

## Municipal Government in Capital Region Designed for the Past..... Rather Than the Future

The role of city councils have changed; and now the majority of city boundaries established decades ago are not particularly relevant today.

Stop and reflect on your daily life when your community was where you worked, shopped and local school grounds served as your playgrounds. Today, where we sleep and pay property taxes is not usually where we work, shop, play or learn. Hospitals, colleges, big box stores, recreation centres and even churches serve the region and are generally located in another municipality. Conversely residents from other municipalities use your local roads and bridges to visit and use facilities, services, institutions and workplaces in other municipalities.

### How things have changed

[ Decades ago the first municipalities were incorporated when Province recognized a need to establish a role for local officials to fund and provide basic services to emerging communities; roads, water, sewer, garbage pickup, playing fields and fire protection.

[ Over time their responsibilities expanded to include sidewalks, street lights landfill, libraries, recreation centres, transit and the capital costs of infrastructure.

[ Most Regional Districts across BC remain “*unicentric* “ where the largest community i.e. Kelowna, Prince George, Kamloops, Cranbrook simply grew outward and remain as the singular regional centre for hospital, colleges, airports, shopping centres and employment.

[ In contrast while majority of the Capital Regional District (CRD) is rural forest and **agriculture**, the pattern of urban settlement is “*polycentric*”. From the central harbour settlement dispersed to several surrounding communities which over time morphed to a

common urban agglomeration BUT with 5 separate municipal councils.

[ Recently Colwood and Langford have grown and incorporated as separate municipalities and recently now have outgrown Esquimalt and Oak Bay. The economic vitality of urban core is now challenged by 2 rapidly growing sub-regional areas ie. Westshore and Peninsula each of which include cluster of additional 3-4 municipal jurisdictions. Instead of recognizing commonalities 6 new municipalities have been incorporated. The result is a Regional District that suffers fragmentation at both its core and also at the outskirts of settlement. All of this within 45 minute driving distance. [In a **“unicentric”** district all of this would be matters for the regional centre.]

[ “Downtown” along with major industrial/ commercial employment centres i.e. Dockyard, Keating, airport or shopping centres bear no relationship to where users, customers or employees actually reside and call home. Today all municipalities and their residents now live collectively and share common obligation and mutual dependency for transit, landfill and social housing. The pattern of dependency of residents of one municipality for employment, shopping and health/educational services located “next door” is confirmed by one simple fact. Over 65% of all daily vehicle movements are inter-municipal.

[ Originally Victoria was the city centre and rapid urban settlement was accommodated by within City limits. Today population growth **within Victoria proper** can only be accommodated by infill density increase. Similarly the larger District of Saanich, has made deliberate policy decision to protect farmland **(primarily under the Agricultural Land Reserve)**, forest cover and open space and consequently has only limited opportunities for urban growth. Several other municipalities within the CRD have defined **Official Community Plans (OCP's)** that clearly restrict any future growth and severely limit social housing. This pattern of polycentric governance means that no one municipality is sufficiently large enough to be acknowledged as the regional centre. Obviously Victoria with its *“Downtown and Inner Harbour”* and the Legislative precinct is recognized as our urban core

and “city centre” but includes less than 25% of the regional population.

### How Things Are Now

Municipal officials have forgotten the successful lessons of their original joint efforts via the CRD to provide regional scale services for water supply, landfill, regional parks and most recently sewerage treatment. Unfortunately they have failed to act collaboratively and do the same for emergency response and dispatch, policing, transportation planning, transit and housing supply.

All 13 municipalities compete for economic development, infrastructure and leadership. Each jealously protects and expands their own municipal prerogative to be the sole service provider paid for only by local residents when pattern of usage is clearly regional. The result is duplicity of municipal service units with thousands of municipal employees, 14 CEOs, 14 more CFOs, 19 fire departments, 7 police forces, 4 emergency dispatch centres, 8 parks and recreation commissions. We have over 90 elected councillors; all for ‘metro’ area of less than half million residents.

Unfortunately; modern urban growth has been accompanied by several negative trends that create problems for local councils and exceed their ability to plan and pay for regional scale remedies and programs:

[ Response to addiction and homelessness requires social and health programs and social housing. Solutions cannot and should not be provided and funded by just one or two municipalities and requires regional funding transfers from senior governments.

[ Crime; involving drugs or sophisticated commercial and electronic fraud does not recognize municipal boundaries. Crimes occur across the region in multiple locations and require co-ordinated prevention and enforcement.

[ Emergencies; fire, floods, chemical spills, earthquakes don't recognize municipal boundaries and require professionally trained staff training and specialized equipment. Co - ordinated response and need for specialized capability exceeds any one municipality. Smaller ones with volunteer personnel are dependent on their neighbours for service.

- [ Similarly effects of climate change and natural disasters cannot be mollified by local response but must be regional in scope.
  
- [ The cost to the urban core of providing infrastructure, facilities and programs are not fairly shared as over half of the regional populations are “free riders”. Provincial subsidies i.e. highways, policing; are unfair and distort cost comparisons. Too many municipalities simply opt out of cost sharing.
  
- [ Inter-municipal travel whether by private vehicles, **public transit**, commercial traffic, students, or tourists heading to airport and ferries has generated significant traffic congestion. 65% of all vehicle movement require inter-municipal trips. Multimodal primary and arterial transportation routes must be designated, funded and managed on inter-municipal regional basis. Many argue it is now time for rapid transit to connect the growing Westshore.

### Summary

An inevitable conclusion is that “13 is too many”. Common interests suggest that there is a need to end duplication of service providers for residents clustered in three sub regional locations i.e. the urban core, the Peninsula and the Westshore. With common boundaries and inter-municipal travel patterns the role of a municipal councils to provide local services has become less relevant to need for regional service, programs and facilities, programs and facilities

Several public polls have consistently confirmed resident support for independent public review of “costs and benefits” of possible mergers on at least a sub- regional scale. Yet such attempts are resisted by municipal officials and councils firm in their resolution to defend their turf. The Province needs to initiate and lead reforms.

Services should be paid for by those who have access and benefit from their use. Unfortunately, due to combination of provincial police subsidies and “free rider” the tax burden to provide services is inequitable and not fairly distributed. Too often taxpayers of Saanich and Victoria bear the costs of being service provider for the other half of the regional population.

Increasingly the service demands expected form local government are dependent on fiscal transfers from senior government not just for

infrastructure projects and transit but also for housing, health and social programs and for environmental protection. But who is responsible to confirm priorities and to package and present these funding proposals.

Today there is evidence of greater appreciation by residents to identify with their neighborhoods or community associations. Unlike other provinces and countries we in BC have little experience with selecting elected officials on a Ward basis i.e. James Bay, Fairfield Gordon Head, Royal Oak. In reality compared to Langford small municipalities Oak Bay, Esquimalt or Sidney are more like a large community centre rather than a separate entity. Amalgamations is merely a merger of municipalities not communities; the core of our local neighborhoods remain intact.

In spite of this multiplicity of municipal fiefdoms; strangely in the minds of taxpayers, tourists, business community, the post office and the Province we all identify ourselves as residents of Victoria. Yet no elected official can claim to serve as the voice of our Capital City

Modern cities are home to the majority of our population and serve as drivers of the economy, employment and investment. The wealth of country and our intellectual, social life (arts, culture, and sports) more often found in our urban centres. Yet the constitutional and legislative framework of Canada is stuck in historical context where they are not equal but that municipalities are subservient to the Province. As such the ability of municipal leaders to lobby and argue the case for the Capital Region is diminished. Further here in the CRD with 13 municipalities lack a critical mass and has no one voice that speaks for our Capital Region. As such 400,000 residents are without voice at both the provincial or national level. Who represents Victoria?

### Possible remedies

Fund the Citizens Assembly process for Victoria and Saanich and consider requiring similar process in the Peninsula and for Westshore to give voice to their residents of an independent public review of cost and benefits of possible municipal mergers.

Recognize Provincial Capital as *polycentric* region and as the Capital City and need and opportunity for 'special status' and make statutory amendments to the Local Government Act (Part 2, Div. 1-6). And at same time streamline local government and hold it more accountable.

Support and encourage municipal referendums on Ward systems

Require direct election of CRD Chair as a Regional Chair and consider how majority of Board members can be elected on the basis of regional wards. (Local mayors would still be represented.)

Revise mandate of the CRD to include integration of regional transportation planning and financing service, emergency planning, fire dispatch and policing in the Capital Region.

Amend term of office for elected municipal officials to 3 years from current 4 years.

Restore Provincial role for the “municipal auditor”.

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Recent Sources: that provide broader and more recent perspectives on urban governance than badly dated observations of Dr. Bish

[See: Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance (IMF), Univ. of Toronto )No. 31/2020-Making Space for Cities in Canadian Federation

(Thomas Hatchard )

IMF No. 49/2020 Theme and Variations : Metropolitan Government in Canada

(Zach Taylor)]

[Prepared by J.D. Anderson - Jan 7,2021]