

Victoria councillors need to rein in tasks, skip big pay raise, says Chamber of Commerce

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Catherine Holt, CEO of the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce
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Victoria city councillors need to rein in their responsibilities rather than seek full-time pay for what should be a part-time job, says the chief executive officer of the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce.

Catherine Holt said Friday that if city councillors find they're working up to 60 hours a week they have nobody to blame but themselves.

"They have expanded their responsibilities, expanded their engagement, expanded their role, expanded their meetings, expanded their issues, expanded everything — on their own volition," she said.

"So now they have a very demanding job. They made it that way. They need to fix it. It's not about becoming a full-time, fully paid employee of the city. That's not the solution."

Holt was responding to an online budget survey that asks whether taxpayers would support raising councillors' salary and benefits by more than 50% to \$70,100 a year — the same as the median income of a city employee, excluding police and fire.

Coun. Ben Isitt, who proposed linking councillors' pay to that of city employees, told the Times Colonist this week that the time demands on councillors are increasing to anywhere from 40 to 60 hours a week.

"And, unlike other municipalities in the region, you can't have an ordinary job and be a council member [in Victoria]," he said. "This week, we have three days of meetings and that's very regular."

But Holt said it's a "completely false comparison" to suggest that councillors should receive the same pay as a city employee.

"They are not city employees," she said.

"They are the elected representatives of the citizens that are there on a part-time basis to oversee the staff and make sure they are doing what the citizens of the city want them to do. That is a part-time responsibility.

"Nobody has ever said to me the significant problem with the city that needs to be fixed is that we need to pay councillors more and have them do more."

Holt expressed concern that if Victoria councillors get full-time pay, other councillors in the region will expect the same.

"If one municipality decides this is a full-time job for 70 grand, where does that go for the other [12]?" she said.

On the other hand, a substantial pay raise might be in order if all the municipal councils in the region were merged into one government, she said.

“If you put all 13 mayors’ salaries into one, if you put all the councillors’ salaries across all 13 municipalities into one set of councillors, we could pay everyone quite handsomely for being the mayor and council of a region of 350,000 people and still save ourselves quite a bit of money.”

People have until Nov. 24 to complete Victoria’s online budget survey at victoria.ca. They can also take part in a Budget Town Hall meeting at city hall on Nov. 21, beginning at 6:30 p.m., during which they can provide comments in person, online, by telephone or by way of social media.

As well, people can provide feedback by sending an email to engage@victoria.ca with “Feedback on the Draft 202 Budget” in the subject line.

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