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## **Vital Signs report confirms new direction for the future**

Amalgamation Yes supports the Victoria Foundation initiative to publish the annual Vital Signs report and endorses its findings.

This check-up of the regional quality of life focuses on the personal aspirations and concerns of local residents. It also reaches forward to project what the future might hold for our community a decade from now. (Results also available in the Times Colonist).

Residents were surveyed about their quality of life and connectedness to the community. They identified numerous values we share: climate, natural beauty, parks, festivals and walkability.

It also provided an opportunity to express their concerns. As expected, the cost of living, housing, climate change and wellness were mentioned. But one in 10 respondents also identified municipal amalgamation. This is more important when grouped with related concerns for housing, transportation and community planning. Here the majority confirmed an ongoing concern about governance in the region.

The Vital Signs report also looks to the future decade. Why is this important? The realization of personal goals and the ability of our community to provide services depends on governance. This raises the issue of whether the current local government fragmentation into 13 separate municipalities is adequate to manage change.

Survey results confirm the similar views of Amalgamation Yes that our region is unable and unprepared to respond to the challenges ahead and to realize these expectations.

The report includes three essays from community members. Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce CEO Catherine Holt is particularly concerned about the failure to realize an adequate regional transportation system because integrated action is not possible with 13 municipal officials in control of land use plans and local roads. Further, she reminds us that the infrastructure for the arts and culture sector is badly dated and needing replacement and upgrades. She also expressed ongoing concern about the disjointed system of policing.

The essays by Dave Obee and Jill Fleming also confirm the need for sustainable development, and to embrace change. This raises the critical question: How to achieve this? How do we govern ourselves and elect leaders to make the best choices for the region?

Dave Obee reminds us "every year more new ways will replace old ways." Yet some still want to defend municipal structures put in place many decades ago. These structures are ineffective in adapting to a future when local parochial concerns continue to supersede regional needs.

There will soon be a chance to determine how to prepare for and manage that change. In 2018 the residents of the two largest municipalities in the urban core approved an initiative "...for establishing a Citizens' Assembly to explore the costs, benefits and disadvantages of the amalgamation between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria". A final Terms of Reference recently reviewed by both Councils should soon be confirmed and presented to the Province to facilitate implementation of a Citizens' Assembly process.

The evaluation of current circumstances and future prospects will not be taken by current political officials. Instead, a representative group of citizens at large will hold meetings with municipal administrators, emergency services and with wide range of economic and social advocacy groups including community associations and residents. In the coming weeks public notices should be placed to conduct a civic lottery to select volunteers to serve on this Citizens' Assembly.

The Vital Signs report confirms the values, hopes and concerns of our residents. That reinforces the opportunity for core residents to use the Citizens' Assembly process to determine how to bring about a more responsible and accountable system of local government.

We encourage residents of Victoria and Saanich to participate in this opportunity.

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