

SAANICH AND VICTORIA -- What do we share?

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Some respond to this question "I live in Saanich and I like living here in Cadboro Bay." Others say "I live in James Bay and like it here." But if Victoria and Saanich were to merge, what would change? You would still live James Bay or Cadboro Bay or Gordon Head or Fernwood. Amalgamation would not affect the character or enjoyment of these neighbourhoods.

Residents often start with the premise that they live in Victoria or Saanich and don't really appreciate that municipal boundaries are actually meaningless. In fact, we live in what researchers characterize as *daily urban systems* in which people can change place or residence without changing place of employment or vice versa. It is clear that where we sleep and pay our taxes is not usually where we work, play, learn or shop.

Consider the following:

Most residents of the Capital Region District (CRD) can't get to the airport or the ferries unless they travel through Saanich, Central Saanich and North Saanich. Also true for buses, trucks, taxis and ambulances. But the Clipper and Coho ferries to the USA, the Helijet, and floatplanes are in downtown Victoria.

Of the critical access points into the City we immediately think of the Bay and Johnson Street bridges but forget about the similar roles of the Tillicum and Craigflower bridges as entry points to major employment centre of Esquimalt dockyards.

The bus system connects neighbourhoods, as well as Oak Bay, Esquimalt, the Peninsula and Westshore. The Galloping Goose and Lochside Regional Trail systems merge in Saanich and use the Selkirk trestle in Victoria to access the downtown core. Both Victoria and Saanich Councils and residents support policy shifts to active transportation, e.g. walking, transit and cycling.

How many residents of Victoria and Saanich use Oak Bay or Esquimalt Recreation Centres? Or how many residents from Victoria use Cedar Hill Park, or Saanich residents use Beacon Hill Park? The Royal Theatre and Save on Foods Memorial Arena (SOFMA) are in Victoria, and Commonwealth Pool and Pacific Institute for Sports Excellence (PISE) are in Saanich. Beacon Hill Park, Fisherman's Wharf, Mt. Tolmie Park and Mt. Douglas Park serve all visitors.

Our shared urban core is the Capital City of the Province of British Columbia. It has regional businesses, health and education service centres, and is the gateway to southern Vancouver Island. As for the daily traffic flow and workforce, over 130,000 vehicles and 30,000 transit riders move through the Uptown - Douglas corridor. A regional workforce of over 200,000 contributes to the daily onslaught of residents from 11 other municipalities entering the urban core. There are 48,500 jobs located in Saanich and 91,200 in Victoria, while 35,000 students commute to Camosun College and the University of Victoria.

Apart from federal, provincial or municipal government offices, the two largest regional service providers are in the urban core. Camosun College is in Saanich and the University of Victoria are in Saanich and Oak Bay, while the Royal Jubilee Hospital is in Victoria. Of the daily flow of 40,000 workers into Victoria, 19,000 are from Saanich. And 7,000 flow from Victoria into Saanich.

The two largest shopping centres, Mayfair (Victoria) and Hillside (Victoria) are both located right on the municipal border. Mayfair and Uptown (Saanich) are only three blocks apart and the municipal boundary between them is invisible. Fairfield Plaza and much of Oak Bay Avenue are actually in Victoria. Tillicum Centre and Royal Oak Centre are in Saanich.

Children attend schools provided by School District 61 and others. Catchment areas, particularly for middle and high schools, do not reflect neighbourhood or municipal boundaries.

The largest arts, cultural and sport facilities in the region are in Victoria: The Royal Theatre, SOFMA, the Victoria Music Conservatory, the Victoria Art Gallery and the Royal BC Provincial Museum.

The largest church congregations in the region for most denominations are located in Victoria.

Of the two most popular scenic venues for residents and tourists, Mt. Tolmie Park is in Saanich and the Beacon Hill - Dallas Road waterfront is in Victoria.

Urban core residents have chosen to live in suburbs or downtown and over the year have established neighbourhoods and villages, each with their own character and identity, whether it is Cadboro Bay, Cordova Bay, Fernwood, Rockland, Cook Street, James Bay, or Royal Oak, etc. Each of these is identified in the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) and they are often designated as villages and protected by Local Area Plans. (LAPs) Their interests are represented by community associations and Parent Advisory Councils. None of this would change if there was only one city council.

It is clearly evident that municipal boundaries become an irrelevant urban blur as we and our families go about our daily routines.

But too often the less desirable factors that we also share are forgotten.

First, a burden of paying property taxes to support duplicate administrative bureaucracies, e.g. municipal councils, senior administrative staff and department heads, engineering, parks and recreation, planning, finance and human resources, two police chiefs, two fire chiefs, building inspectors and the like.

Second, the two urban core municipalities provide a wide range of social, community, health, arts, cultural, sport facilities and services available to all residents of the CRD. But in providing \$millions in tax exemptions and grants there exists the fiscal burden of sharing those services with residents of surrounding areas who, as free riders, don't contribute funding.

Third, a preoccupation with the past results in a lack of vision and failure to recognize and address a

common future. It ignores the need to plan transportation, housing, roads and infrastructure in an era where neither climate change or international economic trends (e.g. technology, investment and tourism) are oblivious to municipal boundaries. Environmental and social stewardship should not be constrained by politics.

These factors provide an imperative for a shared participation to plan for infrastructure upgrades, to fund and provide emergency services and major arts/culture/sports facilities, social housing and community civic centres for youth and seniors.

Promoting and achieving international investment and employment opportunities requires joint planning and an unified urban identity.

And while at various times residents might be unhappy with municipal leadership, remember that every four years there is an opportunity to turf out politicians who fail to meet expectations. If mayors or councillors, often elected by as few as 20,000 voters, displease the larger electoral base of a unified municipality, there is an opportunity to elect new council members. With a new unified municipality, the existing councils of Victoria and Saanich would be extinguished, and a new single new council would be elected. Existing elected officials do not automatically inherit a seat.