

Saanich By-Election Questionnaire
Capital Region Municipal Amalgamation Society (Amalgamation Yes)
<http://www.amalgamationyes.ca>

TO EACH CANDIDATE STANDING FOR ELECTION TO PUBLIC OFFICE TO FILL THE VACANT COUNCIL SEAT IN SAANICH MUNICIPALITY.

Please complete and return to amalgamateyes@gmail.com by September 2, 2017. Responses will be posted on the <http://www.amalgamationyes.ca> website.

Candidate name: Rebecca Mersereau

Candidate for: Councillor

Municipality: District of Saanich

1. Are you in favour of the Provincially-funded, citizen-led, unbiased study of the current system of local government in the Capital Region District, to include municipalities and CRD? Yes or no. Please explain.

Yes. Reviewing performance to improve effectiveness and efficiency is a good practice that any government or region should undertake periodically. It's clear that our current system of 13 municipalities + the CRD has many weaknesses, and neither the CRD nor individual municipalities have an incentive or the mandate to look at how we govern ourselves as a region and consider new ways of organizing our local governments and services. The recent North Cowichan – Duncan Citizens Assembly provides an excellent template for engaging and empowering the public to play a lead role in this process.

2. Leading up to the November 14, 2014 municipal election, all municipalities were requested to add a common non-binding question on the municipal ballot to gauge public interest in an study of local governance. 8 of 13 municipalities acquiesced, but placed uniquely-worded questions on each ballot. The (then) Saanich Mayor and Council resisted this request, but eventually public pressure forced the issue and the Mayor formulated an opaque question on the Saanich ballot. It resulted in an 88% YES vote, the highest affirmation in the regional average (75%). See:

<http://www.amalgamationyes.ca/answer-on-amalgamation---times-colonist-editorial.html>

<http://www.amalgamationyes.ca/saanich-election-about-governance.html>

<http://www.amalgamationyes.ca/so-greater-victoria-is-in-favour-of-amalgamation---kinda.html>

Do you believe that residents should once again have the opportunity to state an opinion on the subject of an governance study on a common **binding** referendum question on the municipal ballot? Yes or no. Please explain.

Yes , provided:

- [the question is clear (it would have been difficult to pose a more ambiguous question than the one Saanich put forward in 2014), and
- [the voting opportunity is preceded by a period of information gathering and open public discourse, so that residents of the region can make an informed decision on the matter, given its significant and widespread implications.

3. After the November 2014 election, and the 75% YES vote for reform, the (then) Premier of BC, Christy Clark, and the (then) Minister of Communities, Coralee Oakes both promised an study into amalgamation. To date, no such study has been initiated. Leading up to the May 2017 Provincial election, the NDP promised: *"You can count on BC New Democrats to follow through on our commitment to commission a study"*. But on August 13, the new Minister of Municipal Affairs, Selina Robinson said she had no plans to commission an amalgamation study. As an elected councillor, what steps will you take with the Minister of Municipal Affairs to reinforce the will of the electorate and the Provincially-promised study?

I believe the question posed by Saanich to residents in 2014 was unfortunately too ambiguous to make an assumption that they voted in support of exploring amalgamation. That was a missed opportunity, in my view. Nonetheless, since it will not be undertaken by the CRD or individual municipalities, I am in favour of the provincial government undertaking a more holistic review of governance in the CRD, to include consideration of amalgamation options. We will not be ready for a meaningful public debate or binding referendum question until we are able to bring more concrete information to the table about what this region would look like with fewer municipalities, and what some of the pros and cons are likely to be. In turn, residents of Saanich will have to consider the implications from our municipal perspective, and employ democracy to decide how we as a municipality should proceed.

4. Do you believe that the Capital Region District Board has been effective in dealing with regional service issues, such as waste water treatment (sewage),

public safety (police, fire, 911), regional growth, transportation and transit planning, etc? Yes or no. Please explain.

As a water utility consultant and Chair of the Capital Regional District Water Advisory Committee (a voluntarily body that advises CRD decision-makers) I can confidently state that the CRD is very effective in managing regional water services. However, there are clear challenges and weaknesses in other areas of service delivery, the most public and obvious example being finding regional consensus for dealing with wastewater treatment. I also continue to be concerned about both unnecessary redundancy and insufficient coordination between municipal public safety units (e.g., police and fire), even though there have been many improvements in these areas in recent years.

In my view though, the most significant failure of our current model of municipal and regional government in the CRD is our complete inability to undertake any regional transportation planning. The consequences are huge: traffic congestion is reducing productivity and regional economic growth, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and poorer air quality, limiting the growth tourism, and threatening the extraordinary quality of life we in the CRD enjoy. Almost 60% of vehicular trips in the CRD cross at least one municipal boundary, and population growth projections anticipate an increase of 100,000 car trips during peak hours in the next 20 years. We need a regional approach to transportation planning - one that is more reflective of our transportation behaviour, that adopts a longer-term view, and that can mitigate the impacts of the inconsistent land use practices and aspirations playing out in the region's 13 municipalities. Unfortunately, the urgency of this issue is such that I don't believe we can wait for the amalgamation debate to unfold before we act.

5. What would you do to improve regional governance in Greater Victoria?

By virtue of their enabling legislation, regional governments in BC are simply not equipped with the authority or the tools to be able to compel member municipalities to cooperate, or make decisions in accordance with what is in the region's best interest, rather than their own. We clearly need a new approach to address the major challenges on the horizon that are regional in nature.

My first priority would be to advocate for a regional transportation authority that is responsible (and has the appropriate legal jurisdiction) for planning, funding, and overseeing a regional transportation network (inclusive of public transportation, active transportation and major arteries for personal vehicle use). This approach is logical because it has precedent in BC and does not preclude future amalgamation scenarios. With a federal government that is prepared to invest in infrastructures - urban

transportation projects in particular - as well as a new provincial government that has significantly increased this region's representation and influence, there is a huge missed opportunity if we don't act quickly on this regional challenge.

Secondly, I would support a provincially-funded review of our system of local and regional governance, to include thoughtful consideration of alternatives, such as directly elected CRD Chairs and/or Directors, and amalgamation of some or all municipalities in the region. Bringing this information forward must be a precursor to any meaningful debate about how we govern ourselves in the region.