

April 19, 2020

**Re. Citizens' assembly vital to regional recovery**

Dear Mayor Haynes and Saanich Council

I was extremely disappointed to hear about the recommendation by Saanich staff — endorsed on the radio by Mayor Fred Haynes — to cancel and disband the agreement for the citizen's assembly with the City of Victoria. Please regard this letter as a voice strongly against the motion.

While it is certainly not appropriate to assemble 75 people in a room at this moment, the notion that Mayor Haynes would use the COVID-19 crisis as a reason to abandon the plan put in place following many years of public engagement is grossly inappropriate.

The entire world is finding ways to interact by using innovative and readily available alternatives, such as online meetings, distance work groups, or simple postponement until it is safe to resume gatherings.

The referendum to explore the benefits of amalgamation was strongly supported by the citizens of Saanich over two elections. We are interested in knowing the facts.

In 2014, Saanich residents voted 88.5 per cent in favour when asked: "Do you support council initiating a community-based review of governance structures and policies with Saanich and our partnerships within the region?"

In 2018, 16,852 residents voted in favour of exploring the costs, benefits, and disadvantages of the amalgamation of Saanich and Victoria through a citizens' assembly process.

In January 2020, Saanich entered into an agreement with the City of Victoria to explore a citizens' assembly to study the amalgamation of Victoria and Saanich.

The taxpayers have expectations that the Mayor and Council will listen to them. These are challenging times and it is understood that it might not be possible to forge forward without adjustments pertinent to the times, and that the financial commitment might need to be deferred to a later budget year. However, it is not acceptable for our elected officials to change this direction without further consultation with the residents of Saanich.

Our elected officials are responsible for acting on behalf of citizens it represents. And, in this case, the citizens have given clear direction to mayor and council, to pass a motion cancelling the agreement is just a blatant disregard for the will of the people that you have been elected to represent.

Please consider a postponement, rather than cancellation, of this commitment to Saanich residents.

Sincerely

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