

# Jack Knox: Municipal dissonance could drive you to drink



People enjoy their drinks at the beer garden of the Forester pub in London, on Saturday, after lockdown was lifted. Central Saanich is looking at letting people drink alcohol in its public parks.

Photograph By Frank Augstein, The Associated Press

Central Saanich is looking at letting people drink alcohol in its public parks. This brings three thoughts to mind:

1) Parks? We thought they only had corn fields.

***article continues below***

2) You can never have enough Saaniches.

3) Why al fresco alcohol in Central Saanich and not the other dozen municipalities that comprise our community?

It's this last question that drives some people to drink (or not).

That is, never mind the question of whether it's good or bad to allow booze in outdoor public places. No, what's crazy-making is having laws that change every 30 metres, which is about as far as you can travel in Greater Victoria without stumbling across yet another municipal border.

Take the proposal being considered in Central Saanich. It would allow drinking in municipal parks from noon until 6 p.m., from July 1 until the end of September.

Sound familiar? That's because a similar measure was defeated (actually, it didn't even get to the talking stage) by Saanich council in June. Presumably the same debate will eventually rage in our many, many, many other Saaniches, as well as in Langford, View Royal, Sidney-by-the-Sea (as opposed to the lesser-known Landlocked Sidney), the Principality of Oak Bay, the People's Republic of Victoria. ...

This probably isn't what the provincial government had in mind when it allowed individual municipalities to decide whether to permit drinking in their parks and on beaches. Most likely the province was thinking of normal stand-alone cities like Campbell River or Prince George, or big places like Vancouver (pop. 675,000) or Surrey (pop. 518,000), not the dozen joined-at-the-hip-but-not-the-head municipalities that make up Greater Victoria, which is in reality a medium-sized city of 368,000.

Now, before you roll your eyes, dear reader, don't fear: This isn't another pro-amalgamation rant. Love the idea or hate it, amalgamation will never happen unless the provincial government forces the issue, and both the New Democrats and Liberals have made it clear they don't have the political will to wade into that particular tar pit.

But jeez, even without a fullblown municipal marriage you would think there could at least be a few more areas — integrated policing? A co-ordinated transportation strategy, anyone? — where decisions could be made on a regional basis. Alas, our history is one of parochialism, a patchwork of

approaches and rules that sometimes leaves neighbours out of sync with one another, as though we lived on unrelated — or, worse, competing — islands.

Remember that years before legalization, Victoria welcomed pot shops with open arms, yet Esquimalt was so opposed that it chased Bongy the head shop mascot right out of town (and onto the Colbert Report, which made fun of the fuss). Earlier, we had the spectacle of Luggie the Lug-a-Rug mascot waving at Blanshard Street cars from the Saanich side of Tolmie Avenue, where costumed sidewalk hucksters were legal, as opposed to the Victoria side, where they were not. (Victoria also banned, at various times, bongo drums, bagpipes and the sale of balloon animals.) In Langford, a commuter park-and-ride lot was called a low spending priority: Why pay for something that makes it easier for residents to leave the community each morning?

The dissonance continues today, courtesy of local bylaws. Saanich residents can park boats and trailers in their front driveways, but those in Oak Bay may not. Every municipality dictates how many backyard chickens you can keep: four in Colwood, seven in Esquimalt, five to 10 in Saanich (where hens must be registered, just like handguns) and an unspecified number “consistent with personal egg consumption” in Victoria.

Good luck figuring out which municipalities allow stores to dispense plastic bags, and which ones horsewhip you for even asking. Speed limits go up and down in a wonderfully whimsical way as we cross invisible borders that appear to have been drawn with as much logic as those inflicted on the post-Ottoman Middle East.

Thank goodness Dr. Bonnie Henry doesn't operate this way or we'd have two-metre physical distancing in Esquimalt, one-metre in Colwood and Mandatory Mask Mondays in Metchosin but nowhere else.

In short, should you really need to consult Google Earth and a dozen sets of

council minutes just to determine whether it's safe to crack a cold one in the park?

[jknox@timescolonist.com](mailto:jknox@timescolonist.com)

© 2020 Copyright Times Colonist

**You Might Be Interested In**