



## Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of August 9, 2018

---

**To:** Committee of the Whole **Date:** August 1, 2018  
**From:** Chris Coates, City Clerk  
**Subject:** Public Opinion Poll on Establishing a Citizens Assembly on Amalgamation of Victoria and Saanich

---

### RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorse the information on the amalgamation referendum question and direct staff to undertake web based and social media notifications as well as a Vic News insert to inform the public of the details.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The District of Saanich and City of Victoria have each ratified the motion noted below resulting from a Joint Committee of the Whole meeting held June 26, 2018

1. *That Saanich and Victoria both place the following question on the October 20, 2018 municipal election ballot:  
**“Are you in favour of spending up to \$250,000 for establishing a Citizen’s Assembly to explore the costs, benefits and disadvantages of the amalgamation between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria?”***
2. *Co-develop and disseminate educational information in advance of the October 20, 2018 general election as an inclusive election expense.*
3. *Direct the Mayors to write to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing informing the Hon. Selena Robinson of the intention to pose a ballot question, sharing the wording of the question.*

The purpose of this report is to bring forward the jointly developed material noted in point 2 of Council’s motion. Appendix A attached is the information that Saanich and Victoria staff have developed. It is general information given that the scope of the Citizens Assembly would undertake has not been established at this time. This approach is recommended to ensure that information presented is factual and not specific given the variables in scope that could occur. In general terms the Citizen’s assembly process would follow that which recently occurred in Duncan/North Cowichan.

In terms of how to provide this information to the public there are three options presented for Council’s consideration:

Option 1 – Web and Social Media

Web and Social media promotion would capture some of the population base. It isn't possible to quantify the extent to which this method would reach voters, or that this method alone would reach all voter demographics. Costs associated with this are limited to staff time which is already allocated to election awareness and outreach.

Option 2 – Vic News Insert

Typically, the City utilizes the Connect Newsletter as a special election edition distributed through Vic News. This year, the intent is to publish the election edition in early October (general voting day is October 20, 2018). The proposed information sheet on the Referendum could be distributed with the election edition through Vic News, this would not likely have any additional cost than what distribution of the newsletter would be. If it were a separate undertaking through Vic News costs are approximately \$3,000.00. The Vic News method does not reach every door in the City but is generally available to most.

Option 3 – Household Mail Drop

There are two options for household mail drop:

The highest cost method, is a door to door mailing to every address in the City. Costs associated with this option are approximately 45,000.00. This would require a modification to the election budget to accommodate these costs.

A postal code walk which is essentially similar to the delivery of a flyer through the mail for an estimated delivery cost of \$6,000.00.


None of the options could assure that all interested voters will receive the information. On balance the recommended approach will provide significant awareness of the information and can be accommodated within the existing election budget.

Respectfully submitted,



Chris Coates  
City Clerk

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

  
Date: Aug 2, 2018

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Proposed Referendum Information Sheet

## Appendix A

### **It's time for you, Saanich/Victoria electors, to decide ...**

The District of Saanich and the City of Victoria Councils will be asking electors if they wish to establish a Citizens' Assembly to explore the costs, benefits and disadvantages of amalgamation of the two municipalities. This non-binding community opinion question will be asked at the upcoming General Local Election being held on October 20, 2018.

### **This is not a referendum on Amalgamation.**

The question at hand is not whether the municipalities of Victoria and Saanich should amalgamate, but rather whether the prospect of amalgamation should be systematically examined through a Citizens' Assembly. If the Citizens' Assembly recommends in favour of amalgamation there would be a binding referendum question put to the citizens of Saanich and Victoria and the citizens would decide as an independent referendum or as part of the next election.

### **What is a Citizens' Assembly?**

A citizens' assembly is a body of citizens formed to deliberate on an issue or issues of broad political importance. The membership of a Citizens' Assembly is randomly selected. The purpose is to employ a cross-section of the public to study a question and to propose answers through rational and reasoned discussion and the use of various methods of inquiry. The use of Citizens' Assemblies aims to reinstall trust in the political process by engaging citizens to take a more direct role in deliberative democracy.

### **What will the Citizens' Assembly do?**

The Citizens' Assembly will be tasked by the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich to learn about the needs and interests of local residents and businesses, examine the the costs, benefits and disadvantages of creating a new amalgamated municipal structure, and – should they determine to recommend in favour of amalgamation – advise local councillors and their administrations on the conditions under which the Municipalities should proceed.

Specifically, the Citizens' Assembly on Amalgamation will develop:

- A set of values which describe their aspirations for good local governance;
- A list of issues which they believe need to be satisfactorily resolved for municipal amalgamation to merit consideration; and
- Should they recommend to proceed with amalgamation, a detailed recommendation concerning municipal amalgamation, including any conditions which would need to be satisfied if a merger were to proceed.

### **How will the Citizens' Assembly Members be selected?**

Should the electors vote in favour of proceeding with a Citizens' Assembly to explore the amalgamation of the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich, an independent body would be engaged by Saanich and Victoria to run the Citizens' Assembly process. The Citizens' Assembly would consist of a randomly selected group of Saanich and Victoria residents that broadly reflect the local community.

## Appendix A

For example, in the Duncan-North Cowichan Citizens' Assembly, 10,000 households throughout the Cowichan Valley were randomly selected to receive an invitation to volunteer for the Assembly. Thirty-six candidates were randomly selected from the pool of respondents in such a way as to broadly match the make-up of local residents.

### **What is the cost of the Citizens' Assembly?**

Early costs are being forecasted at approximately \$750,000 in total for a Citizens' Assembly. The City of Victoria, the District of Saanich, and the Province of British Columbia would each contribute a third of the costs up to \$250,000. No money will be spent on the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly until City Council has heard from the voters.

The question on the ballot of the upcoming General Local Election will give Council an indication of the community's interest in pursuing the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly to explore the question of the Amalgamation of the City of Victoria and District of Saanich. This is an important opportunity to provide your opinion on the path the City of Victoria should take.

### **Ballot question approved by Council:**

*"Are you in favour of spending up to \$250,000 for establishing a Citizens' Assembly to explore the costs, benefits and disadvantages of the amalgamation between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria?"*