

Victoria, Saanich agree to question on amalgamation

Victoria and Saanich councils agreed in a joint committee meeting Tuesday night on the wording of a referendum question on amalgamation.

The question still has to be ratified by both councils meeting separately.

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If approved, Victoria and Saanich will put the same question to voters on the Oct. 20 municipal election ballot.

The agreed-upon wording of the question reads:

“Are you in favour of spending [an amount to be determined] 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?”

The dollar figure is to be determined by staff and will be included in the question.

Councillors spent considerable time debating whether to include a cost figure in the question.

Saanich Coun. Susan Brice argued for including it on the grounds that voters should understand the financial implications.

“I think to ask a question and not get some idea of the magnitude of the ask is not respectful,” she said.

Saanich Coun. Colin Plant opposed the idea, fearing that it would muddy the waters and encourage people to vote against a citizens’ assembly.

He said the cost details should be included in information materials circulated prior to the referendum rather than in the question itself.

“It almost makes me feel we’re giving it a reason to fail,” he said.

Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps said she, too, favoured leaving the dollar figure out of the question, but she relented in order to reach agreement.

“I came to tonight’s meeting in the spirit of diplomacy, in the spirit of good will, in the spirit of working together, so that’s why I support the motion.”

She called it “historic” that the two councils came to an agreement on the wording to the question.

Saanich Mayor Richard Atwell similarly opposed including a dollar figure for fear it would complicate the question.

But he, too, voted in favour of the final motion.

“I think we have to go with the majority,” he said in an interview.

“Councils work by majorities, this is work by majority and we’ll be looking to the citizens and looking for a majority of those citizens to support this question.”

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