Participation in Amalgamation Study

I am writing to express support for Councillor Murdock's recent motion that Oak Bay seek to be involved in any study regarding amalgamation of Greater Victoria's numerous municipalities.

While I am not an amalgamation enthusiast I've spent most of my working life planning, implementing and/or overseeing health care amalgamation efforts in two provinces. The argument in favour of involvement hinges on three simple realities:

1. It is clear that a noteworthy proportion of Greater Victoria's voting population is receptive to the possibility of amalgamation. Given the ultimate decision will rest with those same voters it seems fair to conclude the balance of probabilities has tipped, to some degree, in favour of amalgamation in our neighboring municipalities.
2. It is far simpler to make a compelling case for amalgamation than it is to present a nuanced assessment of its feasibility and benefits. Consider, for example, policing. In 2013 the core geographic communities (Esquimalt, Oak Bay, Saanich and Victoria) spent \$79 million to police 228,000 people. Burnaby, with the same number of criminal code offences and the same crime rate, spent \$48 million to police 235,000 people. The point here is that in the absence of challenging voices at the table the study could easily suggest truly massive financial savings. A superficial amalgamation study and a receptive voting population is a recipe for an ill-informed pursuit of amalgamation.
3. It is hard to envision any useful amalgamation study that would not offer a vision for the restructuring of municipal services. After all, the central argument for amalgamation revolves around efficiency and this argument can only be validated by offering an alternate to the status quo and showing, or purporting to show, the cost difference. Whether Oak Bay remains independent or at some point chooses to join the amalgamation movement, it will be impacted by any restructuring of municipal services in neighboring communities. If we remain independent we will likely be a purchaser of services (e.g., much as we currently purchase some policing services from Saanich) from a monopoly provider and it is in our interest to influence the restructuring and push for the creation of efficient service delivery models. Similarly, since we cannot absolutely preclude the possibility there will be a time in the future where Oak Bay might seek to join a larger municipality it is in our interest to push for responsive and equitable service delivery models. No one should think that late arrivals to the amalgamation discussion will have any influence over these matters.

Others may suggest we play no role in the amalgamation study or that we wait for an invitation and/or greater clarity concerning the nature of the study. With regard to not participating in the study, this is an entirely safe option provided one is confident amalgamation will not occur on a consequential scale or, if it does, that Oak Bay will not be adversely impacted by its absence from the table. Neither is a safe assumption. As for waiting for an invitation, nothing is impossible but I would be very surprised if any such invitation were forthcoming. The Province has clearly demonstrated it intends to be a relatively passive facilitator in this process. Currently it is awaiting written commitments from interested communities. Oak Bay Council has touted its opposition to amalgamation and that position was seemingly endorsed in the response of Oak Bay voters to the ballot question. The Minister will almost certainly be happy to leave the burden of defying voters on the shoulders of Council. Finally, as for waiting for clarity re the study...the whole purpose of involvement is to shape the study and study process. Waiting for clarity is the same as disengaging.

I believe the probability of amalgamation has risen; making the case necessary to 'seal the deal' is simple but the likelihood the case proves invalid is high; and, Oak Bay will be impacted by the decisions of its neighbors. Active involvement in the amalgamation study is the only prudent course of action and I hope that if and when Councillor Murdock's motion comes before Council again it will be approved.

James Murtagh
Oak Bay