



March 7, 2018

Ref: 233232

His Worship Mayor Richard Atwell
District of Saanich
770 Vernon Ave
Victoria BC V8X 2W7

Her Worship Mayor Lisa Helps
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Sq
Victoria BC V8W 1P6

Dear Mayor Atwell and Mayor Helps:

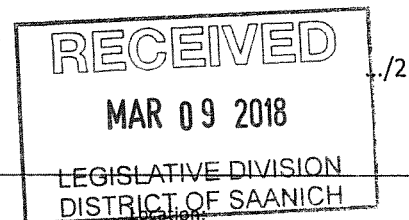
Thank you for your letter requesting a meeting to discuss the establishment and funding of a Citizens' Assembly on amalgamation with interested municipalities. I am also in receipt of His Worship Mayor Richard Atwell's letter to the Honourable John Horgan, Premier, which conveyed the Saanich Council resolution on the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly. As Minister responsible for the local government system, I am pleased to respond.

I appreciate learning of shared interests and joint initiatives among local governments. Particularly, I was interested to learn that the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich are discussing issues as broad as governance and as specific as police services.

The Province of British Columbia has a tradition of self-determination and elector choice in local governance matters. The Capital Region reflects the cumulative effect of choices by local voters and elected officials over time. The Province is always open to discussing specific, practical proposals further if local governments can provide plans for how they would proceed in the best interests of their residents.

Amalgamation studies by their nature are collaborative endeavours among municipalities. Should you be ready to advance a joint, specific study proposal – as the City of Duncan and District of North Cowichan did in 2016 – it would be considered in the same way.

As you may be aware, the Citizens' Assembly process that examined amalgamation of Duncan and North Cowichan was created by those municipalities. I understand that it was a positive experience for the participants and provided a diverse range of perspectives to inform the technical study undertaken jointly by the municipalities. At its conclusion, the Duncan-North Cowichan Citizens' Assembly on Municipal Amalgamation made a recommendation to the Councils on proceeding further.



Ministry of Municipal Affairs
and Housing

Office of the Minister

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If the Duncan-North Cowichan proposal is a template that Victoria and Saanich would like to follow, it may be useful to consider its key elements, which included:

- A defined scope/geography for a specific study question (amalgamation of those two municipalities);
- A structure established by municipalities for directing the study (Citizens' Assembly, steering committee, consultants);
- Resources required (estimated \$145,000 plus staff time, with each municipality and the Province to contribute one-third of costs);
- A timeline for study process (sequence and approximate end date); and
- The role of the municipal councils after completion of the study (e.g. creating the study process; arm's length during study; decision-makers on requesting a vote if recommended by Citizens' Assembly).

The Province is integrally involved in local government restructuring and does provide financial support to some processes. However, the process of governance review and change is locally driven. Under the *Local Government Act*, decision-making rests with local citizens through the requirement for an approved vote of electors prior to Cabinet approval of municipal incorporation (which includes amalgamation).

If you have a more specific proposal for a joint study in mind, please keep me informed. Information would be needed on the specific nature of the proposal, as well as confirmation of the interests of all local governments involved. In addition, I would suggest that the request also identify any specific benefits to be gained for residents from such an exercise. Marijke Edmondson, Director, Governance and Structure Branch, Local Government Division, and her staff can provide you with further details regarding the principles, processes and other requirements for such a study. Ms. Edmondson can be reached by email at: Marijke.Edmondson@gov.bc.ca, or by telephone at: 778 698-3227.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further, I would be happy to meet with you. My office will be in touch to confirm whether a meeting at this time is still preferred.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,



Selina Robinson
Minister

Mayor Atwell and Mayor Helps
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pc: Honourable John Horgan
Premier

Honourable Lana Popham, MLA
Saanich South

Honourable Carole James, MLA
Victoria-Beacon Hill

Honourable Rob Fleming, MLA
Victoria-Swan Lake

Dr. Andrew Weaver, MLA
Oak Bay-Gordon Head

Marijke Edmondson, Director
Governance and Structure Branch
Local Government Division
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing