

March 6, 2019

To: Fred Haynes, Judy Brownoff, Colin Plant Rebecca Mersereau
cc: Saanich CAO, Saanich Council

Re: Draft Saanich Terms of Reference

Good evening Saanich Citizens' Assembly Standing Committee members,

Our Board has reviewed the Draft Saanich Terms of Reference from the Saanich Citizens' Assembly Standing Committee and we are very encouraged to see that it honours the voice of your citizens with this 'unprecedented opportunity to explore the future of Victoria and Saanich.

It is evident that you are 'walking the walk' with respect to your number one guiding principle of openness and transparency at this very early stage. Thank you.

We understand that the document is still a work in progress and it is our hope that our input will help you in your continued deliberation.

We would like to draw your attention to the following sections where we have suggested changes:

3.4

"List issues, recommendations and next steps for addressing identified issues with regard to the implementation and the merger of the municipalities should the CA recommend amalgamation."

3.17

"If full amalgamation of Victoria and Saanich is recommended by the Assembly, commentary and recommendations from the Assembly on the merger of full municipal operations (both in the short and longer term) is expected as part of the assembly's mandate."

5.0

We are pleased to see concrete beginning and end dates. However, this clause may be too prescriptive. We suggest that there be leeway allowed for the facilitator/chair to adjust the meeting schedule. According to our research, an appropriate expectation would be a minimum of six meetings with a maximum of eight.

7.3

We see this section as potentially problematic. A general mail-out does not provide a randomizing filter for the selection of a proportionate number of households in each community. Based on research, we know that higher income, better educated residents are more likely to volunteer, and so will have a higher likelihood of being selected in the final draw. This design choice might skew the balance of the assembly. Including business owners is also problematic; it would double many business owners' chances of being asked to participate on the Assembly.

We suggest creating a different mechanism for business interests to make their concerns heard, such as through a special business roundtable on amalgamation. Lastly, the decision to mail all households and businesses will be prohibitively expensive and will exceed the entirety of the project's \$250,000

budget. We believe that once a facilitator has been selected that these details should be determined.

Based on our research and information provided at our public forum hosted in the Spring of 2018, 96 would likely be far too many people. A group of less than 50 provides a forum size that can sustain good relationships and afford everyone a chance to be heard in plenary. Managing a 96-member assembly would require a full time secretariat and member relations coordinator and again be a major cost driver. It could also force the assembly to vote on the outcome, rather than achieve consensus through dialogue. We recommend that the Citizens' Assembly be about half the size proposed. A smaller group would also reflect the modest budget.

8.4

We view the idea of following Robert's Rules as a potential hindrance to effective dialogue and discussion. Robert's Rules are not particularly useful for building consensus and they are impractical to implement in a deliberative exercise, much less one with 96 people (or, if our previous recommendations are followed, even a group of 48). Robert's Rules do not encourage discussion nor an atmosphere of collegiality and brainstorming. This is particularly true as many citizens are not well versed in Robert's Rules, and as such, the structure would likely discourage their input and their thoughtfulness. Importantly, it gives an unfair edge to those familiar with rules, and can be used as a tool by such people to shut down others or steer the outcome in a particular direction.

We suggest that the rules or control of meetings be simple, flexible, and set by the facilitator/chair.

General:

As with any large scale facilitation, it is important that roles and responsibilities are clarified at the outset (e.g. Who is the 'Chair'? Who is the 'CA Team' etc.).

While we are sure that the experiences of other municipalities has been a core influence in your progress thus far, it may be useful to explicitly and formally request feedback from the former members of the Duncan North Cowichan experience to glean wisdom from their lessons learned, given the recency of their experience. Al Siebring is the current Mayor of North Cowichan and Michelle Staples is the current Mayor of Duncan.

For your consideration, and submitted with sincere respect,

Shellie Gudgeon,
Chair,
Amalgamation Yes