



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: (Sept 23, 2020)

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## **Amalgamation Yes calls for an immediate response to the intractable and insular municipal relationships and the need to streamline emergency response**

Once again senior and elected officials have demonstrated intransigence to address the need for integrated regional approach for emergency services.

Four urban core municipalities have failed to agree on the terms of condition for renewal of mutual aid agreements that provide joint response to fires and emergencies.

Commentary from two mayors suggest it is others who are to blame. Esquimalt Mayor Desjardins failed to mention Esquimalt receives over \$10 million of Government of Canada Payment In Lieu of Taxes funds for CFB Esquimalt (for which it provides no services) and is very able to fund shared services. And in the spirit of local inter-municipal unco-operation, Esquimalt contracted fire dispatch with Surrey.

At same time Victoria reneged on its announced commitment in 2018 to join with Saanich fire dispatch and instead signed up with Langford.

Victoria has determined the renewal agreement for mutual exchange of services should now include provision for cost recovery.

Only Victoria and Saanich fire/rescue forces are funded with professional firefighters and specialized equipment necessary for large or multiple emergencies. Most of the other fire departments in the Capital Region District (CRD) have limited resources and use volunteer firefighters for core services and generally provide only first response to incidents needing additional support. Requiring payment for extra services is a necessary evolution of these co-operative arrangements.

The issue relates to the excessively complex emergency service arrangements across the region. There are 5 police departments and 19 fire departments, each with their own chief and edifice buildings. At the front end, to provide emergency dispatch there is one regional 9-1-1 and police emergency dispatch, but four separate fire dispatch centres. This includes 5 local municipal councils that contract with Surrey for that service. Then there is Capital Region Emergency Service Telecommunications (CREST) network, and a separate ambulance service.

Adding to the cost burden, there have been several major and expensive public work projects to build new fire halls, each bigger and better than the neighbouring municipality. Often the location of these new buildings bears no relationship to actual regional growth patterns.

Each of these agencies, facilities and parking lots of expensive vehicles are staffed with officials who jealously guard their turf, with Councils who support this triumph of localism over regionalism. Former Esquimalt Mayor Darwin Robinson lamented the inability of Esquimalt and View Royal to share the purchase of a ladder truck because agreement could not be reached on which municipality would take physical custody of the truck.

It is time to recognize that emergencies do NOT respect or recognize municipal boundaries.

First, we call for action by the Provincial Fire Commissioner to provide leadership to order the parties to find common ground and extend this framework to regional context.

Second, the CRD Board rescind their previous decision to defer review of the addition of fire dispatch services to the new regional 9-1-1 and police dispatch centre. And that over time all fire departments in the region be added to the roster.

And finally, at the same time the Province and the CRD Board must recognize that emergencies are not local events, but require a multi-agency response by fire, rescue, police, ambulance, traffic, and that current arrangements to fund and deliver emergency services requires significant reform.

It is no longer appropriate to organize emergency response on such a segmented basis. And central to that is recognition of the need for regional policing.

This public dispute is further evidence of the need to acknowledge the advantages of possible merger of Saanich and Victoria to represent the interests of at least half the residents of Greater Victoria. These residents pay the bill anyway. It confirms the need for the Province to co-fund and initiate the voter-approved Victoria – Saanich Citizens Assembly process. That independent review of the current state of municipal governance would include a review of emergency services and their budgets.

Amalgamation Yes advocates for a comprehensive governance study in Greater Victoria to fulfill the mandate provided by the electorate in 2014, and promised by the NDP government in 2017.

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