

# Saanich Mayor Richard Atwell to seek second Saanich term

Saanich Mayor Richard Atwell plans to run for a second term and says he would like to see a question about regional policing on the 2018 municipal ballot.

Atwell would like to see a regional policing study looking at the Saanich, Victoria, Central Saanich and Oak Bay police departments, “so the public can be aware of the pros and cons so that we can have an informed vote.”

## ***article continues below***

If the municipalities acted quickly, the study could be completed before the October election, allowing for a non-binding referendum, he said.

Saanich council last month voted in favour of asking the province to establish and fund a citizens assembly on amalgamation with all interested local municipalities.

In the 2014 municipal election, eight of 13 municipalities in the capital region put amalgamation-related questions on ballots, and 75 per cent of voters said they supported the study of some form of amalgamation.

The B.C. Liberal government commissioned a \$95,000 report that reviewed integrated services but required no action, while the B.C. NDP government has said a review on amalgamation is not a priority.

Atwell says that’s a mistake and wants the NDP to honour its election promise to study amalgamation.

“As this region grows and governance becomes more and more complicated, I don’t think it’s an issue that any government is able to walk away from forever,” he said.

He said “governance dysfunction” in the capital region prevents a speedy and proactive approach to projects such as the regional growth strategy, which aims to tackle traffic issues.

“This isn’t the way to govern. This fractured type of governance, I think, is really serving politicians more than it’s serving the public.”

He acknowledged that some municipal politicians might be reluctant to champion amalgamation if it means axing their own jobs.

“As elected officials, if we are to excel at our jobs, it may be to actually eliminate our jobs,” he said. “Simplifying government is the job of every government.”

Atwell said anecdotally he’s heard that voters support the mandate for change that was central to his campaign in the last election.

The fact that 10 candidates ran for one council seat in a September byelection, held to replace the late Vic Derman, could be an indicator that incumbents will face a healthy number of challengers, he said.

“There will be a lot of debate and I think the change mandate that I came in with last election will carry through to this election and the public is going to be looking for some new faces,” he said.

Atwell stands by the Saanich Police Board’s decision to rehire Chief Bob Downie on a two-year contract, a decision that caused a rift with councillors who said they were kept in the dark about the retirement package.

The police board revealed in September that Downie received nearly \$380,000 in severance when he retired on July 31. Downie was then rehired on a two-year contract for \$222,711 a year, about \$10,000 more annually than his previous salary.

Atwell said the contract is cost-neutral because Downie will no longer be

accumulating retirement allowances.

“The police board could have done a better job of providing background information to better explain [the deal] to the public,” he said.

“I think it’s a decision that we still stand behind and I’ll go into the next election standing behind that decision.”

The B.C. municipal elections are scheduled for Oct. 20, 2018.

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