

# Amalgamation won't save in short term

Re: "Duncan, North Cowichan weigh the 'intangibles,' " June 21.

Today, citizens of Duncan and North Cowichan are voting on whether they want to amalgamate. Recent newspaper articles suggest that part of the motivation for amalgamation is to achieve efficiencies and lower costs of local government.

## ***article continues below***

During the deliberations of the Saanich Governance Review Citizens Advisory Committee, we took a look at the experience of many amalgamated municipalities across Canada.

It seemed clear that these examples did not demonstrate efficiencies and lower costs, at least in the short term.

It was over the longer term that these efficiencies started to show benefits. So finding benefit in amalgamation is a long-term proposition.

The Saanich committee considered amalgamation in the Victoria-region context. There was a lot of support for studying amalgamation around the committee table.

For me, the most persuasive point made was simply this: If you were planning a municipality of 400,000 from scratch, would you start by dividing it up into 13 separate municipalities? Likely, the answer would be no. Yet that's what we've got.

In the end, the committee recommended that Saanich call on the province to launch a citizens' assembly process in the Victoria region focusing on amalgamation. I note that in Saanich and Victoria, the mayors have begun a

discussion on studying amalgamation.

These are useful first steps, but let's lower the expectation that any sort of amalgamation would produce cost efficiencies in the short term.

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Victoria

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