

Editorial: Doing a referendum right

When Victoria and Saanich councils meet Tuesday in a special meeting to discuss a referendum question on amalgamation, they will have two examples before them of how to conduct a referendum.

In Duncan and North Cowichan, residents are voting today on whether to amalgamate the two communities. Regardless of the outcome, those municipalities are doing it right.

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Meanwhile, with the launch of B.C.'s electoral-reform referendum campaign a little more than a week away, confusion still reigns. The province's handling of the issue, so far, has been clumsy and murky.

The people of the Cowichan Valley are voting on a question formulated by a group of 36 citizens selected by lottery. Costs and other impacts of amalgamation have been researched. Will your taxes go up or down? How will policing and fire protection be affected? That information has been readily available as voters ponder their choices.

In contrast, B.C.'s electoral-reform referendum was designed by the government in power. Public consultation included an internet-based survey with questions that appeared designed to favour changing the way we vote. Rules on funding the campaign have yet to be released.

The mayors of Victoria and Saanich have proposed a referendum that would ask voters if they favour establishing a citizens' assembly to explore amalgamation, much like the one formed in the Cowichan Valley. That would keep the process at arm's length from the politicians, and would provide the research needed to help voters make an informed choice.

Regardless of how they vote, our neighbours to the north are going about it

the right way, in a straightforward process largely free of political taint.
Victoria and Saanich — and the province — could learn a lot from them.

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