



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: (June 12, 2017)

Municipal mayors want amalgamation study, FOI response reveals

A recent Freedom of Information response reveals that mayors representing the majority of population of municipalities in the CRD have written to the Province acknowledging the need for an amalgamation study.

Letters to the Province from the mayors of Saanich, Victoria, and Colwood (combined population 217,000) as well as Sidney, Central Saanich and North Saanich (combined population 40,000) are clear in their request to proceed with an in-depth examination of the governance structure in the Capital Region. Excerpts from letters:

Saanich Mayor Richard Atwell emailed the Province on February 23, 2016

As mayors, we have a responsibility to demonstrate that we have heard the voices of people throughout the region, and any individual comments or suggestions otherwise by local elected officials undermines the potential benefit that can result from this initiative.

I trust my mayoral colleagues will agree that, despite the variety of referendum questions on the 2014 municipal ballot, there exists a strong groundswell of support among the electorate to examine local government services, and that it is imperative that we respond appropriately.

In that regard, it is important that we collectively recognize the extent to which our local residents have a sophisticated level of awareness and knowledge of local government services, or simply what's working and what's not working.

While it will be useful to identify and examine existing shared services (e.g. Greater Victoria Public Library), systemic problems in major service areas in our region must be frankly and openly acknowledged for this to be a fulsome and meaningful initiative.

Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps letter to the Province on February 7, 2015:

On behalf of City Council and the citizens of Victoria, I am writing to ask that the Provincial government undertake a study on regional governance, based on the enclosed guidelines.

Residents of our region have made it clear that there is a real and widespread interest in studying amalgamation. During the municipal elections last year, City of Victoria ballots included a question on governance review, to which voters responded resoundingly in favour. Six of the seven other municipalities in the Capital Regional District also included similar questions, and found that voters supported amalgamation, or the study thereof.

It is apparent that there is a strong mandate from the residents of Greater Victoria for this undertaking. I propose that the enclosed document guide this study which should evaluate the various models to achieve good municipal governance, follow sound methods to assess the merits of each, and to ensure inclusion of all interested parties and agencies, including members of the public.

Colwood Mayor Carol Hamilton letter to the Province on February 19, 2015:

On behalf of City Council and the Colwood community, I am writing to express our support for the City of Victoria's request to the Provincial Government to undertake a study on regional governance using the proposed guidelines submitted with their letter (copy attached).

In October 2014, Colwood City Council reaffirmed its resolve to participate in the exploration process for amalgamation or integrated services in the future with one or more municipalities should the opportunity present itself. In November 2014, residents of the capital region clearly expressed a desire for a governance review.

And the Mayor of Sidney Steve Price was clear that the Province should undertake the study, in his letter of March 19, 2015:

While all three questions specified that the study was to be funded by the Province, each was silent on who would carry out the study. From the Town of Sidney's perspective, it would certainly impact the impartiality and credibility of an amalgamation study if the local governments themselves were to undertake it; nor do we have the expertise or the available resources to carry out such a study.

Other municipalities wrote to the Province to acknowledge their desire for participation in a governance review. See full package of correspondence details in the link below.

"Given the municipal referendum results, the letters written by mayors and residents, the number of opinion polls by pollster Angus Reid and various print and broadcast media outlets, it's long past time for politicians to act." said Amalgamation Yes Spokesperson John Vickers.

All three major political parties supported local government reform in the recent provincial election.

Amalgamation Yes Amalgamation Yes advocates for a comprehensive governance study in Greater Victoria to fulfill the mandate provided by the electorate in 2014.

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Full FOI response package:

http://docs.openinfo.gov.bc.ca/Response_Package_CSC-2016-61318.pdf