



## The Corporation of the District of Saanich

# Report

**To:** Council

**From:** Mayor Richard Atwell (Saanich) and Mayor Lisa Helps (Victoria)

**Date:** April 18, 2018

**Subject:** Mayors' Joint Report on Citizens' Assembly

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### RECOMMENDATION

That Saanich and Victoria hold a joint Committee of the Whole meeting to determine which question both local governments will place on the October 20, 2018 municipal election ballot in order to receive elector ascent to explore the costs and benefits of the amalgamation between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria.

### INTRODUCTION

On January 8, 2018, Saanich Council passed the following motion:

"That Council call on the Province of British Columbia to establish and fund a Citizens' Assembly on amalgamation with interested municipalities."

On January 11, 2018, Victoria Council reciprocated and passed the same motion.

Responding to the direction from our respective councils, we (Mayor Atwell and Mayor Helps) co-signed and addressed a letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Hon. Selena Robinson (Attachment A).

We received a letter in response from the Minister inviting us to meet with her staff to learn more about the process for exploring amalgamation between our two communities (Attachment B).

On April 11, 2018 this meeting took place with ministry staff to gather information about what steps both Saanich and Victoria Councils could take should we collectively wish to spend time and resources to study the costs and benefits of amalgamation between our two municipalities.

The key advice received from Ministry staff was as follows:

- The process from start to finish must be thorough and objective
- Public engagement is key throughout the process
- It is the role of local government in partnership and with reliance on experienced consultants to design, host and steward the process
- An independent technical analysis should be performed in tandem to analyze the costs and benefits

## NEXT STEPS

Should each council wish to place a non-binding referendum question on its municipal ballot, the next steps would likely be as follows:

1. To ensure there is a mandate from our citizens to undertake this work, develop a clear, concise and identical question to be placed on the October 20, 2018 municipal election ballot in Saanich and Victoria
2. Develop and disseminate educational information in advance of the October 20, 2018 vote to enable electors to cast an informed vote

## POST-ELECTION

3. If a majority of the referendum ballot votes cast in both municipalities support moving forward, establish a joint steering committee comprised of elected officials and senior staff from both local governments
4. Develop a clear proposal outlining a citizen-led process and budget with terms of reference for studying the costs and benefits of amalgamation with the aim of asking the Province to co-fund the study with Saanich and Victoria.

## DUNCAN-NORTH COWICHAN EXAMPLE

2014 ANNOUNCEMENT:

<https://duncan.ca/2014/09/amalgamation-and-boundary-realignment/>

BALLOT QUESTION:

*Are you in favour of spending time and resources to study the costs and benefits of the amalgamation of the municipalities of North Cowichan and the City of Duncan?*

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY WEBSITE:

<https://www.dnc-cama.ca/>

**Prepared by**

MAYOR RICHARD ATWELL (Saanich)



MAYOR LISA HELPS (Victoria)



Attachments



The Corporation of the District of Saanich | Mayor's Office

770 Vernon Avenue Victoria BC V8X 2W7 | T 250-475-5510 | F 250-475-5440 | www.saanich.ca

January 22, 2018

The Honourable Selina Robinson  
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
P.O. Box 9056 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, British Columbia  
V8W 9E2

Re: Citizens' Assembly on Amalgamation

Dear Minister Robinson:

I am writing to you jointly with Mayor Lisa Helps, to respectfully request a meeting to discuss the recent motions passed by the City of Victoria Council and the District of Saanich Council, provided here respectively and for your convenience:

City of Victoria:

**"Be It Resolved That Council call on the Province of British Columbia to establish and fund a Citizens' Assembly on Amalgamation with interested municipalities from Greater Victoria And Be It Further Resolved That the City of Victoria remain receptive to any initiatives for the creation of a regional police service and that Council request that the Mayor participate in the discussions initiated by Saanich."**

District of Saanich:

**"That Council call on the Province of British Columbia to establish and fund a Citizens' Assembly on Amalgamation with interested municipalities."**

Mayor Lisa Helps and I would very appreciate an opportunity to begin the dialogue on how the Province can support the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich move forward with this proposal.

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I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. Sherri Andrews is my administrative assistant and she may be reached directly at 250-475-5510 or via email at [sherri.andrews@saanich.ca](mailto:sherri.andrews@saanich.ca).

Yours truly,

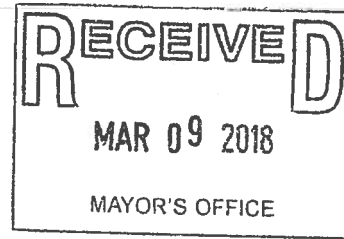


Richard Atwell  
Mayor, District of  
Saanich



Lisa Helps  
Mayor, City of  
Victoria

cc: Council, District of Saanich  
Council, City of Victoria



March 7, 2018

Ref: 233232

His Worship Mayor Richard Atwell  
District of Saanich  
770 Vernon Ave  
Victoria BC V8X 2W7

Her Worship Mayor Lisa Helps  
City of Victoria  
1 Centennial Sq  
Victoria BC V8W 1P6

Dear Mayor Atwell and Mayor Helps:

Thank you for your letter requesting a meeting to discuss the establishment and funding of a Citizens' Assembly on amalgamation with interested municipalities. I am also in receipt of His Worship Mayor Richard Atwell's letter to the Honourable John Horgan, Premier, which conveyed the Saanich Council resolution on the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly. As Minister responsible for the local government system, I am pleased to respond.

I appreciate learning of shared interests and joint initiatives among local governments. Particularly, I was interested to learn that the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich are discussing issues as broad as governance and as specific as police services.

The Province of British Columbia has a tradition of self-determination and elector choice in local governance matters. The Capital Region reflects the cumulative effect of choices by local voters and elected officials over time. The Province is always open to discussing specific, practical proposals further if local governments can provide plans for how they would proceed in the best interests of their residents.

Amalgamation studies by their nature are collaborative endeavours among municipalities. Should you be ready to advance a joint, specific study proposal – as the City of Duncan and District of North Cowichan did in 2016 – it would be considered in the same way.

As you may be aware, the Citizens' Assembly process that examined amalgamation of Duncan and North Cowichan was created by those municipalities. I understand that it was a positive experience for the participants and provided a diverse range of perspectives to inform the technical study undertaken jointly by the municipalities. At its conclusion, the Duncan-North Cowichan Citizens' Assembly on Municipal Amalgamation made a recommendation to the Councils on proceeding further.

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If the Duncan-North Cowichan proposal is a template that Victoria and Saanich would like to follow, it may be useful to consider its key elements, which included:

- A defined scope/geography for a specific study question (amalgamation of those two municipalities);
- A structure established by municipalities for directing the study (Citizens' Assembly, steering committee, consultants);
- Resources required (estimated \$145,000 plus staff time, with each municipality and the Province to contribute one-third of costs);
- A timeline for study process (sequence and approximate end date); and
- The role of the municipal councils after completion of the study (e.g. creating the study process; arm's length during study; decision-makers on requesting a vote if recommended by Citizens' Assembly).

The Province is integrally involved in local government restructuring and does provide financial support to some processes. However, the process of governance review and change is locally driven. Under the *Local Government Act*, decision-making rests with local citizens through the requirement for an approved vote of electors prior to Cabinet approval of municipal incorporation (which includes amalgamation).

If you have a more specific proposal for a joint study in mind, please keep me informed. Information would be needed on the specific nature of the proposal, as well as confirmation of the interests of all local governments involved. In addition, I would suggest that the request also identify any specific benefits to be gained for residents from such an exercise. Marijke Edmondson, Director, Governance and Structure Branch, Local Government Division, and her staff can provide you with further details regarding the principles, processes and other requirements for such a study. Ms. Edmondson can be reached by email at: [Marijke.Edmondson@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Marijke.Edmondson@gov.bc.ca), or by telephone at: 778 698-3227.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further, I would be happy to meet with you. My office will be in touch to confirm whether a meeting at this time is still preferred.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,



Selina Robinson  
Minister

pc: Honourable John Horgan  
Premier

Honourable Lana Popham, MLA  
Saanich South

Honourable Carole James, MLA  
Victoria-Beacon Hill

Honourable Rob Fleming, MLA  
Victoria-Swan Lake

Dr. Andrew Weaver, MLA  
Oak Bay-Gordon Head

Marijke Edmondson, Director  
Governance and Structure Branch  
Local Government Division  
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing