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## YOUR VIEW

# Amalgamation with Victoria: a tale of two cities or one?

Saanich residents may have noticed the March 1 report on the next steps for our Citizen's Assembly (CA). As directed in the ballot question of October 2018, this will be to explore the costs, benefits and disadvantages of the possible amalgamation of the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria.

The report lays out next steps. These include making a funding application to the province, securing consultants' help to undertake this process, and confirms the number of participants and its format. With emails and calls from residents I thought an update might be helpful.

Council reaffirmed its commitment of \$250,000. This is in line with our initial budget of \$250,000 each from Saanich and Victoria. The same will be requested from the province for a total of \$750,000. The budget estimate is \$720-820,000. Council directed staff to present this budget to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and request funding for at least one-third.

Upon provincial approval, staff will prepare a request for proposals (RFP) to seek a consultant for the CA process, a second RFP for consultant services to prepare the technical analysis to describe the costs, benefits and disadvantages of such an amalgamation. Staff were also directed to work with the consultant to develop a terms of reference for an oversight committee on the Citizens Assembly, to facilitate an arms-length outcome.

While COVID has seen the rise of virtual meeting formats, council mandated in-person participation. The number of participants is set at 48. These maintain a "best practice" approach. On a population basis these realize participation of some 21 Victoria residents and 27 from Saanich. Costs for per diem travel, day care and options for honorariums were approved.

With the above in place, it is expected the Citizens Assembly will start in the fall and take some six months to report back to the

Victoria and Saanich councils.

Some key questions from residents have included Q: Is this study for regional amalgamation? A: No, just Saanich and Victoria. Q: How do I participate? A: The consultant will undertake a random selection of 48 residents. Q: Will this be COVID safe? A: The CA takes place after the COVID vaccination program is complete. Q: Is there a risk of losing green space, farms, the Urban Containment Boundary and our municipal investment savings? A: Hard to know. A review of such risks will presumably be presented in the technical analysis. Q: Do the residents of Saanich get a say? A: Yes, I believe so. Recommendations from the CA are non-binding on council. However, before the province would approve an amalgamation of Saanich and Victoria into one city, I believe a referendum would be required to hear from Saanich voters.

**Fred Haynes**  
Saanich Mayor