

RESPONDING TO VICTORIA COUNCILLOR ISITT'S 3 REASONS FOR VOTING AGAINST CREATING A CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY FOR SAANICH - VICTORIA

1. WE CAN'T AFFORD A MEGACITY

What is a mega city (megalopolis)? The Oxford Dictionary defines it as having a population of over 10 million people. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as:

"A very large city; a thickly populated region centering in a metropolis or embracing several metropolises"

The M-W dictionary provided examples of Shanghai (23.4 million), Beijing, and Guangzhou-Foshan (20.6 million) in middle-income China. The remaining top 10 megacities of Jakarta, Delhi, Manila, and Karachi (22.1 million) are low income. Other megacities are Cairo, Sao Paulo, Rio and Mexico City.

By Councillor Isitt's definition, if Saanich and Victoria merged to a combined population of 200,000, it would be a size similar to Regina (pop. 215,106) and Saskatoon (pop. 246,376). Both the latter cities are larger than a potential merged Saanich-Victoria. In any case, not a megacity.

And where is the Councillor's evidence of *"taxes going up, rather than down"* under amalgamation? It's easy to posit the words and post them on Facebook, but where is the research?

And regardless of amalgamation, have either Victoria or Saanich municipal taxes ever gone down? So could it be worthwhile to study possible efficiencies?

2. THIS IS AN AMAZING PLACE! WHY MESS WITH A GOOD THING?

Councillor Isitt is correct when he says we have a beautiful natural environment -- the mild climate, the ocean and beaches that surround us, the mountain vistas and nature's landscape. But local governance structure did not create this. Even the watershed, originally administered by the Greater Victoria Water District and later turned over to the CRD, is a natural watershed phenomena and not a creation of local government. The CRD simply own the lands on our behalf.

Councillor Isitt's also stated:

"Canada has 3,500 municipal governments? Should we amalgamation them all into one? Why not?"

Councillor Isitt, PhD, could have researched the facts. The **Canadian Federation of Municipalities**, has 2,000 members representing over 90% of municipal populations, so

Councillor Isitt's comment was not only erroneous, but was also ludicrous to suggest (even tongue in cheek) that if Victoria and Saanich studied the pros and cons of merging, that this would lead to amalgamating all Canadian municipalities into one. This is a ridiculous statement.

Councillor Isitt proposes that emergency services could be amalgamated. Let's talk about police services first. VicPD polices Victoria and Esquimalt under a 10-year agreement, wherein Victoria pays 85% and Esquimalt 15% of Vic PDs budget. How would Councillor Isitt provide civilian oversight and budgeting to an amalgamated police force? This year, VicPD requested 6 more officers to deal with the opioid crisis (and to deal with mental health & homeless issues), plus 2 civilian staff. Esquimalt refused to pay their share, resulting in Victoria approving their share and the balance going to the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General for arbitration. And what would be the composition of an amalgamated Police Board. We already have two Mayors Lisa Helps and Barb Desjardins co-chairing the Police Board, would we just keep adding Mayors to the mix?

Imagine trying to manage three, four or more municipalities separately funding VicPD (or a regional police service). Could it be turned over to the unaccountable, unelected CRD Board? (Only 3 directors from the rural unorganized areas are directly elected to the Board; the rest are appointed to represent their home municipality, not the region. The CRD has no taxation authority within municipalities. Municipalities that use CRD services authorize the CRD to provide them; the Municipalities then collect the taxes to pay for those services and give the money to the CRD via an annual requisition (i.e. invoice for services). Provincial legislation would require amendments in order to give the CRD taxation powers and, due to the long established *no taxation without representation principle*, the CRD Board would need to be elected by the voters within the borders of an amalgamated police force.

Has Councillor Isitt advocated for these Provincial legislative amendments to the *Local Government Act*, the *Community Charter* and the *Police Act* at either the CRD Board, or directly with the Provincial Government?

With regards to firefighting, regional leaders cannot cooperate to create a regional fire dispatch. Victoria and Saanich reached an agreement in principal on October 27, 2017 for a joint dispatch that seems to have fallen apart when Colwood, View Royal, Esquimalt, Sidney and North Saanich announced they are moving fire dispatch services from Saanich to Surrey - a wonderful display of regional cooperation! Imagine the confusion when an earthquake strikes, with up to four separate fire dispatch centres involved.

3. WE NEED MORE DEMOCRACY RATHER THAN LESS

Councillor Isitt, where is the evidence that democratic rights would be lost? Both councils have an ongoing policy of listening to neighbours when development applications come before them. And despite the protests of neighbours, both councils frequently approve such applications in order to create more housing. In Vancouver, the largest municipality in BC, council procedures allow for the same public input. Councillor Isitt, how would a possible merger of Victoria and Saanich impact individual rights? Greater Victoria has low voter participation in municipal elections (average 34%, with a low of 19%). Does this sound like an engaged community where local democracy is thriving?

- Colin Nielsen, June 30, 2018