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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: (April 19, 2020)

***Amalgamation Yes concerned by District of Saanich attempt to cancel or defer joint citizens' assembly amalgamation study***

On April 20, the District of Saanich will be discussing the cancellation or deferment of the Joint Citizens' Assembly (CA) initiative approved by both Victoria and Saanich electorate in 2018.

This was a sudden and unexpected action, and a surprise to many. Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps was blindsided by the news and stated that there was much preliminary work that could continue, despite the current pandemic. She stated that the City of Victoria was prepared to continue this preliminary work. <https://www.vicnews.com/news/amalgamation-helps-feels-like-rug-pulled-out-from-under-her-after-saanich-mayors-report/>

Although claiming to be unbiased, the Mayor of Saanich is on the record as opposing the study, publicly calling it “the death of Saanich”. <https://www.vicnews.com/community/year-in-review-top-issues-in-saanich-in-2019/> <https://www.vicnews.com/community/year-in-review-top-issues-in-saanich-in-2019/>

A cynic might conclude this is an opportunistic move to derail the governance review process that the electorate has endorsed over two election cycles and 6 years of multiple polls. <http://www.amalgamationyes.ca/polls.html>

We challenge any efforts by political opponents of studying amalgamation to use the virus to thwart any serious review of governance. To do so would be undemocratic and raise questions of authoritarianism.

As you are aware, it took over a year for the two municipalities just to agree on a Terms of Reference for the CA.

While we are all acutely aware of the Covid-19 health emergency, much of the work yet to be undertaken precedes the selection of interested resident volunteers for CA membership. Of course that resident selection must not occur until the pandemic abates.

There is no reason why the CA process could not proceed with the following activities:

- Send joint report to Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for joint funding, to augment the \$250K authorized by the two electorates.
- Upon Provincial funding confirmation, draft RFPs for CA Facilitator and Technical Analyst.
- Create a Joint Council Committee to oversee preparation for the CA
- Issue RFPs for Facilitator and Technical Analyst
- Receive and evaluate RFP responses and seek Councils' approval to sign contracts.

- The CA Facilitator to prepare a plan and methodology for selection and evaluation of CA respondents

We urge the District of Saanich to cooperate with the City of Victoria and proceed with preliminary work as outlined above.

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