

Island Voices: NDP shuts down amalgamation aspirations

Having hosted her as a guest speaker at the opening of Amalgamation Yes's launch in downtown Victoria several years ago, I sometimes wonder how B.C. Finance Minister Carole James feels today.

She presented at the time her wholehearted support for a study into the pros and cons of regional consolidation for Greater Victoria. She wasn't alone. An area Angus Reid poll on amalgamation has shown over 80 per cent support for a world that is less than the 13 municipalities with 91 mayors and councillors who rule the capital region's crowded roost today, overseeing a total population that has 140,000 fewer residents than Surrey.

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It was the previous government of Christy Clark that first announced there would be a capital region amalgamation review as a result of the ballot vote with varied questions in 2014. However, the euphoria that subsequently gripped the area was short-lived when just several months later, newly appointed community minister Peter Fassbender decided he would dismiss the public's call for a review on consolidation.

But wait! The NDP won the election and where is the party of James today? Not only has it, too, dismissed the aspirations of capital area residents for a regional review, it has shut down the entire process.

What kind of provincial government can just turn its back on the overwhelming sentiments of its citizens? For the party to now float a lone citizens' assembly process incapable of inclusiveness for regional amalgamation, why doesn't the province just come clean and say it is shutting the process down?

With Saanich and Victoria governments looking at an assembly as the only avenue, exactly where, for example, does that leave Esquimalt, which voted by a more than two-to-one margin in favour of an amalgamation review? Or a majority of Langford residents, for example? Or North Saanich? Did these ballot votes not occur in the same place, the ballot box where current NDP legislators such as James were voted into their jobs?

It is preposterous that the provincial NDP, under the portfolio held by Selina Robinson, is now shutting down democracy across the capital. As for the letters written by several area mayors asking the government of the day to respect the wishes of the people who supported an amalgamation review — it is obvious the minister doesn't care.

While everyone agrees amalgamations should never be forced, to see the province take pride in failing to live up to its responsibility as called upon by citizens is an absolute disgrace and an embarrassment not only to British Columbia but to the nation.

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