

Councillor moves to get Esquimalt pushing service integration at UBCM convention

Esquimalt Coun. Beth Burton-Krahn is hoping to keep alive options for capital region municipalities to further integrate services when local government representatives meet in Vancouver this month.

Burton-Krahn has brought a notice of motion to Esquimalt council calling for an Esquimalt delegation to meet newly minted Community Minister Selina Robinson during the upcoming Union of B.C. Municipalities convention in Vancouver. The idea will be debated by Esquimalt councillors at their next regular council meeting.

With a new minister in place since the NDP came to power, it's important that local governments try to get some face time with Robinson, she said.

"We would be looking at just letting her know that as a township we are actively looking at other areas of further service integration between ourselves and our municipal neighbours," Burton-Krahn said.

Burton-Krahn's notice of motion comes on the heels of the release of a \$95,000 review of local municipal services commissioned by the former B.C. Liberal government.

That report outlined both how the 13 municipalities in the Capital Regional District are working together and ways that they aren't.

Its recommendations include creating a "leaders forum" to discuss integration, using a standardized workbook to review potential service-sharing, and continuing initiatives that have been started, such as a shared 911 dispatch centre and South Island Prosperity Project. But it also noted

that improved co-operation is needed in other areas, such as transportation and policing.

It did not review amalgamation as an option, but notes some of the information gathered could be used to inform future discussions of amalgamation.

In the last municipal election, 75 per cent of voters in eight of the 13 municipalities in the CRD said they supported a study of some form of amalgamation.

In Esquimalt, two questions were asked:

1. Are you in favour of the Township of Esquimalt exploring options to achieve efficiencies by further sharing some services with other municipalities?

Results: Yes 3,731, No 578; 87 per cent yes

2. Are you in favour of exploring the reduction of the number of municipalities within Greater Victoria through amalgamation?

Results: Yes 2,905, No 1,404; 67 per cent yes

Burton-Krahn said there seems to be “a lot of unfortunate misinformation that if you are not interested in amalgamation that you are somehow holding ‘the status quo,’ which implies no evolution, no movement, no process.

“That’s unfortunate because it’s actually quite the opposite.”

Both Mayor Barb Desjardins and Burton-Krahn acknowledge that meetings with provincial ministers during the UBCM convention are generally seen as an opportunity for local government officials from areas outside Greater Victoria and Greater Vancouver who don’t have the same access that proximity affords other local councils.