Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly on Municipal Amalgamation

Final Report

VICTORIA SAANICH CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

Saanich

THE CITY OF VICTORIA

Acknowledgement of the Land and its People

The Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly acknowledges that the District of Saanich and City of Victoria lie within the territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən Peoples represented by the Songhees and Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) Nations and the W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples represented by the W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), BOḰEĆEN (Pauquachin), SṮÁUTW̱ (Tsawout), W̱SIḴEM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations.

Citizens' assemblies operate within a democratic framework that is itself a product of colonial governance. These systems have historically excluded Indigenous Peoples and have been associated with dispossession, marginalization, and cultural harm.

The Assembly was tasked with considering whether two municipalities—each defined by settler-imposed boundaries—should merge to better meet future challenges and opportunities. This mandate necessarily intersects with the deeper context of governing on Indigenous land without consent.

It is important that processes like this one acknowledge these injustices, and reflect them in how knowledge is received, considered, and acted upon. The Assembly sought, wherever possible, to respect the land, honour its peoples, and support the broader work of community healing and renewal.

The consensus-based approach used by the Assembly, while rooted in colonial democratic traditions, shares important qualities with Indigenous models of governance—particularly its emphasis on dialogue, deliberation, and collective decision-making.

In the spirit of Reconciliation and Reconstruction, the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly is committed to the restoration of Indigenous communities and culture, however possible, through its work of thoughtfully and respectfully considering the future of the land and its people.

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This report is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Warren Magnusson, a distinguished professor at the University of Victoria and a respected member of the Citizens' Assembly's Oversight and Advisory Group. Dr. Magnusson's scholarship and steadfast belief in the role of cities and democratic engagement helped shape this process. We are grateful for his contributions and mourn his passing before the Assembly's work was complete.

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Introduction

Note from the Assembly Chair

The Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly was a special exercise in citizen democracy—an opportunity for residents from both municipalities to come together, learn from one another, hear from experts, and deliberate with care and respect on a question that has been debated for decades: should the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich amalgamate?

Citizens' assemblies are a made-in-British Columbia innovation. Since the first assembly was launched in 2004 to consider electoral reform, more than 50 assemblies have taken place across Canada, and more than 1,000 have occurred in different countries around the world. These processes are built on a simple, powerful idea: that regular people, given the time, resources, and support, can engage complex issues and offer clear, fair-minded recommendations.

While Victoria and Saanich are closely linked—geographically, economically, and socially—they remain distinct in their identities and governance. Determining whether to bring them together requires both detailed local understanding and a clear view of the region's long-term future.

Over nearly 60 hours of deliberation across eight full-day sessions, the 48 members of the Assembly brought an open mind to this process. Many changed their views along the way. Their conversations were informed by more than 20 guest speakers who brought local and expert perspectives that enriched every discussion. Members also reviewed dozens of public submissions and participated in four public roundtables, engaging with over 250 residents.

The Assembly's work was also informed by an independent technical study conducted by MNP. This report compared two municipal corporations with different organizational structures, financial systems, and service delivery models. It concluded that the two municipalities are broadly compatible—and that amalgamation is unlikely to impose either

significant financial costs or deliver substantial savings. This finding aligns with decades of academic research on Canadian municipal amalgamations: while large savings are rare, modest efficiencies can be realized and, in the context of a growing population, are often reinvested into improving local services.

I want to assure residents that the members of the Assembly care deeply about their communities and reflect the diversity of the people who live here. They recognize—as do many—that there are more urgent challenges facing our region, including housing affordability, climate adaptation, and supporting individuals living with addiction. In light of these priorities, the question of amalgamation can understandably feel like an issue that can wait.

However, having examined the issue in depth, the Assembly members concluded that amalgamation is not only timely but overdue. They found that a unified municipality would, among many benefits, strengthen both communities by enabling more integrated planning, offering a more representative voice at provincial and federal tables, and supporting a wider, more diversified tax base to advance shared priorities across the region. Of course, reasonable people can disagree on this question. But what cannot be doubted is the diligence, good faith, and farsightedness with which Assembly members approached their task. This was a healthy exercise in local democracy and the members should be commended.

I would also like to acknowledge the significant support of municipal representatives from both Victoria and Saanich and the members of the Assembly's Advisory and Oversight Committee, whose guidance was invaluable.

On behalf of everyone involved in this process, thank you for taking the time to read this report. We hope it contributes meaningfully to your understanding of the Assembly and its findings and supports a constructive conversation about the future of both communities.

Peter MacLeod
Chair, Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly on Municipal Amalgamation

Note from the Advisory and Oversight Group

As members of the Advisory and Oversight Group (AOG), with diverse expertise and experience, we were invited to provide independent and impartial advice to the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly and his team on several matters. First, we provided feedback on the proposed design and pacing of the Assembly sessions, as well as advice on topics and potential presenters to the Assembly. Second, we were invited to observe the sessions, share our observations with the MASS LBP team, and provide a sounding board for any questions or concerns they had. Finally, we were asked to be available to respond to any concerns expressed by Assembly members about how the meetings were curated or facilitated, but no such concerns were raised.

The AOG had two meetings with the MASS LBP team before the Assembly first convened and four meetings thereafter. Two or three AOG members typically observed each of the Assembly sessions. What follows are observations we think are material for readers of the Assembly's final report.

Steady, expert, neutral facilitation. MASS LBP brought its considerable experience to bear on facilitating the Citizens' Assembly. The process was well described and defined early on, the overall trajectory and expectations were clearly delineated, there were regular check-ins with members of the Assembly, and there was excellent facilitation with no apparent bias. Members were informed about the history of efforts to stimulate debate on the possibility of amalgamation, how the Assembly came to be in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how their deliberations would fit into the longer process of decision-making for the Victoria and Saanich Councils and citizens, regardless of the outcome. The MASS LBP team was flexible and responsive to the wishes and concerns of the Assembly, and regularly sought out the observations of AOG members.

Professional presentations and reports. Citizens' Assembly members were exposed to presentations from a diverse set of experts, advocates, and researchers. Every effort was made to identify speakers who could share their expertise or viewpoints, and to ensure that presentations arguing one side of an issue were balanced by presentations sharing the other side. Several informative presentations were made by Saanich, Victoria, and CRD officials, who in the best public service traditions were neutral, knowledgeable, and professional. Despite later concerns from the City of Victoria on selected matters, the MNP technical study provided useful information to the Assembly and did not affect or mislead in any way the deliberations of the Assembly. Members were comfortable with the report and already aware of key differences across jurisdictions.

Encouraging Indigenous representation. Efforts were made to engage Indigenous communities and organizations, and to secure representation on the AOG, but it was not possible to secure this kind of commitment given other priorities of those communities. Two presenters did focus on the pre-settler history and context of what we now call the Saanich Peninsula. Assembly members were mindful of traditional territories and seriously considered the implications of their deliberations for Indigenous communities in the region.

Assembly diversity, dialogue, and deliberations.
We were struck at the diversity of members of the Assembly, reflecting different age groups, genders, education and professional backgrounds, and points of view. Despite this diversity, the questions, statements, conversations, and deliberations were always thoughtful and respectful. All members were open to learning and listening to many points of view, issues, and concerns. They were invited to identify shared values and encouraged to think about what more they needed to know or be assuaged about when alternatives were presented. Even though members were serious about the process and their responsibilities, they enjoyed meeting with each other and the sessions were convivial. This, too, reflected even-handed and unbiased facilitation, and the commitment to encourage sharing diverse perspectives.

In short, as members of the Advisory and Oversight Group, we want to assure readers that this report reflects the considered deliberations of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly, after listening to diverse presentations and reviewing many pertinent documents. It was clear to us that Assembly members felt that they were privileged to participate in such a process, and we, in turn, felt privileged to provide advice and observe. We recommend that municipalities in the Greater Victoria region consider relying on similar deliberative processes to explore similar and other issues in the future.

Marjan H. Ehsassi
Executive Director, Federation for Innovation in Democracy (FIDE-North America), and a Democracy Fellow, Berggruen Institute

Paul Hames
Chair of Federated Coop Ltd., and former Chief Constable, Central Saanich

Evert Lindquist
Professor and former Director of the University of Victoria's School of Public Administration

Ansley Tucker
Dean Emerita, Anglican Diocese of Islands and Inlets

Warren Magnusson
Professor Emeritus, University of Victoria's Department of Political Science

(Deceased prior to the completion of the Assembly)

Executive Summary: Understanding the Assembly Process

The final report of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly is the culmination of a yearlong process that began when the 48 Assembly members were selected by Civic Lottery in June 2024 and ended with the submission of this report to municipal councils in May 2025. During this time, the members of the Assembly met for eight, full-day Saturday sessions, convened four public meetings, heard from over 20 expert guest speakers and read more than 50 submissions from area residents. Collectively, they invested more than 3000 hours in this work. On April 5, 2025, the members of the Citizens' Assembly reached a consensus recommendation:

> *"Having considered the costs, benefits and disadvantages to the best of our abilities and with the information available to us,* ***we recommend the amalgamation of Victoria and Saanich****. In the course of our deliberations, we ultimately concluded that amalgamation as a unified city would be the best form of government for our two municipalities."*

The recommendation of the Citizens' Assembly also brings to a climax decades of public debate around amalgamation and the future of the capital region. As municipalities grow, they routinely consider whether they should merge with neighbouring jurisdictions. This process, called amalgamation, means combining the governments, geographic boundaries, municipal services, and identities of two or more jurisdictions.

Over the past decade, the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich have considered whether they should amalgamate and become one municipality. During the 2014 B.C. municipal elections, eight municipalities in the region asked a non-binding ballot question of voters to gauge public support for studying amalgamation; Victoria and Saanich were among the seven municipalities where a majority of voters supported it. Following this election, the councils of Victoria and Saanich took the initiative to propose a study of amalgamation in the form of a Citizens' Assembly. During the 2018 B.C. municipal elections, Victoria and Saanich each asked a Community Opinion Question: *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?* A majority of voters in both municipalities supported the proposal and, after being delayed by the pandemic, the Citizens' Assembly proceeded in 2024. The councils and staff of Victoria and Saanich worked together to produce the Terms of Reference to guide the Assembly's work.

As a representative body of randomly selected residents, the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly is well positioned to bring clarity and guidance on an important civic issue to government and the public alike.

How to read this report

The report has three sections. The Introduction (page 9) and Appendices (page 61) have been written by the Assembly organizing team and help to explain the process and findings. The Members' Report (page 39) is the heart of this report. This section was written by the Assembly members, in small working groups and in plenary, during the last two sessions of the Assembly. Members reviewed and refined their text in the weeks that followed the final session, reflecting the consensus reached on April 5, 2025.

The Members' Report consists of a preamble that describes, in the members' own words, who they are, why they volunteered, the values they developed to guide their work, what they learned, and the issues they considered. The Assembly's consensus recommendation to pursue amalgamation is described on page 43. Following this section, the Assembly members have written a section called "Considerations and Further Recommendations" around nine specific topics. Here, they explain their rationale for supporting amalgamation and provide additional ideas to consider in advance of any referendum and, if voters approve, the implementation process that would follow.

Exploring the Costs, Benefits and Disadvantages of Amalgamation

The District of Saanich and the City of Victoria directed the Assembly to "explore the costs, benefits, and disadvantages of the amalgamation between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria" and to "make fact-based, evidence-based, and informed recommendations to the councils in order to determine a path forward." To help fulfil this mandate, the organizers—in collaboration with representatives of both municipalities and the Advisory and Oversight Group—developed a curriculum, commissioned a technical report, and invited guest speakers to ensure that members would benefit from a range of perspectives.

The Citizens' Assembly carefully examined the costs associated with amalgamation, but not the costs of implementing amalgamation. This distinction is important. The Assembly's mandate did not include producing a detailed implementation plan or cost estimate, and no such figure is presented in this report.

As part of its deliberations, the Citizens' Assembly was fortunate to hear from Dr. Enid Slack, Director of the Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy.[1] Dr. Slack is widely regarded as Canada's leading expert on municipal finance, and her extensive research into the impacts of municipal amalgamations across the country helped shape the Assembly's understanding of this complex issue.

From the outset, it was clear to members that there is no universal rule when it comes to the costs of implementing amalgamation. The fiscal outcomes of past mergers have varied widely depending on the size of the municipalities involved, the

1) See: "Municipal Amalgamation: Principles and Case Studies"; presentation to the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly by Dr. Enid Slack, November 2, 2024.

speed and manner of implementation, and the presence—or absence—of provincial support. Comparing case studies can be helpful, but they are also inconclusive because every amalgamation occurs within its own unique legal, political, and economic context. Differences in population size, labour agreements, service standards, and geographic layout all influence the ultimate costs involved.

For this reason, the Assembly was cautious about drawing direct comparisons to much larger or more contentious amalgamations, such as Toronto (1998) or Halifax (1996), where the mergers combined multiple municipalities of different sizes, tax bases, and service levels—often under considerable political pressure and with insufficient support.

Among the case studies reviewed, the 1995 amalgamation of Abbotsford and Matsqui in British Columbia stood out as the most useful point of reference. Like Victoria and Saanich, Abbotsford and Matsqui were adjacent municipalities whose boundaries were increasingly seen as artificial and confusing by local residents and businesses. Prior to their merger, the two municipalities had developed a range of shared service agreements, but this cooperation was ultimately judged to be insufficient to meet the demands of rapid growth and long-term regional planning. The decision to amalgamate was made voluntarily, with local approval and support from the Province of British Columbia.

According to post-amalgamation reviews, the implementation costs of the Abbotsford–Matsqui merger were approximately $1.15 million—or roughly $2.12 million in today's dollars—an amount that was considered manageable and reasonable at the time.[2] The province contributed roughly one-third of that cost, consistent with its broader policy of providing financial support for locally initiated restructuring efforts. Members noted that any potential amalgamation between Victoria and Saanich would likely incur higher implementation costs, particularly given today's greater administrative complexity and scale. However, the Abbotsford experience remains instructive: it demonstrated that when implementation is carefully planned, well-phased, and accompanied by provincial support, amalgamation can proceed without significant financial disruption.[3]

It is also worth noting that many of the case studies reviewed—including Abbotsford, Halifax, and Toronto—took place more than 25 years ago. While still instructive, these examples reflect a different policy and administrative environment. Members recognized the importance of adapting those lessons to today's context, particularly with respect to implementation complexity, public expectations, and available provincial supports.

Beyond case-specific figures, the Assembly also considered the broader potential advantages of amalgamation outlined by

2) Igor Vojnovic, *Municipal Consolidation in the 1990s: An analysis of five Canadian municipalities* (Intergovernmental Committee on Urban and Regional Research, 1997; see Chapter 3: British Columbia);
3) *"Case study: Amalgamation between Abbotsford and Matsqui seen as successful,"* Robert Barron, Cowichan Valley Citizen, May 6, 2018

Dr. Slack and others.[4] These included the creation of a larger and more equalized tax base; improved coordination of services such as planning, transit, and infrastructure; and more equitable distribution of costs across the population. These advantages take on added importance when viewed in light of the region's current and future challenges—including the need for affordable housing, climate adaptation, and major infrastructure investment. At the same time, members weighed potential disadvantages, including concerns about reduced local responsiveness, the possible loss of municipal identity or community character, and fears that a larger bureaucracy might feel more distant or harder to navigate. These concerns informed the development of specific assurances later in the Assembly process.

The Assembly also reviewed the Technical Study prepared by MNP, which provided a comparative analysis of the two municipalities' finances, services, and governance. That report concluded that Victoria and Saanich are highly compatible and identified no significant financial risks, barriers, or advantages to amalgamation. Unlike many past amalgamations, where significant disparities created friction and complexity, the similarities between the two municipalities suggest that the fiscal and administrative hurdles to amalgamation are comparatively low. In the view of the Assembly, this compatibility—combined with prudent implementation planning and anticipated provincial support—means that cost should not be seen as a barrier to amalgamation.

The information considered by the Assembly—including academic research, comparable case studies, and professional assessments—supports the conclusion that while costs are inevitable, they are not insurmountable. Based on the lessons of prior amalgamations, with careful planning, phased implementation, and support from the Province of British Columbia, the costs of amalgamation between Victoria and Saanich are unlikely to prevent the communities from realizing what the Assembly believes are the potential benefits of a unified city.

The Assembly's program of learning and deliberation further emphasized delineating advantages and disadvantages of amalgamation for each municipality, as well as those accruing to a combined municipality. The process ensured members had the opportunity to weigh the pros and cons of each potential outcome, develop a range of assurances they would need to support each, and reengage with the benefits and disadvantages for their communities in the process of reaching consensus.

For example, members considered whether amalgamation might improve coordination of housing and transportation planning across municipal boundaries, while also weighing concerns about the potential loss of local identity or responsiveness. They discussed how a larger, unified municipality could better attract infrastructure investment, while also noting the importance of maintaining neighbourhood-level services and representation. Throughout the process, members returned to these trade-

4) See, for example: "*Municipal Amalgamation in BC: History and Alternative Approaches*"; presentation to the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly by Dr. Robert Bish, September 21, 2024.

offs, refining their thinking in light of new evidence and each other's perspectives. This iterative deliberation helped ensure that the Assembly's final recommendation was grounded in a shared understanding of both the potential benefits and real challenges of amalgamation.

Consensus and Minority Reports

The Citizens' Assembly's Terms of Reference provided by the municipalities affirmed that a consensus model should guide the Assembly's decision making, as stated in the Guiding Principles: "The Assembly will work towards consensus when drafting their recommendations, while also respecting and documenting differing perspectives among its members."[5] On page 26 readers will find a thorough description of the process by which the Assembly members ultimately reached a consensus recommendation that the municipalities should pursue amalgamation.

Consensus is "an outcome resulting from participants developing and agreeing on a solution to a given issue through open deliberation oriented towards the best interest of the group as a whole."[6] Consensus does not connote unanimity, and as indicated in the box at right, seven of the 48 members of the Assembly were contrary-minded with regards to the recommendation to amalgamate. All but one of these members voted with the majority to endorse the Members' Report as being an accurate reflection of the members' deliberations and an expression of consensus. Those who were contrary-minded had two opportunities to contribute their perspectives to the final report: by working alongside their fellow members in considering and drafting the sections of the report (See: Members' Report, page 39) and/or by drafting a minority report (See: Minority Reports, page 54).

Through the consensus model, Assembly members agreed to speak with one voice while making space for differing opinions and conclusions throughout the process.

The Citizens' Assembly reached consensus through a rigorous process of learning and deliberation. Before finalizing their recommendations, a vote was called to affirm consensus on the following questions:

1) Should Victoria and Saanich:

39	Amalgamate
7	Remain separate municipalities but pursue opportunities for deeper service integration
0	Remain separate municipalities and maintain their existing approach to providing services
2	Members not present

2) Do you agree that the final report appropriately reflects the Assembly's deliberations and should be submitted to the municipal councils for their consideration?

45	Yes
1	No
2	Members not present

5) "Terms of Reference – Citizens' Assembly between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria"; revised March 22, 2021.
6) See Participedia (https://participedia.net/method/consensus); see also Mansbridge, J. (1983). Beyond Adversary Democracy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Meeting the Terms of Reference

The Citizens' Assembly's Terms of Reference, issued jointly by the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria, defined the Assembly's mandate and provided guidance for its work. It included a list of guiding principles (see: Citizens' Assembly Guiding Principles, page <?>) and 16 criteria the Assembly was expected to consider (see table below). The Terms of Reference also granted the organizers important flexibility: "The Assembly will enjoy wide latitude, subject to the processes and mandate laid out in the Terms of Reference, in its ability to make recommendations to Saanich and Victoria regarding the costs, benefits and disadvantages of the amalgamation between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria."

What the Assembly was asked to consider	Where to look
Identify common aspirations for good local governance to provide a basis for evaluating costs, benefits and disadvantages of amalgamation and status quo of the municipalities relative to their current independent status.	*Members' Report: Our Values (page 41)*
List the issues which the Assembly believes needs to be resolved for amalgamation to merit consideration, including issues related to the implementation and integration of the municipalities under amalgamation.	*Members' Report: What We Learned (page 42) and The Issues We Considered (page 44)*
Consider any assets and liabilities of Saanich and Victoria including any related impacts on local rate payers.	*VS Technical Study (page 68)*
Consider cultural and land use priorities and similarities and differences of the two municipalities.	*Presentations made to the Citizens' Assembly by the CAOs and Planners*
Compare corporate structures and approaches to governance of the two municipalities.	*Presentations made to the Citizens' Assembly by the CAOs and Planners*
Ensure all analysis and recommendations of the Assembly are informed and mindful of the ongoing work with local First Nations towards Reconciliation.	*Summary of Engagement with Indigenous Communities (page 97)*
Consider neighbourhood level implications and balance issues of economy of scale with community identity and representation.	*Presentations made to the Citizens' Assembly by the CAOs and Planners*
Consider congruency and alignment of strategic and political priorities of the municipalities (as expressed in Strategic Plans, Official Community Plans, Urban Containment Boundary policies and other significant strategic and planning documents).	*Presentations made to the Citizens' Assembly by the CAOs and Planners*
Consider past investment in and future needs for capital assets, infrastructure replacement reserves including the analysis of anticipated impacts on an amalgamated municipality.	*VS Technical Study (page 68)*
Consider ariations in levels of service of the two municipalities including the development of clear recommendations on aligning service levels in an amalgamated municipality.	*VS Technical Study (page 68)*
Clearly delineate advantages and disadvantages for the respective municipality in considering amalgamation versus those accruing solely to a combined municipality arising from amalgamation.	*See below; also: VS Technical Study (page 68); Members' Report (page 39) and Minority Reports (page 54)*
To the extent possible, consideration of costs, benefits and disadvantages of amalgamation between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria over both the short and long terms (i.e. over 5 year, 20 year, and 50 year horizons).	*Members' Report (page 39) and Minority Reports (page 54)*
Consider democratic representation and accessibility of elected officials to residents and other stakeholders.	*Members' Report (page 39) and Minority Reports (page 54)*
Provide commentary on other opportunities for service integration is considered part of the Assembly's mandate.	*Members' Report, Considerations and Further Recommendations (page 45)*
If full amalgamation of Saanich and Victoria is recommended by the Assembly, provide commentary and recommendations from the Assembly on the integration of full municipal operations (both in the short and longer term) is expected as part of the Assembly's mandate.	*Members' Report, Considerations and Further Recommendations (page 45)*
In meeting its mandate and the expectations outlined in the Terms of Reference, the Assembly will, to the greatest extent possible, represent the consensus view of the members. Divergent views of Assembly members will be included in the Citizens' Assembly's Final Report.	*Members' Report (page 39) and Minority Reports (page 54)*

Who are the Citizens' Assembly Members?

The 48 members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly are residents who volunteered their time and energy because they care about the communities where they live, work, and play. Representing the diverse fabric of Victoria and Saanich, they brought many unique perspectives to bear and worked collaboratively to produce a thoughtful public judgment on a question that has been vigorously debated for decades. (See: Meet the Members of the Citizens' Assembly page 72; see also: Assembly Members in their Own Words, page 35.)

Members were randomly selected from a pool of registered volunteers using a blind draw called a Civic Lottery. Ten thousand households in Victoria and Saanich were randomly selected to receive an invitation to opt in. The Civic Lottery was stratified to ensure the Assembly broadly matched local demographics. Given population differences, 27 seats were reserved for Saanich residents and 21 for Victoria residents. The draw weighed factors like gender, age, local geography, ethnicity, and housing status, using data from Statistics Canada and municipal sources. (See: Civic Lottery and Member Selection, page 65.)

Involving the wider public

In addition to eight full-day sessions, the Citizens' Assembly hosted four public roundtable meetings—two in November 2024 and two in February 2025—where residents met members, learned about their work, and shared views. More than 250 people attended. These sessions gave Assembly members broader community input as they considered the future of both municipalities. While deliberations were closed to the public, all presentations, reports, and submissions were published online, along with summaries of each session. A regular newsletter kept subscribers informed and encouraged participation. Beginning in September 2024, the Assembly accepted 57 submissions from individuals and community groups, which were shared with members and posted publicly.

What happens now

In British Columbia, municipal amalgamation requires provincial approval following a vote in each municipality, with more than 50% of votes in favour in both. The Assembly's role was to study the issue on behalf of the wider communities and make a consensus recommendation to both councils and the public. The Assembly has recommended amalgamation. It is now up to the elected councils to consider the recommendation and decide if they endorse it. If they do, they would work with the Province of British Columbia to initiate a public referendum. The referendum could coincide with the next B.C. municipal elections in October 2026. If a majority of residents in both municipalities vote in favour, the provincial government's approval would still be required for amalgamation to proceed.

Looking for consensus
Looking for consensus

Understanding the Findings of the Citizens' Assembly

The members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly recommended that the two municipalities pursue amalgamation and believe that a unified city would be the best form of government for the two communities, whose lives and services are already deeply interwoven.

Shared Values

To guide their work, Assembly members adopted a set of shared values that reflected their aspirations for good local governance and served as criteria for evaluating both the status quo and the potential of amalgamation. These values were: accountable, caring, collaborative, communicative, effective, fiscally responsible, forward-thinking, and representative. The members returned to these values repeatedly throughout the process as they assessed the implications of amalgamation for considerations such as service delivery, civic engagement, environmental stewardship, Indigenous relations, and democratic representation. (See: Our Values, page 41)

The Issues They Considered

The Citizens' Assembly took seriously its task to identify the full range of issues that needed to be addressed for amalgamation to merit support. Among the most pressing were how amalgamation might affect the region's capacity to respond to social and economic pressures such as affordability, climate change, and urban growth. Members discussed whether a single municipality would be better positioned to manage rising housing costs, regional inequality, and homelessness, particularly by coordinating policies and funding streams more effectively.

They examined how amalgamation might improve transportation planning—connecting sidewalks, bike lanes, transit routes, and arterial roads across municipal boundaries in a way that better reflects actual commuting patterns. The Assembly also explored whether harmonized land use and zoning policies could better support sustainable development and the "missing middle" housing that both communities need. At the same time, they considered the risk that amalgamation might dilute local character or erode the rural-urban balance that residents in Saanich, in particular, value.

The Assembly assessed governance and democratic accountability under various future models, including ward and hybrid council systems. They debated whether amalgamation would give more residents a voice in decisions that already affect them, or whether it would lead to less responsive government due to a smaller number of elected representatives overseeing a larger and more diverse population. They also discussed how a unified city might wield greater influence with the provincial and federal governments—potentially attracting more funding or resisting cost downloading. Members further considered how

amalgamation could reshape inter-municipal relationships within the CRD, including implications for shared service agreements and regional initiatives.

While many services are already regionally coordinated, members noted gaps and inconsistencies in other areas, such as building permits, policing, fire dispatch, and emergency response. The Assembly wanted to understand whether these could be more effectively managed within a single municipal structure or through improved collaboration. (See: The Issues We Considered, page 44.)

What They Learned

Through a curriculum that included technical studies, expert presentations, public submissions, and peer deliberation, Assembly members developed a rich and well-rounded understanding of how the two communities are governed and administered. They learned that Victoria and Saanich already share many values and service partnerships and that, in practice, residents' lives cross municipal boundaries daily. From commuting to schooling to healthcare and recreation, most people experience the region as a unified whole—even if the governance structure does not reflect that reality.

Members reviewed historical and contemporary examples of amalgamation in Canada and discovered that each case produced different outcomes depending on local context, implementation, and leadership. They saw that amalgamation alone does not guarantee lower costs or improved services, but that it can create new possibilities for strategic alignment, long-term planning, and public engagement—if handled well.
From the MNP Technical Study, they learned that Victoria and Saanich are broadly compatible in terms of governance, finances, service levels, and infrastructure. No significant financial or legal barriers to amalgamation were identified. Members also heard from economist Bob Bish and others that most municipal costs stem from service provision, not from the number of elected officials or administrative structures—meaning that amalgamation was unlikely to yield large financial savings but could improve service coordination and efficiency.

Members deepened their understanding of Indigenous relations and reconciliation, noting that amalgamation could offer a moment to rebuild municipal relationships with local Nations on stronger, more equitable foundations. They reflected on the region's colonial history, the current obligations under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the potential for co-developing place names, stewardship agreements, and urban Indigenous engagement strategies.

Crucially, the Assembly learned to think in terms of long-term impacts. While implementation costs would exist, they found no credible evidence that amalgamation would increase tax rates substantially or pose unmanageable risks. Instead, they came to appreciate that governance reform is not a technical fix

but a structural choice that can enable better decision-making over time. By harmonizing planning, pooling resources, and offering more consistent democratic representation, amalgamation could help the region face shared challenges with greater resilience and accountability. (See: What We Learned, page 42)

Why the Citizens' Assembly Recommended Amalgamation

The Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly ultimately recommended amalgamation because its members—48 residents drawn from both municipalities—came to believe that a unified local government would better reflect the social, economic, and environmental realities of the region and be better equipped to meet its future challenges. After months of intensive learning and deliberation, Assembly members concluded that the current administrative divide between Victoria and Saanich no longer served the public interest. The region functions as a shared civic space, and its governance should reflect that.

The Assembly's recommendation did not rest on a narrow cost-benefit analysis. In fact, members learned that the financial savings from amalgamation were uncertain and likely modest. However, they also learned that the greatest municipal expenses come from service delivery—not from governance structures or elected officials—and that both municipalities already depend on each other in critical ways. For example, economic activity in downtown Victoria supports regional prosperity, while many of the region's green spaces and housing opportunities lie in Saanich. The two municipalities already collaborate on services through the Capital Regional District and share responsibilities on key issues, such as emergency response and waste management. Yet, in many areas—particularly land use, transportation, policing, housing, and climate response—the Assembly concluded that fragmented governance hinders effectiveness and accountability.

Assembly members came to believe that amalgamation offered a more coherent and strategic path forward. A single, unified city would be better positioned to plan and deliver services consistently across the region, remove administrative redundancies, and respond more efficiently to shared challenges like climate change, housing affordability, and infrastructure coordination. They were especially persuaded by the potential for integrated transportation planning, standardized building and zoning processes, and improved coordination of emergency services. In particular, a unified police and fire services could lead to faster response times and more equitable resource allocation.

Equally significant was the Assembly's belief that amalgamation would increase democratic fairness. Members noted that many residents live, work, and spend time across both municipalities, but are only able to vote in one. Amalgamation would ensure that all residents could help

elect the leaders who make decisions that affect their daily lives. The Assembly also supported the idea of a larger, more influential municipality—one that could join national forums such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Big City Mayors' Caucus and more effectively advocate with higher levels of government.

The Assembly placed a strong emphasis on Indigenous relations and saw amalgamation as an opportunity to reset and deepen government-to-government partnerships with local Nations, in line with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They recommended co-developing stewardship practices, engaging urban Indigenous organizations, and even considering renaming the amalgamated city in partnership with Indigenous Peoples.

(See: Considerations and Further Recommendations, page 101, for a full description of the Assembly's rationale for their recommendation to amalgamate.)

Some Assembly members expressed concern that amalgamation might erode local representation or compromise the unique character of neighbourhoods. Others worried that amalgamation might introduce new layers of bureaucracy or that the benefits of integration could be achieved through better inter-municipal collaboration instead. These perspectives were captured in six minority reports (see page 54). However, the majority felt that such concerns could be addressed through thoughtful planning, including a new governance structure that preserves neighbourhood identity while ensuring broader representation.

Ultimately, the members weighed the knowns and unknowns, listened to diverse perspectives, and returned to the core values they had identified together—accountability, effectiveness, collaboration, care, and forward-thinking governance. They came to see amalgamation not as a silver bullet, but as a vital structural change that would enable more integrated, resilient, and representative governance for generations to come. It was, they concluded, a decision to prepare the region for the future by shaping a city that better reflects how people already live today.

How did the Assembly Reach Consensus?

Consensus is "an outcome resulting from participants developing and agreeing on a solution to a given issue through open deliberation oriented towards the best interest of the group as a whole. A consensus emerges when all participants or parties who are discussing a common problem agree on a solution or a course of action." 7 Within the realm of democratic decision making, consensus is distinguished from majority-rules voting by two key features.

1. **Each participant may voice their position to others in the group, typically in a deliberative format;**
2. **Each participant agrees to support the ultimate decision, even when it's**

7) See Participedia (https://participedia.net/method/consensus); see also Mansbridge, J. (1983). Beyond Adversary Democracy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

not their own preferred choice.[8]

Consensus should also be distinguished from unanimity. Unanimity implies complete agreement through a vote with no dissent, whereas consensus emphasizes broad support without requiring full agreement.

The Citizens' Assembly's Terms of Reference, as set by the municipalities, affirmed that a consensus model would guide the Assembly's decision-making, as outlined in the Guiding Principles:

> **2.8 The Assembly will work towards consensus when drafting their recommendations, while also respecting and documenting differing perspectives among its members.**

And in the Mandate of the Citizens' Assembly:

> **3.16 In meeting its mandate and the expectations outlined in the Terms of Reference, the Assembly will, to the greatest extent possible, represent the consensus view of the members. Divergent views of Assembly members will be included in the Citizens' Assembly's Final Report.**[9]

The Assembly's program was designed to foster thoughtful dialogue about the issues surrounding amalgamation. Through repeated rounds of learning and discussion, members developed greater clarity and built a shared understanding, ultimately leading to consensus. (See: Summaries of the Assembly Sessions and Public Meetings, page 88.)

On the morning of Saturday, March 8, 2025, 43 Assembly members arranged their chairs into a large circle inside Sherri Bell Hall at Camosun College. By that point, they had spent over 50 hours across six full-day sessions together. They had heard from 21 guest speakers, including experts and stakeholders; explored a wide range of regional and municipal issues; drafted values to guide their work; developed considerations and assurances for each possible outcome; and reviewed feedback from residents through public meetings and written submissions.

With the group assembled, Assembly Chair Peter MacLeod explained that the time had come to determine whether consensus had been reached. He presented a prompting question, both orally and on screen:

> *"In a minute or two, tell us the story of how you have arrived at your current perspective and why you believe this perspective is right for your community."*

MacLeod added that sharing this story as part of the search for consensus is "not as simple as yea or nay or somewhere in between. One of the things we've come to appreciate is the kind of richness of thought that we have acquired through all of these

8) See "Decision Making Models: Voting versus Consensus" (2017), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, via the Center for Health and Learning. https://healthandlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Decision-Making-Models-Voting-versus-Consensus.pdf
9) "Terms of Reference – Citizens' Assembly between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria"; revised March 22, 2021.

conversations. And I know from speaking with a number of you, some days it's been on this side of the line and other days it's been on that side of the line, and that's normal. That's healthy. Your process of coming to wherever you happen to sit right now, I think, could be very valuable to the rest of us."

Over the course of nearly two hours of thoughtful sharing and reflection, each member volunteered to take the microphone in turn and, facing their fellow Assembly members in the circle, expressed their perspective on the question of whether the two municipalities should pursue amalgamation, pursue greater service integration without full amalgamation, or retain the current status quo—and their rationale for reaching their conclusion.[10]

At the conclusion of the circle, noting that there appeared to be an overwhelming majority of members who expressed support for recommending amalgamation, MacLeod said:

> *"I want to thank everyone for your honesty and your thoughtfulness and your patience. I think it is clear that there is a balance of opinion in the room that favours amalgamation, and that while there clearly isn't unanimity, I think there is the basis of a working consensus and that we should proceed to develop recommendations on that basis, while having heard very carefully the concerns of those who are contrary minded. And that there are a number of elements to this report where I think we should take care to address the concerns of the contrary minded. I think we all appreciate that our job now is to make the clearest case to try and distill all of the perspectives, all of the wisdom that I think's been shared over the course of the past two hours."*

During the afternoon of their seventh session and the morning of their eighth on April 5, Assembly members worked collaboratively to draft the various sections of what has become this final report. They prepared to read out a draft version of the report at a special closing ceremony that afternoon, which included the mayors or mayor-delegates, councillors, staff from the municipalities and Province, and previous guest speakers and presenters to the Assembly.

Before that ceremony took place, MacLeod asked the members to affirm the consensus recommendation and their confidence in the report by a show of hands on two questions:

1. **Should Victoria and Saanich:**
   a. Amalgamate
   b. Remain separate municipalities but pursue opportunities for deeper service integration

10) Of the 43 members present on March 8, only one declined the opportunity to speak to their perspective, citing a preference not to speak in front of a group, but instead indicated privately to the chair and to fellow members their perspective. Of the five members who were absent, three communicated their perspectives in phone conversations with Assembly staff the week prior to March 8, though these perspectives were not conveyed during the circle so as to avoid any inference of bias by the Assembly staff. These three members, when contacted afterwards and apprised of the consensus-making process, conveyed their support for the process and outcome, and rejoined the process during the final session. The other two members were contacted but could not be reached, and were ultimately the two who withdrew from the Assembly.

c. Remain separate municipalities and maintain their existing approach to providing services

2. **Do you agree that the draft report appropriately reflects our deliberations and should be submitted to the municipal councils for their consideration?**
   a. Yes
   b. No

On the first question, among the 46 Assembly members present, the result was 39 members in favour of amalgamation; seven in favour of remaining separate but pursuing deeper service integration; and zero in favour of maintaining the existing approach. On the second question, 45 members indicated by show of hands Yes, and one member indicated No.

Having affirmed consensus, the members prepared to read out a draft version of their report in the closing ceremony. They then worked in the weeks that followed to refine and finalize the wording of the report, though no further substantive changes were made following the affirmation of consensus.

Those who were contrary-minded were provided with two further opportunities to have their concerns and perspectives included in the final report: by working alongside their fellow members in considering and drafting the sections of the report (See: Members' Report of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly, page 39) and/or by drafting a minority report (See: Minority Reports, page 54).

In their final report, the "We" is inclusive of all members of the Assembly, though of course a small minority did not support the ultimate recommendation. Through the consensus model, Assembly members agree to speak with one voice while making space for differing opinions and conclusions throughout the process.

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Facts and Figures

Fig. 1: Members by gender

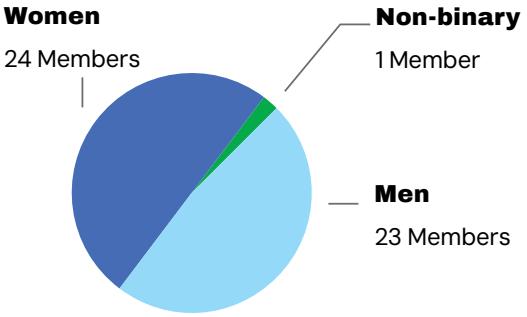


Fig. 2: Members by age group

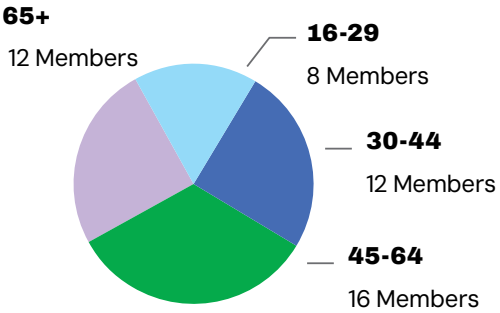
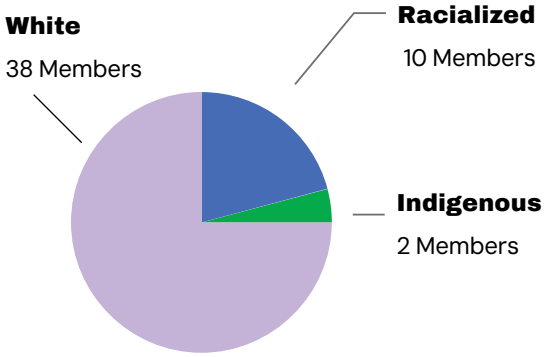
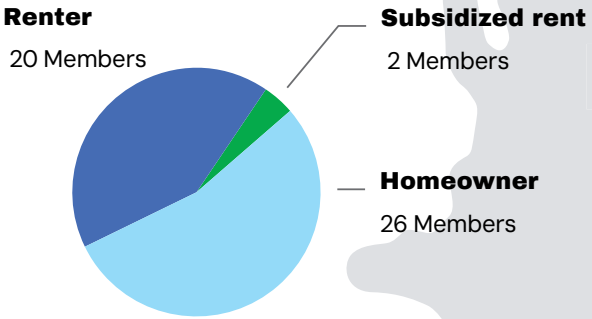


Fig.3: Members by race and ethnicity



Members had the option to declare more than one identity.

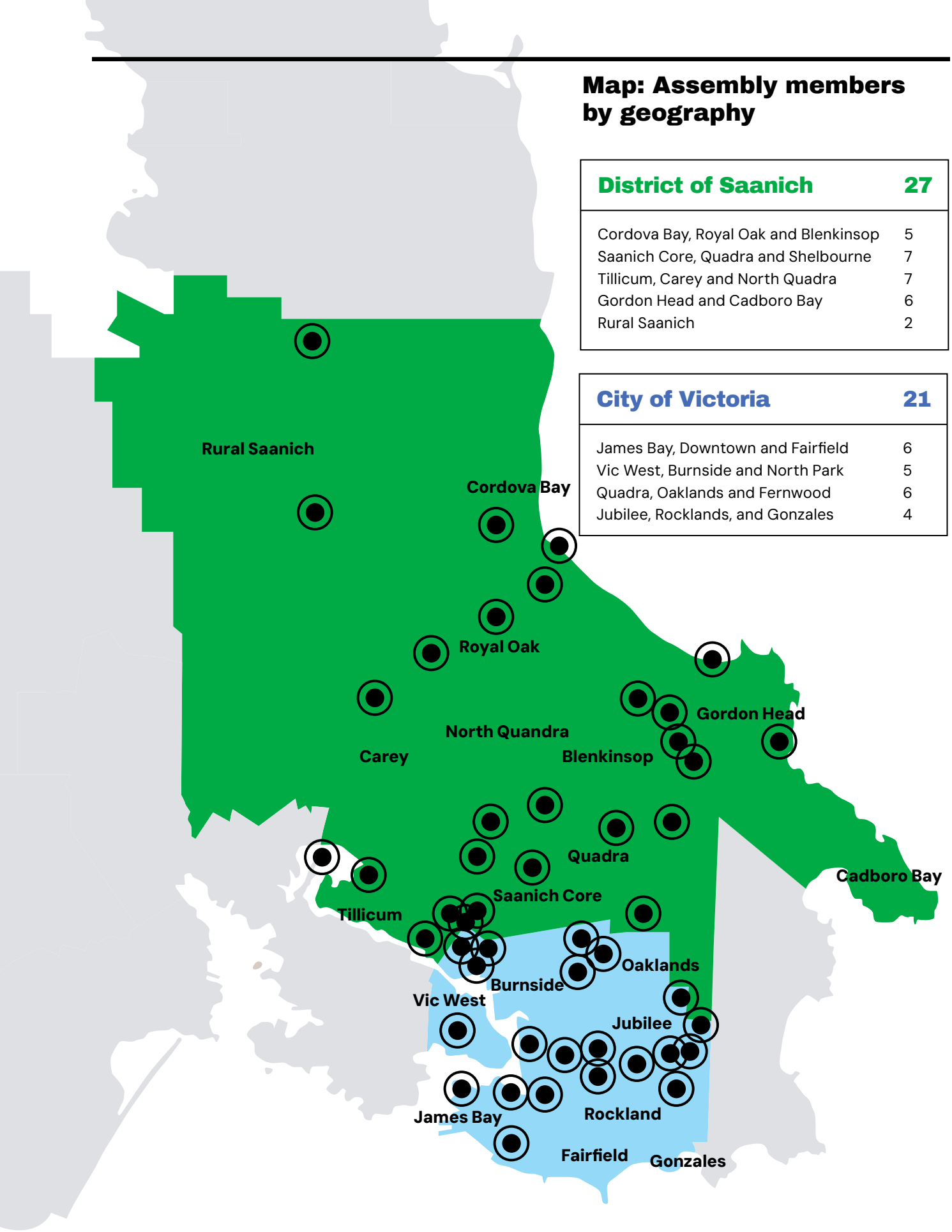
Fig. 4: Assembly members by type of housing



Map: Assembly members by geography

District of Saanich	27
Cordova Bay, Royal Oak and Blenkinsop	5
Saanich Core, Quadra and Shelbourne	7
Tillicum, Carey and North Quadra	7
Gordon Head and Cadboro Bay	6
Rural Saanich	2

City of Victoria	21
James Bay, Downtown and Fairfield	6
Vic West, Burnside and North Park	5
Quadra, Oaklands and Fernwood	6
Jubilee, Rocklands, and Gonzales	4



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In Their Own Words

During the seventh session, Citizens' Assembly members shared with each other their judgment on the question of amalgamation, as part of building towards consensus. Here are some highlights from that session.

"

I think I'm in favour of amalgamation… one of the strongest reasons is when you look at the comparison between the two [municipalities] it's like each of them kind of is half of a city. One is all downtown and dense and the other is suburb and more rural. A strong city, I think, is the two halves together."

"

I agree 100% with what everyone says, and I think that in 50 years down the road, we are probably better off amalgamating. [That said] I don't think that the circumstances are right, right now."

"

I've arrived at my current perspective by doing nothing but listening and recognizing my own bias… I think the best thing is to have the two municipalities stay status quo and to recommend greater integration of services."

"

If we could find 10% of redundant costs … that's nearly $60 million a year. What could we spend that money on? We could spend it on housing for [the] homeless… you could fund more police… possibly more bike lanes…."

"

It's never been clearer that something like an earthquake, a major wildfire, or other climate issues bears no interest whatsoever in small boundaries… all of the challenges, positive and negative, will either be neutral or better amalgamated, or easier amalgamated."

"

One thing that's been really useful is coming back to our values… this is a decision not for today but for far into the future… I'm in support of amalgamation because a united front clearly seems like the best path forward."

“

I’m really afraid for the future… My major concern is climate change… with an amalgamated city, we have more power. We can make decisions that are in the best interest of everyone in the region.”

“

I’m in favour of amalgamation, but only with strong conditions—we need a ward system, protection for local identities, and commitments around housing and climate. Otherwise, it’s just consolidation without purpose.”

“

I’m fully in favour of amalgamation… I don’t think it’s about saving money and not paying as much taxes. I think it’s about spending the money differently.”

“

I can vote in Victoria, and I don’t get a say in Saanich. And it would be nice to have a say for a bigger area. The problem that we’re trying to solve is about the future and I think we should grow together.”

“

I came in here a bit cynical, but I’ve seen what’s possible when people actually listen to each other. Whatever happens next, I feel more hopeful that change is possible.”

“

I agree that Saanich and Victoria are basically de facto one community… I definitely support amalgamation with a ward system, calling for the other municipalities to be integrated, and a preservation of the agricultural land reserve.”

“

Maybe it doesn’t save money, but maybe it saves time. And that, I guess… time is money.”

“

I think that, on balance, a combined city has the best chance at a compelling and unified vision for the next 20, 50, and 100 years. I don’t think it’s certain, but I think it’s probabilistically true. There’s a better chance that a combined city can do a better job as we move into the future.”

“

I’ve been to all the meetings, I’ve read lots of documents, listened to so many people with pros and cons, and I haven’t really found any good reasons to change what we have. If I could see a benefit, that would be fine. I see something we could lose, which is fewer elected people per population if we amalgamated. And some people point out that when you have larger organizations, you tend to have more levels of bureaucracy, it doesn’t happen at the beginning, but that does happen.”

“

The [responsibility of municipalities to collaborate] on really important things—I just don’t see it working very well. So I don’t trust that more integration will stick or work in the long term. I was also really deterred by amalgamation at first because of the short-term pain. I thought, ‘Nobody wants to—our property taxes are already going up so much, nobody’s going to want to spend more money for amalgamation. What’s the point of even suggesting it?’ And it is a deterrent. I’m still like, ‘Oh god, this sounds really messy…’ But I’m trying to think from a 50- to 100-year point of view. And when I think long term, I believe amalgamation is needed to be resilient and coordinated in a way that sticks.”

“

I’m from Rural Saanich, so I started this with a mild anti-amalgamation stance. Many people in Rural Saanich have seemed to feel that way over time, though I’ve since changed my opinion to be in favour of amalgamation. I think there’s a compelling equity and fairness argument here. Some people from Saanich say, ‘We don’t want to be involved in the issues of Victoria. We don’t want to help pay for what’s going on in terms of social disorder.’ For me, I think that’s a good reason to want to contribute—and my family and I do. We’d like to help support everything that’s going on in our region.”

“

Victoria and Saanich kind of complete each other… I see an obvious win in terms of future planning and infrastructure.”

Online and in-person public roundtable

Members' Report

Who We Are and Why We Volunteered

We are 48 residents who have a real interest in civic governance and making a better city. We volunteered because we wanted to engage in a democratic process where we could learn, discuss, and understand the different opportunities and challenges facing our communities. We love our communities because of their diversity, accessibility, proximity to natural spaces, and how safe they feel. These qualities promote an active lifestyle with a wide range of activities we love participating in. They also support different arts and cultural institutions that are well complemented by our wonderful local businesses.

Twenty-one of us are Victoria residents, and we appreciate the diversity of our neighbourhoods and our rich cultural amenities, all alongside the beautiful waterfront and dynamic inner harbour. As the provincial capital and commercial hub of this region, we value our city's wide range of easily accessible local businesses, entertainment, and professional services.

Twenty-seven of us are Saanich residents, and we appreciate our municipality's balance of urban and rural living that offers easy access to nature as well as the services of an urban centre. We are fortunate to enjoy living in close proximity to an abundance of trails and green spaces, great recreation centres, locally grown food, and incredible waterfronts.

Looking to the future, we see a number of challenges on the horizon. These challenges include managing a growing population, demographic shifts, the cost of living, political uncertainty, and climate change. While daunting, these challenges create an opportunity for us to re-examine how we approach creating a strong, adaptable, and vibrant community together.

Our Values

In the beginning as an Assembly, we identified the following values which helped us find common ground, guide our discussions and consider the issues. These values were made public and evolved over time through ongoing input by the public and Assembly members.

Accountable	We value local government that holds transparency as a core principle allowing for the measurement of progress and building public trust.
Caring	We value local government that contributes to the community's vibrancy by prioritizing people to have their core needs met.
Collaborative	We value local government that fosters inclusive and adaptable decision-making that balances community needs and perspectives.
Communicative	We value local government that prioritizes communication, respect and reciprocal relationships.
Effective	We value local government that delivers high-quality public services through timely and innovative measures.
Fiscally responsible	We value local government that uses the communities' resources wisely, today and in the future, to provide the best value in services and infrastructure.
Forward Thinking	We value local government that takes a holistic and regenerative approach to decision-making to improve the quality of life of current and future generations.
Representative	We value local government that enables inclusive participation and supports having public influence on decisions being made at the neighbourhood level and with other communities.

What We Learned

As a Citizens' Assembly, we were tasked by the municipalities to "learn about the costs, benefits and disadvantages of the amalgamation between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria, including shared and contrasting values, concerns and needs of residents of Saanich and Victoria regarding neighbourhoods, change, growth, service delivery, governance, capital and infrastructure needs, land use planning, emergency services, strategic and regulatory frameworks,"[11] and more.

During this process we learned that the two municipalities share many values and, as such, they currently work efficiently together to deliver good services and governance. We learned about how much the two municipalities depend on each other and how their futures are intertwined. For example, the tourist industry in downtown Victoria brings prosperity that benefits the wider region.

We learned about the rich history of the region including the Indigenous Peoples who have lived on this land since time immemorial. We learned about the creation of Fort Victoria, and how this evolved into what we now recognize as the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria.

We learned about the governance structure of both the municipalities and the other organizations that municipalities interact with, including the Province of British Columbia and the Capital Regional District (CRD). Currently the CRD and municipalities work together in many ways to provide services such as waste management and water. We also learned about the different responsibilities of the provincial government, which include, among many other things, both health care and education. We learned about the structures of policing in the different municipalities and the delivery of fire services, as well as emergency dispatch in each municipality.

We learned about amalgamation processes which have occurred in other municipalities across Canada including Halifax, Toronto, and Abbotsford. We learned from these past experiences that each process has had its own unique benefits and challenges due to specific circumstances for that area.

We learned that the amalgamation process is a long one, which affects residents and that we need to consider the long-term impact of our decisions. We learned that the financial impacts of an amalgamation are difficult to predict; however, we learned specifically from the economist Bob Bish that the greatest expense for municipalities, by far, is the cost of providing services, and that the salaries of elected officials such as mayors make up a very small part of the municipal budget. We learned from the Technical Study report prepared by MNP that there are no significant foreseeable barriers to amalgamation, either financial or in terms of the compatibility of the services each municipality provides.

11) From "Terms of Reference – Citizens' Assembly between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria"; revised March 22, 2021.

Our Recommendation

Having considered the costs, benefits, and disadvantages to the best of our abilities and with the information available to us, we recommend the amalgamation of Victoria and Saanich.

In the course of our deliberations, we ultimately concluded that amalgamation as a unified city would be the best form of government for our two municipalities.

The administrative border between the two municipalities is invisible, our lives as residents of Victoria and Saanich are intertwined, and it's time for the governance structure to reflect this reality.

We found no significant barriers to amalgamation in the materials presented to us.

The Issues We Considered

As an Assembly we were tasked with identifying the issues we believed needed to be resolved for amalgamation to merit consideration. Throughout the Assembly process we identified a range of issues, weighed the pros, cons and trade-offs, and considered the assurances we would need to support any potential outcome. What follows is a list of the most salient questions we asked ourselves as we moved through the process, but is by no means exhaustive of our conversations as an Assembly. For a complete summary of the Assembly program and how it helped us answer these questions, see Summary of Assembly Sessions and Public Meetings, page 71)

Relationships with Neighbouring Municipalities
The Citizens' Assembly process involved two of the 13 municipalities of Greater Victoria. How would amalgamation impact these relationships?

Affordability
Would an amalgamated Victoria and Saanich help improve affordability?

Social and Safety Issues in Downtown Victoria
Would a unified municipality create a more equitable distribution of resources to help improve these issues?

Community Resilience
Would a unified municipality help us be more resilient to anticipated future challenges?

Transportation Planning and Road Improvement
Would transportation and planning between the municipalities be improved through amalgamation (for example, bus routes, transit-oriented developments, etc.)?

Distinctions between Saanich (both rural and urban) and Victoria
Both municipalities have different values and contexts to inform their planning processes and service delivery. What are the challenges and opportunities that come with amalgamation? Communities in each municipality have their own distinct sense of identity. What might be the impact of amalgamation on community identity?

Amalgamation Transition
What would be the cost of the transition from two municipalities to one and how would it be funded?

Governance and Democracy
Many of us in one municipality are impacted by decisions made in the other municipality, but don't have a say in its decision-making. Would amalgamation resolve this?

Provincial Policies and Pressures
Would a unified municipality have more of an impact when advocating with the provincial government for additional resources or against the downloading of costs and services to municipalities?

Considerations and Further Recommendations

To support the recommendation to amalgamate Victoria and Saanich, the members of the Citizens' Assembly drafted the following Considerations and Further Recommendations around nine specific topics. Collectively, these may be regarded as the Assembly members' rationale for supporting amalgamation as well as guidance for policymakers and the public to consider in advance of a potential referendum and, if voters approve, the implementation process that would follow. The order in which they are listed does not indicate priority or significance. However, in special recognition of the importance of Reconciliation and Reconstruction regarding Indigenous Peoples incumbent upon Canadians, they have chosen to describe this issue first.

1. Indigenous Government to Municipal Government Relationships

Consistent with both municipalities' existing commitments, we believe that amalgamating Saanich and Victoria will provide a unique opportunity to address, honour, and respect larger commitments under the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report Calls to Action* and the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* in partnership with the lək̓ʷəŋən Peoples represented by the Songhees and Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) Nations and the W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples represented by the W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), BOḰEĆEN (Pauquachin), SȾÁUTW̱ (Tsawout), W̱SIK̓EM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations.

A. We expect that an amalgamated Saanich and Victoria could strengthen Indigenous governments and municipal government relationships, by:

- Ensuring the amalgamated municipality moves towards more equal and mutually beneficial government-to-government relationships
- Exploring, in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, how one municipality could encourage a more streamlined process for relationship building
- Re-evaluating and prioritizing Official Community Plans, with the potential to increase partnership with Indigenous Peoples

B. We believe that an amalgamated Saanich and Victoria may provide an opportunity to strengthen land and water stewardship and ancestral site management, by:

- Exploring how stewardship can be undertaken together and in respect of Indigenous knowledge systems, potentially through joint, action-oriented working groups
- Suggesting the CRD work with the one amalgamated city to deepen stewardship practices

C. We believe that amalgamation could provide an opportunity to address historical injustice, consistent with ongoing efforts, by:

- Initiating a renaming process (of the amalgamated city) in partnership with Indigenous Peoples

  For example, the City of Victoria has a statement in their Strategic Plan within the section entitled "Reconciliation and Indigenous Relations" regarding the restoration of Indigenous place names.[12]

12) Although recommending a name or a naming process for a future amalgamated municipality lay outside the scope of the Assembly's mandate, which members acknowledged throughout the process, the Assembly nevertheless believed that, since a renaming process may be a downstream effect of their recommendation, it was crucial to signal the importance of involving Indigenous Peoples in any such process, consistent with broader Reconciliation and Reconstruction efforts.

2. Climate Change Planning, Resilience and Environmental Considerations

Climate impacts extend beyond single municipal boundaries, making coordinated response through a unified municipality potentially more effective.

A. We believe an amalgamated Victoria and Saanich can enhance climate response and adaptive urban planning, through:

- The ability to deploy resources across current municipal boundaries based on need rather than jurisdiction (for example, sharing snow removal equipment, coordinating locations of cooling stations and warming centres)
- The potential for more effective emergency responses to climate events (for example, heat domes, storms, wildfires) through unified command and shared resources
- Standardized climate-adaptive infrastructure across what is now two separate jurisdictions (for example, rainwater collection, green building codes)

B. We believe an amalgamated Victoria and Saanich can strengthen environmental protection and ecologically sustainable land management, through:

- Better protection of intact ecosystems through coordinated urban containment and growth management (for example, watersheds, riparian zones, urban forests)
- A unified approach to protecting shared natural resources, particularly where ecosystems cross current boundaries
- Better capacity to maintain green spaces and environmental corridors through coordinated development (for example, reducing the pressure for development-based revenue that allows for protection of ecologically valued land)

C. We believe an amalgamated Victoria and Saanich can increase the impact of collective action and resources, through:

- Enhanced ability to implement broader climate adaptation strategies through combined resources and greater influence as a large entity
- The capacity to develop continuous green infrastructure across current municipal boundaries (for example, connected bike lanes, integrated sidewalks, rapid transit routes)
- Potential to act as a stronger regional leader on climate initiatives (for example, plastic bag ban, home heating grants, accessible green space)

3. Municipal Planning

We believe that an amalgamated Victoria and Saanich can lead to municipal planning processes and outcomes that take into account the needs of, and impacts on, the broader amalgamated community.

A. Regarding the Official Community Plan, we believe an amalgamated city could:

- Harmonize zoning, leading to improved land-use planning including locations of housing, businesses, facilities, and infrastructure while respecting the unique character of neighbourhood identities
- Engage meaningfully with all residents living within Victoria-Saanich boundaries on planning decisions that impact them

B. Regarding transportation, we believe an amalgamated city could:

- Remove existing political and administrative barriers to providing a seamless transportation network, including well-connected roads, sidewalks, transit corridors, and bike routes that accommodate population growth and densification across the combined municipality

4. Service Levels and Delivery

We believe that amalgamating Victoria and Saanich can enhance service provision by facilitating greater consistency and coordination in the planning and delivery of all services on which everyone relies.

A. We urge the municipalities to:

- Create an implementation planning group prior to a referendum on amalgamation that is responsible for evaluating what services are currently provided, how they are provided, and determining the most comprehensive, cost-effective ways for these services to be delivered in an amalgamated city, while ensuring maintenance or improvement in their quality with a commitment to ensuring the existing levels of commercial and residential taxation

B. We believe this planning should create an amalgamated city that:

- Provides consistent, equitable service levels and delivery across the board
- Has eliminated redundancies in order to ensure efficient service delivery
- Has a streamlined, consistent process for acquiring building permits
- Is coordinated in the planning and execution of projects such as road improvements and the creation of transportation infrastructure

5. Police and Fire

We believe that amalgamating Saanich and Victoria can create a unified service delivery model for the police departments and a unified service model for the fire departments that would each work, investigate, and respond effectively as single units.

A. We believe an amalgamated city would improve police and fire service delivery, by:

- Streamlining communication, cooperation, and chain of command, which could lead to reduced response times, more targeted incident response, and enhanced emergency management planning
- Creating an opportunity to unify their dispatch call centres

B. We believe an amalgamated city would improve career opportunities for service members and staff, by:

- Providing more options for training and new jobs
- Creating a more equitable distribution of the workforce, the call-load, and resources

6. Housing Affordability

A. We believe an amalgamated city would better prepare for future growth, by:

- Standardizing planning processes that respect both communities and their neighbourhoods and build on their unique strengths
- Allocating density appropriately; for example, retaining density downtown, supporting growth corridors across the amalgamated city, and promoting missing middle housing in suburbs)
- Balancing the needs of the environment and people by sustainably allocating land to meet future housing needs

B. We believe an amalgamated city would provide a greater mix of housing options, by:

- Requiring standardized bylaws and approval processes that increase predictability, thereby reducing risk and shortening timelines.
- Enhancing the development of subsidized and supportive housing to meet community needs and income levels

C. We believe an amalgamated city would improve access to housing resources, by:

- Accessing federal and provincial funding through various avenues, such as a seat at the Big City Mayors' Caucus of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Exploring private-public partnerships that can broaden housing options available to the community

7. Agricultural and Rural Lands

We recognize that the residents of Victoria and Saanich highly value natural parks, agricultural land, and other rural lands. Regardless of municipal government, we expect farmland would continue to be protected through the provincial Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) regulations. Fifty-one per cent of Saanich is outside the urban containment boundary (UCB) and approximately one-third of this area is designated as protected farmland within the ALR where farming is encouraged and non-agricultural uses are restricted.

A. We believe that an amalgamated municipality:

- Would be better able to manage growth, with considerations such as meeting provincial housing targets, the urban containment boundary, and the delivery of services
- Need not have an effect on the current Urban Containment Boundary
- Would create a revised official community plan for a unified city

8. Future Governance and Representation

We believe that amalgamating Saanich and Victoria can increase local representation for the residents of these communities by giving us all a voice in what are currently two separate municipalities where we all work, play, and spend time.

A. Regarding a governance structure, we believe an amalgamated city should:

- Examine potential governance models—for example, a ward system, an at-large system, or a hybrid model—with the goal of most effectively addressing challenges that are important to residents, including but not limited to housing density, transportation infrastructure, land use planning, and retaining strong neighbourhood identity and local representation

B. Regarding council composition, we believe that an amalgamated city should:

- Elect 10 full-time councillors plus a mayor, which is permissible under s. 118 of the British Columbia Community Charter

C. We believe that an amalgamated city could:

- Wield greater influence through the possibility of joining the Big City Mayors' Caucus of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, a forum that attracts and directs federal government support for municipal development

9. Conducting the Referendum

We recommend that the municipalities of Victoria and Saanich make a commitment to conducting the referendum as part of the 2026 municipal election and, if the result is yes, make the 2030 municipal election the first election for the unified municipality. We want to ensure that the process is undertaken in a timely manner and that the results are upheld.

A. We believe each council should:

- Include the referendum question in the 2026 municipal election
- Agree on the same question for both municipalities
- Provide equal resources and adequate funding to ensure a fair and equitable referendum process
- Commit to a generous timeline for civic engagement and public education
- Engage a neutral third-party to manage civic engagement and public education
- Honour the referendum outcome: if the outcome is in support of amalgamation, the 2030 municipal election will be for the single unified council

B. We believe a neutral third-party civic engagement and public education specialist should:

- Make information comprehensive and accessible to all residents through multiple channels
- Ensure resources are communicated in plain language
- Provide residents easy-to-access and deep learning opportunities, both in-person and online, to receive answers to questions about amalgamation and the referendum, including the timeline for amalgamation if it passes
- Educate the public about the Citizens' Assembly decision-making process

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Minority Reports

A Citizens' Assembly produces a final report which includes consensus recommendations written together during the sessions. However, it is unlikely that every member will wholly agree with every single word of this final report. A "minority report" is a short text written by one or more Assembly members, which may: dissent from a particular recommendation or other consensus element of the members' report; express agreement with the recommendations as a whole but disagree on specific principles, nuance, or wording; flag a shortcoming of the Assembly process; underscore a point of concurrence that deserves greater emphasis; or, articulate a related topic or concern that a member feels the Assembly should have addressed in its mandate but didn't due to time or other constraints. Six members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly produced a Minority Report following the conclusion of the final session. They are included here in the order in which they were submitted.

1.

This isn't a criticism of the Assembly process or of its report. It's a criticism of our provincial and federal governments.

One of the things that the Citizens' Assembly learned is that instead of getting a cut of income and sales taxes, municipal governments have to constantly go to the other levels of government and ask them for the money needed to run their services. However, the provincial and federal governments have been giving local governments less in funding and cutting back on their own services, forcing municipalities to pick up the slack.

Here's an example: The Province of British Columbia requires our local governments to send fire trucks to medical emergencies, which makes up most fire department calls. Meanwhile, they've gradually been sending their ambulances on fewer calls. The Province was originally supposed to reimburse the municipalities for these costs, but it never did.[13] We don't think of municipal funding as a provincial or federal responsibility, and it shouldn't be. Right now, local governments own 60% of Canada's infrastructure[14], and they only get 12 cents on a dollar of taxes[15] and have to ask for the rest. Municipal funding should be tied to population and what local governments are required to do.

Noa Ma, Member of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly

2.

This minority report is not written in opposition to the amalgamation suggested in the main report, but instead to underline the main problem with the ward system (which the Citizens' Assembly studied but did not make a recommendation about).

In the Assembly's session #6, Leo Spalteholz from the Homes for Living non-profit spoke out against a ward system. He referenced a study published in The Review of Economics and Statistics (2024) titled "Warding off Development: Local Control,

13) From the presentation by the City of Victoria to the Citizens' Assembly, Session 7 (March 8, 2025). See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srWttzBL52Qandt=582s
14) "Paying for Urban Infrastructure Adaptation in Canada" (Report of the Action on Climate Team, Simon Fraser University, 2019) https://www.sfu.ca/act/reports/PayingforUrbanInfrastructure.html
15) "Mayors across Canada call on federal government for urgent investment in infrastructure to support the quality of life of Canadians" (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, News Release, Feb 26, 2024) https://fcm.ca/en/news-media/news-release/mayors-call-federal-government-urgent-investment-infrastructure

Housing Supply, and NIMBYs."[16]

This study finds that changing from an at-large system (the current council model for both Victoria and Saanich) to ward elections "decreases housing units permitted by 24%, with 47% and 12% effects on multi- and single-family units." Housing is the number-two concern (next to cost of living) for residents in Greater Victoria according to the 2024 Vital Signs report. An amalgamated Victoria and Saanich should avoid ward elections for city council or face an even greater housing crisis.

Matthew Moodie, Member of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly

3.

Although the Citizens' Assembly provided an excellent opportunity to explore the subject of amalgamation in great detail, considering the potential benefits, risks, challenges and opportunities from virtually every angle, I did not arrive at the same conclusion as the majority to recommend amalgamation.

Our Assembly's research, analysis and discussion did not result in a definitive, compelling argument in favour of amalgamation as a means of addressing the important issues and concerns raised, including: inefficient service delivery; cost-sharing for services; inconsistent zoning and permitting policies; disjointed police and fire services; transit planning; and environmental sustainability. In our deliberations we could not confirm that the merging of two incorporated municipalities into one would address most if any of these issues.

I feel that these issues could be addressed through active collaboration and cooperation between the municipalities (as well as others not currently considering amalgamation). As an example, the Capital Regional District (CRD) is implementing a regional transit strategy, and already helps to coordinate cross-municipal services such as water, sewage and waste management.

I am most concerned about the impacts of a reduction in elected representation with a smaller council responsible for a much larger and dispersed region. A single amalgamated municipality would see the per capita council representation cut in half, and greatly expand the scope of territory and issues each councillor would need to be attending to. This might lead to councillors having a less intimate knowledge and understanding of the needs and issues of the local communities, and less time to meet with and listen to the needs of their citizens.

A larger municipality would result in a greater concentration of power among a relatively smaller council. I am concerned that as a result, residents may feel less connected to their local government, and less engaged in their local politics. At this time, I think we need MORE accountable representation, not less. Amalgamation of Victoria and Saanich would, in my mind, exacerbate this issue, while not guaranteeing a solution to the concerns that have led to the question.

David Hill, member of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly

4.

I respectfully disagree with the Assembly members who wishfully speculate that full amalgamation is the best path forward for Victoria and Saanich.

In our exploration, we learned that past Canadian civic amalgamations resulted in significant financial costs passed on to taxpayers and consumers of services. Contrary to what people assume, amalgamations do not save money.

I did not see enough clear evidence that amalgamation would lead to multiple or substantial benefits for the people. While some Assembly members guess or imagine that there will be significant benefits, there were not enough concrete indicators to give me the confidence to declare that we should take on absolute amalgamation.

In our current model, we have living proof that Victoria and Saanich are great neighbours. We frequently cooperate, collaborate, and share

16) Evan Mast; "Warding off Development: Local Control, Housing Supply, and NIMBYs." The Review of Economics and Statistics 2024; 106 (3): 671–680. https://doi.org/10.1162/rest_a_01192

services. We also retain an independence from each other that lets us coexist side-by-side when that is most suitable.

Why take on the risks associated with rebuilding a system that already works well, when adequate benefits may never materialize? It's preferable to continue to strive to integrate services in the areas where it is evident we could do better as a single unit, as it is with policing, and leave the rest alone.

Jennifer Chown, member of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly

5.

After considering the information provided to the Assembly, some members do not recommend amalgamation of Victoria and Saanich. What is to be gained? And what is to be lost? I believe there is little to be gained along with several losses.

Presenters to the Assembly generally agreed that amalgamation does not reduce costs significantly, if at all.

Unlike jurisdictions that have experienced amalgamations of separate services such as water, sewers, transit, library, etc., the Capital Regional District already provides these services. Other CRD committees and commissions with municipal representation also provide services (for example, hospitals, housing, regional arts facilities, and Indigenous relations) as well as advisory assistance to Victoria, Saanich, and other CRD members. Amalgamation is not needed to provide such services already available. Municipalities can access them now.

A doubled population gives about half the elected councillors to represent and listen to issues brought to them by residents. Current ratios of residents to elected officials are:

Saanich	13,082/1	(8 councillors + mayor)
Victoria	10,540/1	(8 councillors + mayor)

Amalgamated city:

23,289/1	(8 councillors + mayor),
	or
19,055/1	(10 councillors + mayor)

Perhaps some feel that bigger is better. Generally, smaller organizations are more responsive to clients—residents, in this case. With almost twice as many councillors without amalgamation, residents are more likely to find a sympathetic ear for their issue.

The two jurisdictions have different clients and consequently different needs. The renters of Victoria may have different priorities than the homeowners of Saanich.

The Urban Containment Boundary is a creation of Saanich. Amalgamation could bring pressure to expand it to allow for more urban development sooner than Saanich residents would prefer.

Amalgamation does not make it easier to deal with issues such as homelessness, climate action, road maintenance, infrastructure repair, bicycle lanes, etc. In fact, for some issues it may be more difficult with fewer elected councillors to listen to and act on concerns raised.

One gain is the possibility of a unified police force and unified fire department. However, as Victoria and Esquimalt show, this does not require amalgamation (although not without some financial disagreements). However, in the case of a single police force, some might have concerns about an over-deployment of personnel to the central core compared to the less dense areas of a combined municipality.

Amalgamation would need a period of reorganization within each municipality involved, in addition to normal work. Of course, if there are clear benefits in the long term, reorganization is worth it. I see no clear benefits.

We should not ignore the public interest in the issue either. Two public meetings did not draw large crowds, and the 2024 Victoria Vital Signs Report ranked amalgamation fourteenth in a list of the most important issues facing Greater Victoria, with 12% support compared to the top three issues of cost of living (70%), housing (58%), and health care (57%).

Bill Broadley, member of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly

6.

While I understand the intent behind the recommendation to amalgamate Victoria and Saanich, I am unable to support it currently, for the following reasons:

- The Differences Between Victoria and Saanich Municipalities
- Lack of Cost/Financial Analysis
- The Uncertainty of Success
- Looking at Past Reports and Solutions[17]

A clear and comprehensive understanding of the financial implications, potential impacts on local representation, and associated risks is essential before moving forward. Deciding without the proper financial understanding and forecast may lead to dramatic outcomes and social unrest if the financial burden becomes significant for taxpayers. The differences between these municipalities are substantial, and amalgamation is not a guaranteed solution to the challenges we face. While collaboration between the two municipalities is essential, merging them into one large entity could undermine the very qualities that make our region unique. There are significant advantages to being medium-sized municipalities. As a medium-sized community, we can maintain a more personal and responsive relationship between local government and residents. This allows for better decision-making that reflects the needs of our communities, rather than getting lost in the complexities and impersonal nature of a large metropolitan area. Small- and medium-sized municipalities are often more nimble and able to innovate and adapt to challenges in ways that larger cities cannot. The worst-case scenario of growing into a large urban entity like Vancouver or Seattle is concerning. These cities, despite their economic power, often struggle with issues such as overcrowding, safety concerns, and a loss of local identity. Larger cities tend to face more bureaucracy, slower decision-making, and less community engagement.

If we simply amalgamate without a clear plan, we risk losing the essence of what makes our region special—our unique balance between urban, suburban, and rural landscapes, and our ability to maintain a sense of local ownership and pride. In addition, given the current political and financial situation locally, nationally, and globally, we need to be prudent and thorough when making decisions that have a direct impact on the financial well-being of citizens in both communities.

Small- and medium-sized cities and municipalities can thrive if we improve our collaboration. Rather than merging into a single large entity, we can build stronger partnerships with neighbouring communities to share resources, improve services, and tackle regional issues together. This approach would allow us to maintain our sovereignty, preserve our local identities, and still benefit from the efficiencies that come with regional collaboration. The success of small- and medium-sized cities has been demonstrated in many parts of the world where collaboration, not amalgamation, has led to better outcomes for residents and businesses alike. We must be cautious. I recommend let's not rush into a decision that could have long-lasting, negative consequences for our communities. Instead, I urge us to take a step back, conduct the necessary cost/financial analysis before recommending the amalgamation, and ensure that any future steps we take are in the best interests of all residents.

Thank you.

Ana Cortes, member of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly

17) For example, Saanich Governance Review: Report of the Governance Review Citizens Advisory Committee (Oct 23, 2017) https://www.saanich.ca/assets/Local~Government/Documents/Committees~and~Boards/GRCAC_Executive_Summary.pdf

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Appendices

About the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly

Background

As they grow, municipalities sometimes consider whether they should merge with neighbouring jurisdictions. This process, called amalgamation, means combining the governments, geographic boundaries, municipal services, and identities of two or more jurisdictions.

During the 2014 British Columbia municipal elections, eight of the 13 municipalities within the Capital Regional District (CRD) included a non-binding ballot question seeking residents' views on whether they favoured exploring greater regional integration through amalgamation. A majority in seven municipalities, including Victoria and Saanich, indicated yes.[18]

In 2016, a Citizens' Assembly on amalgamation took place involving the communities of Duncan and North Cowichan (DNC) on Vancouver Island. Building on a made-in-BC model of democratic public consultation that began with the 2004 British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, the DNC Assembly provided inspiration to the mayors of Victoria and Saanich, which ultimately led to the idea for a similar Citizens' Assembly for their communities and a joint process to bring the idea to voters. However, the other municipalities in the region declined to join the process at that time; hence only Victoria and Saanich, the two largest municipalities in the region, have pursued it for the time being.

During the 2018 British Columbia municipal elections, the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria each added to the ballot a "Community Opinion Question" to gauge public support for establishing and funding a Citizens' Assembly to study the topic of amalgamation and issue a recommendation. A majority of voters in both municipalities approved the measure and, after being delayed by the pandemic, the Citizens' Assembly moved forward in 2023. A joint committee comprising members of both councils supported by municipal staff developed terms of reference to guide the Citizens' Assembly's work.

The municipalities of Victoria and Saanich announced in November 2023 the selection of MASS LBP, a Canadian democracy organization, to lead their Citizens' Assembly following a competitive tender. MASS designed, planned, and implemented the Civic Lottery and Assembly at arm's length from both municipalities to safeguard the independence of the process; however, cooperation and communication with the municipalities was crucial for this work. As such, MASS communicated and worked closely with representatives of each

18) The eight municipalities that included a non-binding ballot question on amalgamation were Central Saanich, Esquimalt, Langford, North Saanich, Oak Bay, Saanich, Sidney, and Victoria. Only in Oak Bay did a majority not endorse further study of amalgamation.

municipality in the form of a small Assembly project team. MASS also produced and filed update reports with the provincial government as directed by the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs.

What is a Citizens' Assembly?

A Citizens' Assembly is a deliberative democratic process where a representative group of randomly selected volunteers studies an issue in order to make one or more consensus recommendations to the government on behalf of a wider community.

Since the first Citizens' Assembly took place in British Columbia in 2004, the model has been used by governments and public agencies throughout the world to help examine and find agreement on complex policy issues.

To date, more than 1,000 Citizens' Assemblies—including more than 50 here in Canada—have taken place. Each Assembly is typically made up of several dozen randomly selected participants who together represent a range of perspectives as well as the demography of a specific jurisdiction. Participation is voluntary.

Assembly Mandate

The District of Saanich and the City of Victoria provided a mandate to the Assembly to explore the costs, benefits, and disadvantages of the amalgamation of the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria, and to make fact-based, evidence-based, and informed recommendations to the councils in order to determine a path forward.

Specifically, the Assembly was tasked to:

1. Identify common aspirations for good local governance to provide a basis for evaluating the costs, benefits, and disadvantages of amalgamation and the status quo of the municipalities relative to their current independent status. (See: Our Values, page 41)
2. List the issues that the Assembly believes need to be resolved for amalgamation to merit consideration, including issues related to the implementation and integration of the municipalities under amalgamation. (See: The Issues We Considered, page 44.)

The District of Saanich and the City of Victoria affirmed in the Terms of Reference that the Citizens' Assembly plays an advisory role and its recommendations are not binding on councils. Otherwise, as declared in the Terms of Reference: "The Assembly will enjoy wide latitude, subject to the processes and mandate laid out in the Terms of Reference, in its ability to make recommendations to Saanich and Victoria regarding the costs, benefits and disadvantages of the amalgamation between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria."[19]

19) "Terms of Reference – Citizens' Assembly between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria"; revised March 22, 2021.

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Civic Lottery and Member Selection

The selection of Citizens' Assembly members employed an innovative "Civic Lottery" process based on a form of sortition that is designed to ensure broad demographic representation while maintaining the fundamental principles of randomness and fairness.

The use of a Civic Lottery contrasts with more traditional "open" public consultation recruitment methods, such as town halls or focus groups, which can often appeal to stakeholders with specific interests. Instead, the Civic Lottery process seeks to recruit and engage a more representative cross-section of a given population according to factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, housing status, geography, and others.

In April 2024, invitation letters were mailed to 10,000 households in Victoria and Saanich randomly selected by Canada Post. Any resident of Victoria or Saanich whose household received an invitation and who was aged at least 16 years was eligible to volunteer and serve on the Citizens' Assembly. Approximately one in twelve households in the two municipalities received an invitation. Fifty invitations were reserved and distributed to unhoused residents with the support of a local organization, Our Place Society. The deadline to respond to the invitation letter was May 30, 2024. More than 300 residents responded Yes to the invitation. (See: Civic Lottery Sample, page 100.)

On June 3, 2024, a Civic Lottery was conducted in which the 48 members of the Assembly were selected in a way that broadly matched the demographics of the two communities. By mandate, and proportional to their populations, 27 members of the Assembly reside in Saanich and 21 reside in Victoria. Other factors considered in the lottery included gender, age, ethnic identity, housing status, and secondary geography (i.e., to achieve proportional representation among each municipality's sub-geographies or neighbourhoods). (See: page 32.)

Residents selected by the Civic Lottery received an email and phone call to confirm their selection. After confirming their availability and eligibility to serve on the Assembly, members submitted a short personal profile for the general public to learn about who they are and why they volunteered. (See: The Members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly, page 72)

Serving on a Citizens' Assembly is considered an act of voluntary public service. Members were not paid to serve; however, the Assembly provided for all reasonable expenses, including transit and transportation, childcare, eldercare, and accessibility support. Each member of the Citizens' Assembly signed a pledge, affirming their commitment to provide representative and impartial advice to the Councils of Victoria and Saanich on behalf and to the benefit of all residents of both municipalities.

Inside the Citizens' Assembly

For eight months between September 2024 and April 2025, 48 randomly selected residents from Victoria and Saanich came together as members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly. Their task was both monumental and precise: to consider whether and under what circumstances the two municipalities should amalgamate or pursue greater service integration, and to present a final consensus recommendation to both municipal councils. What followed was a remarkable process of public deliberation—one marked by humility, openness, rigorous inquiry, and deep civic care.

The Citizens' Assembly met for eight day-long, in-person sessions. Camosun College provided the venues hosting the Assembly's regular sessions. Each session consisted of a combination of plenary discussions, presentations or panels (including Q & A) with experts or other invited speakers, and small-group discussions and deliberations towards fulfilling the Assembly's mandate. Much like a jury or task force, the deliberations of a Citizens' Assembly are generally confidential and closed to the public. However, Assembly organizers took care to ensure that copies of all presentations, materials, reports, and submissions received by the Assembly were posted on the website for public review. Summaries of the Assembly's sessions were also posted. (See: Summaries of the Assembly Sessions and Public Meetings, page 88)

Starting in September 2024, the Citizens' Assembly began accepting submissions from members of the public and community groups. A submission to the Citizens' Assembly was defined as a perspective, opinion, or issue of concern that a resident of Victoria or Saanich would like the Assembly members, as representatives of the public, to consider as they work to fulfill their mandate. Submissions were made available to Assembly members and posted on the website for public review. The Assembly received and reviewed a total of 57 public submissions.

Learning about the region and one another

The Assembly's work began on September 21, 2024, at the Centre for Trades, Education and Innovation at Camosun College. Over coffee and breakfast, members introduced themselves and stepped into their shared mandate. That first session laid the intellectual and emotional foundation for their work. They heard from W̱SÁNEĆ (Tsartlip) Elder Ivy Seward, who welcomed the Assembly to the traditional territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples. A series of expert presentations followed—on Indigenous governance, local history, and municipal structures—each of which grounded the group in the historical and contemporary forces shaping the region.

Session 2 brought the Assembly to Camosun's Lansdowne campus on October 19. There, they heard from the top administrators of both municipalities—Victoria's Jocelyn Jenkyns and Saanich's Brent Reems—who offered detailed portraits of their communities, from demographics to budgets. Ted Robbins, CAO of the Capital Regional District, added a regional perspective, and consultants from MNP, the firm preparing the Assembly's Technical

Study, explained their approach and invited input from members on what should be included.

Public Dialogue, Planning Challenges, and Big Questions

By Session 3 on November 2, the Assembly turned its attention to the complex world of urban planning. Senior planning officials from both municipalities outlined land use patterns, future growth strategies, and climate resilience goals. Enid Slack, a respected expert on municipal governance, joined via Zoom to offer a comparative view of amalgamations across Canada. Members engaged in small-group discussions, reflecting on the merits and risks of the scenarios before them.

Two weeks later, the Assembly hosted its first public meetings—one online (November 20) and one in-person (November 21). More than 120 residents participated, discussing hopes, concerns, and advice on amalgamation and local governance. Assembly members sat alongside attendees, listening closely to their fellow residents. Many later said these conversations helped humanize the stakes of the Assembly's work and reminded them of the diversity of perspectives within the region.

Session 4 on November 30 built directly on the public dialogue. Members reflected on what they heard, reviewed 19 public submissions, and welcomed Julian Daly of Our Place Society and former B.C. police official Clayton Pecknold in separate presentations. Daly brought attention to social challenges like homelessness, addiction, and poverty—issues the Assembly agreed would require unified, region-wide solutions. Pecknold's presentation on policing illuminated how municipalities share or separate policing responsibilities, costs, and oversight.

Engaging with the Broader Community

The Assembly resumed with Session 5 on January 11. Members began shaping the early contours of their final report, now grounded in over 40 hours of prior discussion. They revisited their draft values, reviewed their Interim Report, and learned about governance models such as ward systems and hybrids. They also heard from Amalgamation Yes, a community group advocating for a unified municipality. With each presentation, Assembly members grew sharper in their questions—and clearer in their needs for assurances.

February brought the long-awaited Technical Study. Presented by MNP partner James Richardson at Session 6 on February 8, the study offered a comparative view of Victoria and Saanich's operations—from finances and staffing to infrastructure and emergency services. Members dove into the document, working in small groups to analyze sections and flag questions or gaps. They asked how the report addressed their key concerns: service equity, financial transparency, community identity, and governance.

That same day, a panel of local leaders—including representatives from South Island Prosperity Partnership, the Victoria Foundation, and Homes for Living, and Rural Saanich — offered their thoughts on regional

challenges and opportunities. Urban planner and former Central Saanich mayor Allison Habkirk joined remotely to present a cautionary view of amalgamation, balancing earlier advocacy presentations.

At month's end, the Assembly hosted its second round of public meetings on February 25 and 27, drawing more than 165 residents. Participants engaged directly with the Technical Study and reflected on the Assembly's potential recommendations. Councillors attended as observers, and Assembly members reported being deeply influenced by these conversations.

From Reflection to Consensus

Session 7 on March 8 marked a pivotal moment. Assembly members, now equipped with the Technical Study and extensive community feedback, began expressing where they stood. In a powerful, hours-long plenary circle, each member shared how their perspective had evolved and what they believed would best serve the region.

The group then broke into working tables to draft the core elements of their final report. Topics included land use, emergency services, housing, climate resilience, governance, and Indigenous relations. Each team drafted recommendations, presented them for peer review, and incorporated feedback. Consensus was not assumed—but by day's end, it was in sight.

Reaching a decision

On April 5, 2025, the Assembly met for the final time. Over 60 hours of in-person deliberation culminated in a public reading of their draft recommendation: that Victoria and Saanich should amalgamate. The recommendation called for a future referendum, supported by a robust information campaign funded by both municipalities and the Province. In a closing statement, the Assembly declared:

> *"Having considered the costs, benefits, and disadvantages to the best of our abilities and with the information available to us, we recommend the amalgamation of Victoria and Saanich."*

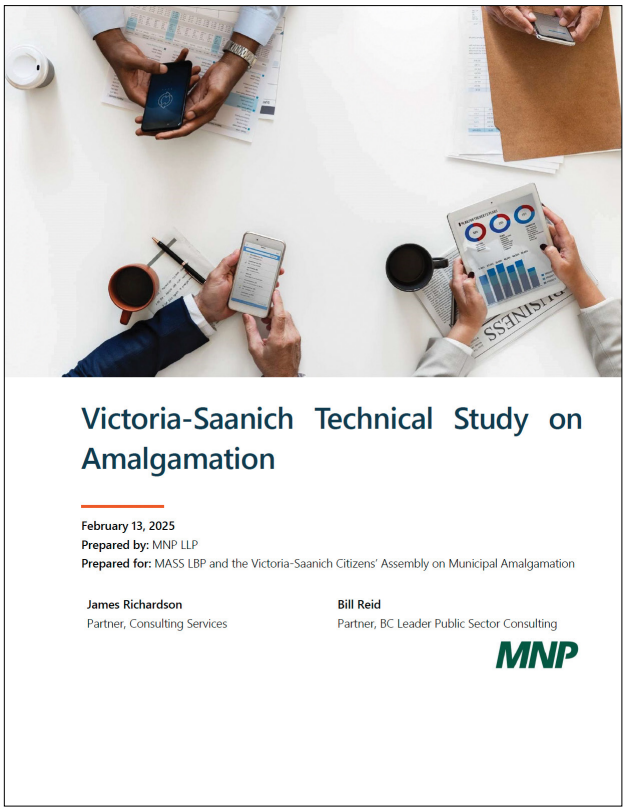
The ceremony, attended by councillors, provincial representatives, and members of the media, celebrated the Assembly's work. Victoria Mayor Marianne Alto and Councillor Susan Brice (on behalf of Saanich Mayor Dean Murdock) both offered remarks thanking members for their service. Chair Peter MacLeod concluded:

> *"The Assembly did a commendable job listening to and representing the varied perspectives of residents… Ultimately the Assembly concluded that both communities would benefit from taking a much more integrated approach to long-term planning, transportation, and emergency services."*

The Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly has modelled what thoughtful, deliberative democracy can look like in practice. It offers not just a recommendation, but a lasting example of how citizens can lead the way in shaping the future of their communities.

Technical Study

To ensure the Citizens' Assembly's deliberations were well-informed, the City of Victoria and District of Saanich required that the Assembly retain an independent consultant to conduct a comprehensive Technical Study of each municipality's services, finances, and governance structures. Following a competitive tender process, MNP LLP—a Canadian accounting and consulting firm—was selected under terms set by both municipalities.


Victoria-Saanich Technical Study on Amalgamation

February 13, 2025
Prepared by: MNP LLP
Prepared for: MASS LBP and the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly on Municipal Amalgamation

James Richardson
Partner, Consulting Services

Bill Reid
Partner, BC Leader Public Sector Consulting

MNP

The Technical Study was produced with extensive collaboration between the City of Victoria, the District of Saanich, and MNP, the authors of the report.[20] The municipalities agreed to the focus of the study, supplied MNP with pertinent information and data, and had the opportunity at various stages to review and provide feedback on MNP's work. MNP was responsible for the content and conclusions presented in the Technical Study report. Although staff from both municipalities reviewed the report for accuracy, the views expressed in the report did not necessarily reflect those of the Citizens' Assembly, its organizers, or the municipal councils. Shortly prior to the release of the Technical Study report, the City of Victoria raised concerns about some of the data and how certain conclusions or observations within the report were characterized. Representatives from both municipalities were invited to address their concerns to the Assembly, and the City of Victoria prepared a presentation which was added to the publicly available resources informing this process.

It's important to note that the Technical Study was designed to provide a comparative analysis of each municipality's services, finances, and governance structures, rather than to serve as an amalgamation implementation plan. As stated in the MNP report's preamble, "This Technical Study does not offer conclusions regarding the benefits or disadvantages of the operations of the two municipalities. The Technical Study is not intended to determine if one municipality's operations are better or worse than the other, nor does this Technical Study draw any conclusions about the efficiency or effectiveness of operations. This Technical Study is not intended to provide recommendations to

20) See: "Victoria-Saanich Technical Study on Amalgamation" (MNP; February 13, 2025). https://archive.org/details/vsca-tech-study-p-2.0-archive

the Citizens' Assembly."

The Citizens' Assembly was able to provide some input as to its expectations for the Technical Study. MNP presented an introduction to the Technical Study during the Assembly's second session, on October 19, 2024, where members asked questions and provided input. MNP presented a draft of the Technical Study report to the Citizens' Assembly on February 8, 2025, at its sixth session. The report was published publicly on February 14, and MNP gave a presentation of the report at the public meetings on February 25 and 27.

The creation of the Technical Study presented considerable complexity and methodological challenges. MNP navigated significant obstacles in developing a comparative analysis between two organizations with different reporting practices, different administrative structures, and different services and service delivery models. Each municipality operates with annual budgets exceeding $200 million and employs more than 1,200 staff collectively. MNP could neither compel information nor undertake extensive original analysis, and instead relied primarily on publicly available information and data provided voluntarily by both municipalities.

The Technical Study deliberately avoided speculation about the impact of various future decisions. For instance, integrating police services or harmonizing service levels could each be the subject of their own dedicated studies. Rather than attempting to predict outcomes or future implementation choices, the study focused on providing a factual basis for comparison to inform further deliberation. As with any analysis of complex municipal systems, the Technical Study represents a snapshot in time, with the understanding that municipal operations and priorities continue to evolve. Despite these challenges, MNP's work effectively demonstrated the fundamental compatibility of the two municipalities. Through its comprehensive comparative analysis across seven technical areas, the study revealed no significant structural barriers to amalgamation in terms of service delivery models, financial structures, or governance frameworks—a finding that proved valuable as the Assembly considered the feasibility of potentially combining these two distinct yet complementary municipal organizations.

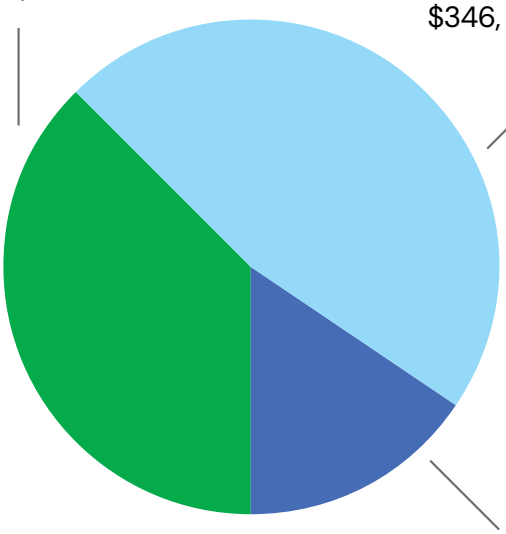
Cost Breakdown of the Citizens' Assembly

The full cost of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly is $750,000, shared equally by the City of Victoria, the District of Saanich, and the Province of British Columbia. The budget was approved by Saanich and Victoria voters as part of the 2018 Community Opinion Question and later confirmed by the Province.

Assembly Budget Overview

38%
Technical Analysis and Report (MNP)
$275,000

47%
Citizen's Assembly and recruitment (MASS LBP)
$346, 245



15%
Assembly and recruitment expenses
$112,000

At a Glance

48
Randomly selected Assembly members

8
Full Saturdays

21
Guest speakers

4
Public meetings

57
Public submissions

1
Technical study report

3000
Cumulative hours of study and deliberation

Meet the Members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly

The 48 members of the Citizens' Assembly were selected in a way that broadly matched the demographics of the two communities. By mandate, and proportional to their populations, 27 members of the Assembly reside in Saanich and 21 reside in Victoria. Other factors considered in the lottery included gender, age, ethnic identity, housing status, and secondary geography (i.e., to achieve proportional representation among each municipality's sub-geographies or neighbourhoods).

Adam Atkinson, Saanich

I'm Adam, and I've lived in Saanich for three years after moving from Fiji. My wife and I were drawn to Victoria for its mild climate and community atmosphere. I am the executive director of a local branch of an international charity, Youth With a Mission. I enjoy being active in the homeschooling community and exploring sustainable farming practices. I joined the Assembly to help improve our community for my children.

Adam Sherk, Saanich

I'm Adam and I've been living in Saanich for 12 years. I live on a small farm in rural Saanich, which I run with my wife and our two young sons. My involvement in the Assembly is driven by a desire to understand the potential benefits and challenges of amalgamation and to contribute to informed civic discussions, while meeting new residents and working together. For my career, I'm a research scientist in public health. I enjoy hiking, backpacking, and soccer in my spare time.

Alli Deelstra, Saanich

I'm Alli, born and raised in Saanich where my husband and I now get to raise our baby. I have been a resident for over 30 years, and I have seen many shifts in our community. The reason I joined the Assembly is to be engaged in how we should best direct the changes to Saanich and Victoria for our future. There are many various stakeholder groups the municipalities need to consider, and I look forward to being a voice of reason and change. My family is deeply involved in outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing, and I treasure the outdoor pursuits we have available in our community. I currently volunteer as the Treasurer for the B.C. Wildlife Federation and the Island Rangers Society to ensure future generations get to experience the same opportunities with fish and wildlife and land access as I did. I hope to bring a well-rounded, youthful voice and a different perspective to my community.

Ana Cortes, Saanich

I'm Ana, and I am a mom of three boys who's lived in Saanich for over a decade after previously living in Oak Bay and Victoria. I love the sense of community, recreational services, and natural beauty that make this area so special. I currently work in administration and genuinely enjoy the people I work with. I look forward to the commitment of the Assembly to help our leaders make an important decision.

Ava Hagreen Leblond, Saanich

I'm Ava, and I've lived in both Victoria and Saanich since I was four. Currently a student at UVic studying biology and environmental studies, I volunteer with nature and food security initiatives. The community's cooperative spirit and natural beauty are what I love most. I joined the Assembly to share my perspective on community living and engage in civic duty.

Bill Broadley, Saanich

I'm Bill, and I've lived in Victoria since the late 1930s and then Saanich since the mid-1950s. A retired high school teacher, I have represented teachers provincially, nationally, and internationally during my 40-year teaching career in Victoria. I enjoy politics from "the other side of the street," as the late Saanich (Victoria) editor Bruce Hutchison wrote. Travel to all parts of the world has confirmed that I live in one of the best locations in the world,

with its vibrant academic and natural environment. I joined the Assembly to learn more about local governance and share ideas with others about the pros and cons of amalgamation. Highlights in the Assembly were having a mix of young and old, new and long-time residents, and respect for differing opinions.

Brandon Yen, Saanich

Hi, I'm Brandon, and I've had the pleasure of calling Saanich my home for the past three years, following two great years in Esquimalt. Originally from Vancouver, I work as a naval officer in Esquimalt. Victoria's unique blend of urban life and natural beauty is one reason I am proud to call this place my home. I joined the Assembly to transform my concerns into proactive solutions and to contribute meaningfully to the betterment of our community.

Brenna Atnikov, Victoria

I'm Brenna, and I've been living in Victoria since October 2021, moving here from Calgary. I work remotely for a global social impact consulting firm, helping to build trust and collaboration among diverse stakeholders. The vibrant outdoor lifestyle and welcoming community drew me back here after completing my undergraduate degree in Victoria. I joined the Assembly to engage with local issues and identify how to contribute to a better city.

Camille Mallari, Victoria

My name is Camille, a resident of Victoria since January 2023. Originally from the Philippines, I moved here to pursue my studies and currently work as an IT Business Analyst. I am passionate about exploring local art, food, coffee, music and supporting community events. Joining the Assembly gives me the opportunity to engage with local issues and contribute to the growth of our community. In my leisure time, I enjoy travelling to new places, both within Victoria and beyond.

Daniel Perrakis, Saanich

I'm Dan, a resident of Greater Victoria since 2010. Originally from Ottawa, I've also lived and studied in Alberta, the northwest USA, and in France and Greece in my youth. Currently, I work as a forest research scientist with Natural Resources Canada, focusing on wildfire behaviour and ecology. My interest in municipal affairs motivated me to join the Assembly. I've been a resident of both Victoria and Saanich and hope to bring a balanced perspective to the discussions. I look forward to engaging with diverse viewpoints and contributing to decisions that will shape the future of our community.

David Hill, Victoria

I'm David, and I've lived in Victoria since 1985, after moving here from the BC Interior to attend University. I hold an undergraduate degree in English and psychology from UVic, and have spent my career in communications, community engagement, and planning, primarily with Indigenous organizations and communities. My wife and I have lived and raised our two (now adult) children in different neighbourhoods in both Victoria and Saanich, where we continue to live, work, and play. I joined the Assembly to deepen my understanding of local governance and contribute to the community I love.

David Vázquez Covarrubias, Victoria

I'm David, and I came to Victoria in 2021 to study marketing at Camosun College. I work as a rope access technician, and recently opened a company of painting and maintenance. Victoria is an incredible place to live. I often work on Dallas Road, and so every morning I walk to work passing Beacon Hill Park, with so many beautiful animals and rich nature. On my way home I walk alongside the parliament buildings. I really enjoy the part of my day where I get to be out in the city and see so many people looking happy, enjoying their time. It's a great atmosphere here. I've been a goodwill ambassador for Mexico and volunteered in my mother's charity back home. I learned my values and ethics from my mother, including helping other people improve their lives. I was excited to join the Assembly and be a part of something that really matters to a lot of people and to learn a lot about how cities work at a micro level, how different issues affect each other, and how decisions are made. I also speak 3 languages fluently. (Spanish, Portuguese, English).

Edward Chang, Saanich

I'm Edward, and I've lived in Saanich since 2003, after moving from Vancouver. Currently I work as a senior data solutions specialist for the B.C. government. I joined the Assembly to contribute

my data analysis expertise and help create a more comfortable community for everyone.

Fabrizio "Tig" Cross, Victoria

I'm Fabrizio, and I've lived in Victoria since 2012, with a previous stint from 1998 to 2003. My wife's work took us around the world before we returned to Victoria to raise our children. I am a graphic designer and am very involved in the region's mountain biking community, serving as the Executive Director of the Hornby Island Mountain Bike Association. I joined the Assembly to expand my community involvement and explore the potential benefits and drawbacks of municipal amalgamation.

Geri Hinton, Saanich

I have spent the past 50 years living in Saanich. As a retired nurse and former Director of the BC Office for Seniors, I have continued to focus on issues affecting older adults, serving on volunteer boards that provide affordable, independent housing and assisted living for seniors. I joined the Assembly to contribute my knowledge and experience in addressing the growth and development challenges facing both Victoria and Saanich. The Assembly process has been thoughtful and thorough, and I believe members have remained focused on ensuring the most meaningful outcomes for both communities.

Janet Kirsop, Saanich

I'm Janet, and I moved to Saanich in 2021 after spending nearly seven decades in Alberta and other regions in British Columbia. Originally from Victoria, I returned to enjoy the mountains and water. I have two children and six grandchildren, with my daughter and one grandson living nearby. In my leisure time, I enjoy knitting, crocheting, reading, and making toys for children of family and friends. Passionate about community involvement, I joined the Assembly to learn more about local history and governance and to contribute to discussions on amalgamation.

Jennifer Chown, Saanich

I have lived, worked, parented, celebrated 23 wedding anniversaries, studied, jogged, cycled, walked the dog, cold-ocean-plunged, volunteered, and made good friends in both beautiful Saanich and vibrant Victoria since 1994. I jumped on the rare opportunity to join the Assembly so I could serve my community in this special way. It was an honour to be a part of it, and I sincerely hope that our work was useful for you.

Jeremy Sewall, Saanich

I'm Jeremy, and I've lived in Saanich for four years since moving from Pennsylvania. I work as an engineering manager in semiconductor design. The region's outdoor activities and welcoming community have made it easy to settle in. I joined the Assembly to actively participate in local governance and help shape the community's future.

Jerry Krepakevich, Victoria

I'm Jerry, and I've been living in Victoria for the past three years, having moved here from Edmonton. My career spans over five decades as a producer, writer, director, editor, and sound designer/mixer in the film and television industry. I joined the Assembly to explore the viability of small cities in today's climate and contribute my governance experience from various board positions.

Jordan Smith, Saanich

I'm Jordan, a lifelong resident of Saanich. Over the past 22 years, I've come to deeply appreciate the natural beauty and climate of our region, from the ocean to the mountains. Currently, I am studying software development at Camosun College and enjoy reading, playing and designing video games, and writing. I joined the Assembly to stay informed and contribute to the future of my community.

Justin Gammon, Victoria

I'm Justin, and I've been living in Victoria since 1995, with a brief stint in Vancouver. I am an architect specializing in residential, affordable, and seniors housing. I enjoy hiking, live music, and watercolour painting. I joined the Assembly to deepen my connection to the community and share ideas on local issues.

Karen Mark, Victoria

I'm Karen, and I was born and raised in Oak Bay. I moved to Calgary in 1986 to pursue a career as a librarian, then human resources advisor—always knowing that I would retire here. Since returning to Victoria in 2016, I have become more aware of the 13 municipalities that comprise Greater Victoria. Retirement life includes family, friends, volunteering at a food bank, reading, and lots of coastal walks. As a member of the Assembly, I am excited to

learn more about local governance and to make a contribution to the community.

Kati Engholm, Victoria
I'm Kati, and I've lived in Victoria since 2014. Originally from Shuswap Lake, I moved to the region to attend university and now work in the communications field. I love to hike, read, and explore urban outdoor spaces in the region. I joined the Assembly to become more involved in the community and learn about municipal governance structures, how our communities grow with us, and how we can all contribute to positive change at the local level.

Keith Wilson, Saanich
I'm Keith, and I've lived in Saanich for 29 years after moving from Calgary. Now retired, I enjoy golfing, dragon boating, and volunteering in the community. The accessibility and connectivity of this region are what I appreciate most. I joined the Assembly to engage with the process of local governance and contribute to meaningful decisions.

Kimberley Williams, Victoria
I'm Kimberley. I volunteered for the Assembly for a few reasons. I've always been interested in participatory processes, having studied politics and participatory community development at university. As a newcomer to Victoria, it also seemed like a great opportunity to learn about local issues, and to meet people. I love Victoria for its small town vibe but city conveniences, fabulous local produce, and the amazing nature and scenery. My community is friendly and has been very welcoming. The most memorable part of the Assembly has been watching the unfolding of a remarkably collaborative and respectful process.

Kyle Hyndman, Saanich
I'm Kyle. I grew up in Greater Victoria and I've been back in Saanich for a year after living in Vancouver, Nanaimo, Toronto, and Hong Kong. I work in law and have a passion for urban issues, especially transportation and planning. I joined the Assembly to engage in discussions about regional planning and contribute to the future of the region.

Kylie Hrabarchuk, Victoria
I'm Kylie, and I've been living on Vancouver Island for nine years. Originally from Manitoba, I work as a Class 1 driver locally. I love the weather here and enjoy biking, camping, and walking on our paths and trails with my boyfriend. I joined the Assembly to contribute to the community and better understand the differences in local governance compared to Manitoba.

Lara Hayward, Victoria
I'm Lara, originally from Terrace in northern B.C., and I've also lived in the Fraser Valley. I came to Vancouver Island about four years ago to attend law school at UVic. I now work for a law firm in Oak Bay and plan to stay in the area for the foreseeable future. I joined the Assembly because I believe it's important for people to get involved in their community. I'm also really interested in how cities work and also how people work together to make change, even though they may have different opinions. When I'm not working, I volunteer with a community food support organization, and I enjoy playing recreational soccer.

Laura Gramada, Victoria
I'm Laura, and I've lived in the Greater Victoria area for over 20 years, with the last nine years in Victoria. I work at a homeless shelter and enjoy walks and spending time with family. I joined the Assembly to learn more about local governance and to contribute my perspective to the community.

Lisa Moore, Victoria
I'm Lisa, and I've been living in Victoria and Saanich for 33 years and currently reside in Victoria. I have a background as a lab technologist and currently manage computer systems at Island Health. I enjoy spending time at home with my husband and our two Havanese dogs. I'm passionate about gardening and travelling. I joined the Assembly to explore new perspectives on local governance and community engagement, particularly around the topic of amalgamation. I really enjoyed participating in the Citizens' Assembly as I met a cross-section of people and learned more about our communities.

Lynda Nguyen, Saanich
I'm Lynda, and I've been living in Saanich since 2005. Originally from Kitchener, Ontario, I am a CPA,CMA in a financial leadership role at UVic. I'm passionate about creating intersections in our community to exchange ideas. My family and I are

actively involved in the local soccer community as a player, parent, and former board member. My involvement in the Assembly is driven by a desire to contribute to the continuous improvement of our community.

Mackenzie Berry, Saanich

I'm Mackenzie, and I've lived in Saanich for a year, with previous experience living in other parts of B.C. I work as a project manager for BC Assessment in the IT division. I enjoy writing poetry, yoga, and exploring nature. I joined the Assembly to be involved in my community and make a positive impact. My strong connection to the island and my family here motivates me to stay engaged with the community.

Mary Stocks, Victoria

I'm Mary, I lived in Saanich for 22 years and now Victoria for two years. Having previously lived in bigger cities in Alberta, I've always found it curious how many municipalities are in our region. In 2018, I voted in favour of the Citizens' Assembly process and have found it fascinating. I'm a retired social worker with 35 years of experience, primarily in mental health and addictions. I love kayaking, hiking, and attending local community events. My strong family ties to the area and my passion for community issues motivated me to join the Assembly.

Matthew Moodie, Saanich

Howdy y'all! Name's Matthew, I was born and raised in Saanich. I'm a student at UVic learning physics and computer science, and I hope to enter the field of quantum computing. I meet twice a week with my friends to play or GM a variety of tabletop role-playing games. I have a hobbyist interest in game design and game studies. I swap books with my friends and just finished William Gibson's Sprawl trilogy. I believe that through education we gain insight into our material conditions, and through art we can break down social boundaries. A collectivist future is possible. I actually voted in the 2018 municipal election in favour of this process, because I was excited to read what a random group of residents from both municipalities would decide on after learning for months. When I got the invitation to participate in this process, it felt like continuity, and I encouraged all friends to try and get in. I use a bike as my main form of transport and love the developments made by both municipalities in improving bike safety. But recently, I was hit by an SUV and ended up needing surgery. So there are still areas of improvement. Coming into this process, I felt helpless about ever changing anything in politics as an individual. Leaving it, I'm feeling empowered and wanting to organize. When you get a representative random sample of a population, they will work for the best interests and liberation of that population.

Mike Mullins, Victoria

I'm Mike, and have lived in Victoria off and on since 1990. Originally from Ontario, I'm now retired from a career in international development consulting. I enjoy spending time with my family, playing tennis, and travelling in our camper van. I joined the Assembly to contribute to discussions on improving local governance.

Nikki B., Saanich

I'm Nikki, and I emigrated from Punjab, India, to Victoria in the summer of 1975 when I was a young man, following my parents and brother who'd arrived earlier. I fell in love with the city immediately: it's beautiful, easy to get around, and people are so helpful. I went to cooking school at Camosun College and started working in kitchens including the Empress Hotel. Eventually I opened my first restaurant and for the rest of my career I ran restaurants in different locations in the region. I raised two wonderful children here who are now grown, and now that I'm retired I enjoy watching sports and volunteering to deliver meals to seniors. I wanted to join the Assembly because I've been a fan of city affairs ever since my dad was a municipal politician in India. He always made me keep up with the news every day, and I can still remember, when I first came to Canada, reading both the Colonist and the Daily Times before they merged. I believe in the duty of democracy—you have to vote, you have to participate—if you want things to get better.

Noa Ma, Victoria

I'm Noa, and though I was born in the Lower Mainland, Victoria has been my home ever since my parents moved here when I was a baby. I'm a university student now at UVic, pursuing a degree in computer science. I love designing systems and helping to improve the way things work for people. I'm very attached to this region, its weather, and its natural beauty, not to mention my friends and family. Biking around town has also led me to think more about municipal infrastructure and

how cities work, and I'm also concerned about the growing cost of housing. Then recently I picked up a book that was all about these kinds of assemblies and was really intrigued by it—Open Democracy by Hélène Landemore. So when I got the invitation, I thought "Hey, maybe I'll give it a try myself!" Attending the Assembly was honestly a huge relief from the soul-crushing disenchantment and despair that I feel about politics these days. I was really astounded by the wisdom, insight, and selflessness of the Assembly members. But I don't think that we're an exceptional group of people. Rather, I feel like my estimation of humans as a whole has gone up. When you get a bunch of random people in a room, learning and discussing together, the results will impress you.

Nora McMillan, Saanich

I'm Nora, and I've lived in Saanich for five years after moving from Nova Scotia. Born and raised in Toronto, I now enjoy the slower pace and beautiful surroundings of Saanich. I am an avid knitter, needle pointer, and enjoy spending time with my dog. I joined the Assembly to have a voice in the community's future.

Perpetua "Pep" Nwosu, Saanich

I was randomly selected to join the Assembly, an opportunity I embraced to contribute to meaningful discussions and connect with others. As a resident of Cordova Bay, I love the welcoming nature of everyone I meet on the street—whether it's a friendly wave or a quick chat, the sense of community here is truly special. The Assembly experience was remarkable for its diversity of perspectives. I was inspired by the range of opinions and backgrounds, which sparked thoughtful debates and broadened my own views. Participating in this process showed me the power of collective dialogue in addressing complex issues. I enjoyed the chance to listen, learn, and share ideas with people who, despite our differences, all cared deeply about creating positive change. It was a humbling and energizing experience that I'll carry forward in my everyday life.

Peter Flagg, Victoria

I'm Pete, a graduate of UVic in 1980, and resident of Greater Victoria since 1987 and with family in the area. We have lived in multiple Saanich and Victoria neighbourhoods and View Royal over the years. We enjoy the diverse and unique neighbourhoods and find we identify with the "Greater Victoria area" as our home, rather than particular municipal administrative boundaries, which are all but invisible in our daily lives. I was looking forward to bringing my experience in organizational change management and consulting for government, non-profits, and private sectors to the Assembly. I am interested in the potential for economies of scale in our local governance structures and ways to improve services for our larger community. I have learned that the issues and problems, and potential solutions, for amalgamating local municipal administrations, or even integrating services, are very complex, but the potential for improvement exists. I admire my fellow Assembly members for their candour and effort, and value our different perspectives shaped by our unique life experiences. It was a privilege to work with the Assembly, facilitators, and municipal and other experts on this initiative. I fully support our recommendations to the two municipalities.

Rick Mitchell, Saanich

I'm Rick, a Saskatchewan native from Moose Jaw. I spent my career in policing with the RCMP and Regina Police Service. I continue to enjoy sailing and motorcycle touring and am the proud father of two grown children who now live and work in the Toronto area. I moved to Saanich four years ago and have fallen in love with its quality of life, the slower pace, and the friendly and hospitable people. I consider myself to be a lifelong learner. Since retiring, I have completed a certificate in conflict resolution and a degree in philosophy from Simon Fraser University. I joined the Assembly to better understand city governance and to participate in the development of informed recommendations for the future.

Richard Sawchuk, Saanich

I'm Richard, and I am a new resident in Saanich. I moved here from Winnipeg just one year ago and I've been retired for several years now. I have participated in several public consultations and have always enjoyed the experience. I volunteered for the Assembly because I wanted to learn more about this beautiful city that I now call home and I strongly believe in the grassroots democratic process. I also enjoy volunteering in the community. So this seemed like an ideal match for my interests. I appreciated the entire process, fully support our recommendation, and feel very excited about the future of these two dynamic communities.

Rolf Seuster, Victoria

I'm Rolf, and I've lived in Victoria since 2016, having previously lived here from 2001 to 2008. I work at the University of Victoria in the physics department, maintaining computers and conducting some research. I enjoy skiing and spending time with my family. I joined the Assembly to contribute to the discussion on amalgamation, help save money, and streamline local governance for the community.

Sam Ashley, Victoria

I'm Sam, originally from the U.K. I followed my family in moving to British Columbia 15 years ago, and I've called Victoria home for the past decade. I love living in this region primarily for its natural beauty and its perfect size. I bike almost everywhere, enjoying the great infrastructure for cyclists and the fact that every commute feels tiny, with views of the ocean and mountains and historic buildings all around. I'm a carpenter by trade, and I work mostly on new home construction, building kitchens, staircases, and more. Being self-employed can be hard but rewarding, and I'm slowly working towards someday becoming a home-builder. Meanwhile I've just expanded my family, as my wife and I welcomed our first child last year. I volunteered for the Assembly because I wanted to learn more about how our democracy functions and how cities work. I've always been impressed by the system here—bike lanes, bus service, recreation centres, swimming pools—and I hope to learn more. I feel that democracy is something you need to take part in. I'm a permanent resident but not yet a citizen, so while I can't vote, at least I can do this.

Sandra Letts, Saanich

I'm Sandra, and I've lived in Saanich since 1992. A former provincial government employee in human resources, I now enjoy sailing, gardening, and spending time with family. The mild climate and outdoor lifestyle make this an ideal place for me. I joined the Assembly out of curiosity about amalgamation and to contribute to my community.

Sarah Begin, Victoria

I'm Sarah. I studied Zoology at the University of Calgary but did my last semester at Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre on Vancouver Island. I fell in love with the West Coast and, after graduating, permanently moved to the Island. Since pivoting my career, I now work in communications for the B.C. Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness. Identifying as genderqueer and bisexual, I feel welcomed in Victoria's inclusive community. I enjoy swing dancing and engaging in creative storytelling through tabletop role-playing games. I volunteered for the Assembly because I wanted to represent my communities and learn more about local politics and the issues that affect us all. The process was very rewarding and I was impressed by everyone's engagement, attention to detail, and respect for the diverse opinions in the room.

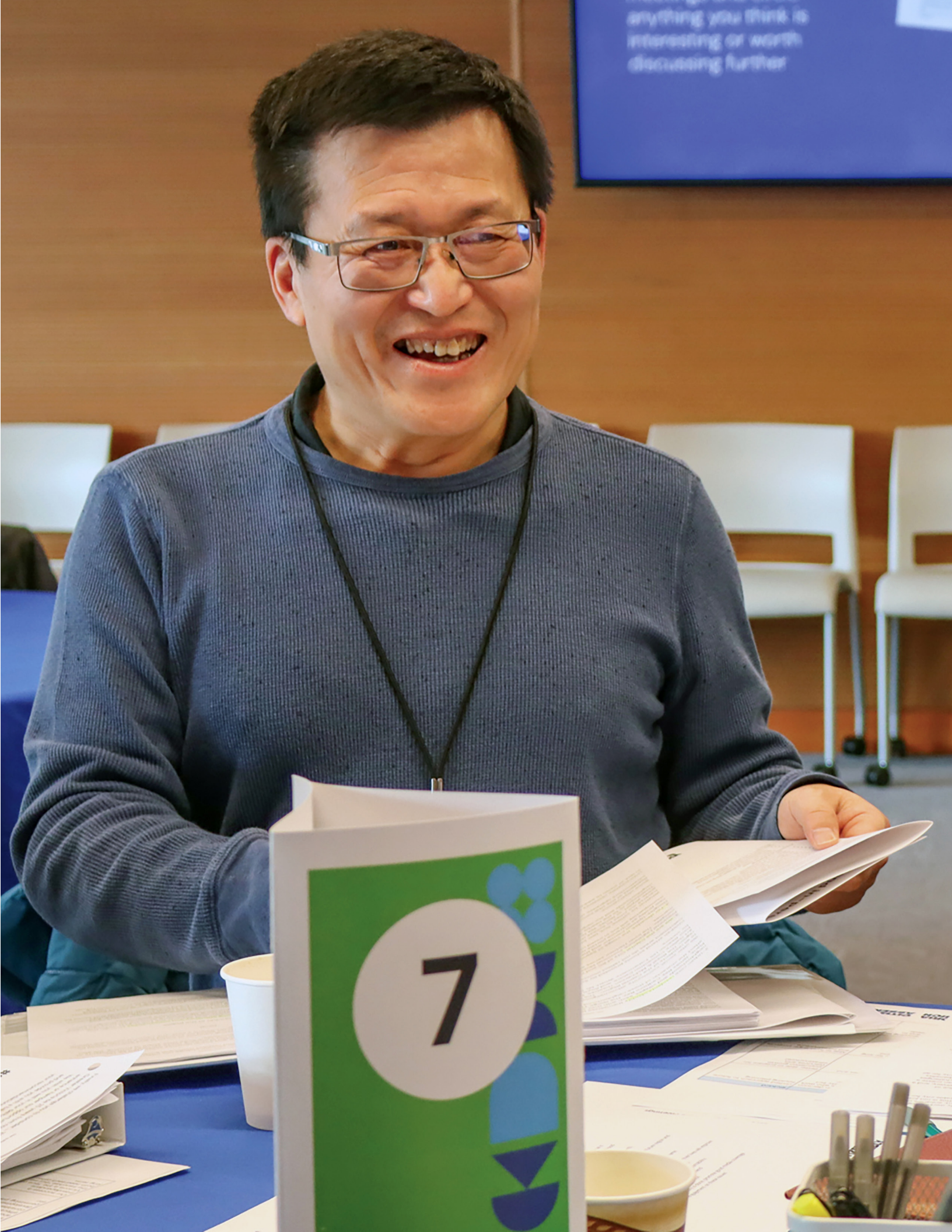
Sarah Todd, Saanich

I'm Sarah, and I've lived in Saanich since January 2020. Originally from Sidney, I moved back to the island after living in Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary. I work as a project director in the arts and culture division of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport. My partner and I have a small urban farm, and I volunteer on the board of the Vancouver Island Visual Arts Society. I'm excited to join the Assembly to engage with my community and contribute to public service.

Tan Emad, Saanich

I'm Tan, a lifelong resident of Saanich, with a recent five-year stint in Australia. I work in marketing at a software company and enjoy playing pickleball and board games with friends. I joined the Assembly to understand how policies could address issues like housing affordability and improve our community.

Note: Of the 48 members who started the Assembly process in September 2024, 46 were able to complete the journey in April 2025. Two members, separately, stepped away in early 2025 for personal reasons and were ultimately unable to continue. At that late stage, it was not feasible to select replacement members, who would have missed a substantial portion of the learning and deliberative work of the Assembly. As noted elsewhere in this report, the number of members present and accountable for the recommendations is 46; however, in recognition of their service, the two members who withdrew are still included here.


anything you think is
interesting or worth
discussing further
7

Guest Speakers and Presentations

Over the course of eight sessions, the Citizens' Assembly heard from 21 experts, stakeholders, municipal and community leaders, and others to aid their understanding of the issues and hear different perspectives. We thank them for sharing their knowledge and perspectives with the Assembly. Guests are listed below in the order in which they appeared before the Assembly.

Session 1: September 21, 2024

JÁEŁNOṈET

Tracy Underwood is a Matriarch of the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations and a PhD candidate and assistant professor of Indigenous Studies at the University of Victoria. She upholds daily her Matriarchal duties of protecting and preserving the children, land, language and culture of her people. She's an expert in land-based learning, history, storytelling and community care. As part of her PhD research she developed a "living presentation" called JÁEŁNOṈET, which means to acknowledge and to thank, as a reciprocal framework for respectful relationships and living on Indigenous land. The presentation intertwines her story as someone who has grown up in W̱SÁNEĆ and explores the impact of cultural genocide on Indigenous language, culture and history, while imploring listeners to think beyond reconciliation to reconstruction.

Harrowing Eden: Early Settlement of Southwest Vancouver Island

John Lutz is a professor of history at the University of Victoria, where he teaches courses on the history of British Columbia, the Pacific Northwest, and Indigenous-settler relations. He is the author or editor of six books, most recently To Share, Not Surrender: Indigenous and Settler Visions of Treaty Making in the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia (UBC Press, 2021). He is passionate about teaching history because he loves to help people find their roots, and when he's not teaching he's often exploring the hidden corners of the region on foot and by canoe or kayak.

Municipal Amalgamation in BC: History and Alternative Approaches

Robert Bish is an economist who has researched, consulted, and written about the organization and operation of local governments since 1968. When he joined the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria in 1979, he was instrumental in bringing a service-based approach to the discipline, especially in his book Local Government in British Columbia (UBCM, 1987; latest edition 2008). A service-based approach also guides his work on amalgamation, including in Local Government Amalgamations: Discredited Nineteenth-Century Ideals Alive in the Twenty-First (C.D. Howe, 2001) and Governing Greater Victoria: The Role of Elected Officials and Shared Services (Fraser Institute, 2016). Now retired, he divides his time between Vancouver Island, Washington state, and Florida.

Session 2: October 19, 2024

City of Victoria Municipal Overview

Jocelyn Jenkyns is the City Manager of Victoria and previously served as the Deputy City Manager and the General Manager of the Victoria Conference Centre. She received her Masters Certificate in Municipal Leadership from York University in 2018.

District of Saanich Municipal Overview

Brent Reems is the Chief Administrative Officer of the District of Saanich. He joined Saanich as the Director of Building, Bylaw, Licensing and Legal Services in October 2017. Previously, he held roles at the Capital Regional District, the Office of the Ombudsperson, and a private law firm. Reems holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Victoria and a Master of Arts from Queen's University.

Understanding the Capital Regional District

Ted Robbins is the Chief Administrative Officer of the Capital Regional District (CRD) which provides over 200 regional, sub-regional, and local services in the capital region, including regional parks, drinking water, wastewater treatment, and solid waste management. Ted is also responsible for the Capital Region Housing Corporation (CRHC) which provides affordable housing, and the Capital Regional Hospital District (CRHD) which provides capital funding for health care infrastructure in the region. Ted holds a BSc in Geography from the University of Victoria and has over 20 years of local government experience.

Session 3: November 2, 2024

Community Planning and Development

Lindsay Chase is the Director of Planning for the District of Saanich, and previously was the Director of Development Services for the Town of View Royal and Senior Planner with the City of Victoria. She's a PhD candidate in geography at the University of Victoria and also teaches planning as a professor at Vancouver Island University's Master of Community Planning program, educating the next generation of planners in the areas of theory, ethics, and planning in local and regional government. Lindsay currently serves on the Professional Standards Board for the planning profession in Canada and was previously Vice-President of the Canadian Institute of Planners. Mentoring students and young professionals is part of her contribution back to the profession. In her spare time, she can be found travelling or at the library!

Community Planning and Development

Andrea Hudson is Assistant Director, Community Planning, at the City of Victoria. She previously served in planning roles for the Cowichan Valley Regional District and the Government of the Northwest Territories. She received her Master's in City Planning from the University of Manitoba and is a member of the Canadian Institute of Planners.

Municipal Amalgamation: Principles and Case Studies

Enid Slack is the Executive Director of the Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance at the University of Toronto. She has published books and articles on property taxes, municipal fiscal health, intergovernmental transfers, development charges, financing municipal infrastructure, and metropolitan governance. She consults with governments and international agencies such as the World Bank, UN Habitat, Inter-American Development Bank, and the International Growth Centre, and chairs the Advisory Board of Local Public Sector Alliance. Enid received her BA in Economics from York University (Glendon College), and an MA and PhD in Economics from the University of Toronto. In 2012, she was awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for her work on cities.

Session 4: November 30, 2024

Understanding Social Needs, Services and Priorities

Julian Daly is the Chief Executive Officer of Our Place Society, which serves Greater Victoria's most vulnerable, including people struggling with homelessness, mental health challenges, substance use issues, the working poor, LGBTQ+, and impoverished elderly. Previously he was Executive Director of Boyle Street Community Services, the largest organization for the homeless in Edmonton. Over a 35-year career, he has been a frontline worker and a manager in a wide range of programs and projects including housing, poverty reduction, community engagement, HIV/AIDS, harm reduction, the differently abled, employment, youth services, social enterprises, health, education, and children and family services.

Understanding Policing in British Columbia

Clayton Pecknold retired in 2024 after a five-year term as Police Complaint Commissioner of British Columbia. Prior to that, he was the Assistant Deputy Minister and Director of Police Services, Policing and Security Branch, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, from 2011 to 2019. A former RCMP officer, he also previously served as deputy chief of Saanich police and was president of the BC Association of Police Chiefs. He holds a law degree from Dalhousie University and is a graduate of the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia. He is a recipient of the Order of Merit for the Police Forces (member), the Queen's Jubilee Medal, the King's Coronation Medal, and the Police Exemplary Service Medal.

Session 5: January 11, 2025

Community Perspectives: Amalgamation Yes

James Anderson is the co-founder and chair of the community association Amalgamation Yes and a resident of Saanich for 45 years. He holds an MA in urban and regional planning from UBC. He spent his career working with provincial agencies responsible for policy in parks, agriculture, land administration, property management, and fisheries and oceans. He's a well-known attendee of CRD and Saanich council meetings and considers himself a "citizen activist."

James Legh is a partner at the law firm of Stevenson Luchies and Legh and has been practising law since 1986. He is a long-term member and former president of the Victoria Bar Association and is currently a Bencher with the Law Society of British Columbia. He is also a local business owner and has been an active community volunteer for over 50 years, including with Scouts Canada, Saanich Police Board, Victoria Foundation, Children's Museum of Victoria Association, Learning Disabilities Association of British Columbia, and various theatre groups. He is a member of the community association Amalgamation Yes.

Session 6: February 8, 2025

Introduction to the Technical Study Report

James Richardson is MNP's Alberta Public Sector Consulting Leader and a Partner in the firm's consulting practice. Drawing on over two decades of experience, he serves public and private sector clients both locally and nationally. His cross-industry expertise includes all orders of government, post-secondary institutions, health care, transportation, housing, infrastructure, manufacturing, not-for-profit organizations, and private enterprises. The scope and breadth of James' experience enables him to bring innovative and practical solutions to the complex problems that his clients face. James obtained his Master of Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Wales (Cardiff) in 2011 with a focus on strategy, change management, and risk management. He is a director with Kids With Cancer Society.

Community Perspectives: Five Views on the Future of the Region:

Andrew Duffy has been carrying a pad and pen with journalistic intent through the streets of Victoria since the early 1990s and has been with the Times Colonist covering everything from sports to politics and all points in between since 1996. The University of Victoria graduate and award-winning journalist has been covering the municipal minefield that is the City of Victoria and District of Saanich for the last few years, and before that covered the region's business beat from 2000, with a practised eye focused on financial malfeasance, real estate, the burgeoning tech sector, tourism, and forestry.

Jonathon Dyck is Senior Director of Marketing and Communications at the Victoria Foundation. Known especially for its annual Vital Signs report, which explores the vitality of the region, identifies concerns, and supports action on issues, the Victoria Foundation manages charitable gifts to create permanent, income-earning funds that support hundreds of charities each year. The Foundation grants over $2 million a month, and to-date has distributed more than $340 million to support charities locally and across Canada.

Dallas Gislason is Deputy Director, Regional Economic Development, of the South Island Prosperity Partnership (SIPP), a regional alliance model designed to convene Greater Victoria's many stakeholders and governments around the pursuit of a more diversified, innovative, and sustainable economy, with over 70 members. He has served on several boards over the years, such as Business Retention and Expansion International, the International Council on National Youth Policy, the Camosun Technology Access Centre, and the Greater Victoria Placemaking Network, among others.

Joanne Peake is the Board Secretary of the Prospect Lake District Community Association in Rural Saanich, which facilitates the sharing of information, promotes discussion, and represents community interests. The association aims to create opportunities for connection through activities and events that promote community fun, health, and well-being.

Leo Spalteholz: After seeing how municipal zoning and permitting drive our housing shortage and

increase the cost of housing, Leo Spalteholz co-founded the advocacy group Homes for Living, a volunteer organization that advocates for more affordable housing in Greater Victoria. Leo lives with his family in Saanich and hopes for a future where they can afford housing in the region.

Community Perspectives: Big is Better or Small is Beautiful?

Allison Habkirk is a Registered Planner who has worked as a staff planner, consultant, and trainer for more than 90 local governments and First Nations as well as the Province of British Columbia and the Local Government Management Association. She served as Mayor and Councillor for the District of Central Saanich for three terms of office. She is now an Instructor with Capilano University and was an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria, and served as Program Manager for the Local Government Leadership Academy.

Session 7: March 8, 2025

Perspectives on the Technical Study from the City of Victoria

As Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer of the City of Victoria, roles she has held since 2018, **Susanne Thompson** oversees several corporate services departments including Finance, Parking Services, Legislative Services, and the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. Susanne started her career in private sector small business and in 1996 moved into public service, where she has held a variety of positions. Susanne has a Bachelor of Accounting Science (BAccSc) and a Chartered Professional Accountant (CPA) designation. She also has a Certificate in Local Government Administration from Capilano University. When she isn't working, Susanne's life revolves around her two teenagers, and she enjoys spending time at her family property on Cowichan Lake.

To further understand the perspectives of Rural Saanich and the importance of agricultural land within the communities, the Citizens' Assembly invited a representative from the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) of British Columbia to present. Although the ALC declined to attend, they responded in writing to a set of questions provided by Assembly members. That document, alongside all presentations and materials provided to the Assembly, was collected on the Assembly website for public review.

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Advisory and Oversight Group

The Advisory and Oversight Group provided advice to the Assembly Chair concerning the process and curriculum the Assembly followed. It also stood available to respond to any concerns from Assembly members related to the conduct and impartiality of the Assembly itself, though that responsibility did not arise. We thank them for their service to the Assembly members and both communities.

Marjan H. Ehsassi is a lawyer, international governance expert, Executive Director of FIDE North America, and Strategic Director of the Democratic Action Fund. She serves on several boards including Healthy Democracy, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Meridian Council. As a Berggruen Renovating Democracy Fellow, Marjan supports programs that raise knowledge, build capacity, and test deliberative platforms in the United States, including the Global Innovations in Democracy Parliamentary Forum, the Summit of Democracy Working Group on Deliberative Democracy, the Future of Institutions on Deliberative Democracy, and the design and implementation of the Citizens' Assemblies in the United States.

Paul Hames is currently serving as Vice-Chair on the Board of Directors for Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL), continuing his 21-year commitment to community building through strong governance in the cooperative movement. Paul is proud to have been a police officer for 41 years, beginning his career in the RCMP and then moving to municipal policing as Chief Constable in Central Saanich for 17 years. He has been awarded the Order of Merit of the Police Forces (M.O.M.), the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, and the RCMP Long Service Medal. Paul loves to travel with his family, hike and explore back roads on his motorcycle, and cruise the Gulf Islands.

Evert Lindquist is a professor in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria, where his research interests include public sector and public service reform, designing and implementing policy interventions, digital and collaborative governance, the role and influence of think tanks in policy networks, and competing values in public sector leadership and reform. Professor Lindquist has been the Editor of Canadian Public Administration, the journal of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, since January 2012. He was awarded the BC Lieutenant Governor's Silver Medal Award for Excellence in Public Administration, Institute of Public Administration of Canada (Vancouver/ Victoria Regional Groups), on 23 June, 2016.

Ansley Tucker is the dean emerita of the Anglican Diocese of Islands and Inlets, and now serves part-time to advance and coordinate the ministry of deacons. She took up her role as rector of Victoria's Christ Church Cathedral in 2015, having previously served in the Diocese of Toronto for 25 years, and Calgary for 10. During her tenure she led the church community's response to the Tent City encampment on the courthouse lawn, coming alongside the community in times of civic sorrow and indignation, and encouraged the church to make an "outward turn" in its sense of purpose. She brings extensive experience in the region's non-profit sector and is a champion of civic service and volunteerism.

The late **Warren Magnusson** was Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Victoria whose deep interest in the urban and the local as sites of politics and government inspired countless students and informed a generation of public servants. His most recent book, Local Self-Government and the Right to the City, completed a trilogy that began with The Search for Political Space (1996) and Politics of Urbanism: Seeing Like a City (2011). He authored or edited numerous other books and articles on politics in British Columbia and Canada. He was a founding member of the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Cultural, Social, and Political Thought (CSPT) at UVic, as well as of the Urban Studies Committee, which organizes the CityTalks in Victoria.

Warren Magnusson passed away on April 2, 2025.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is municipal amalgamation?
As municipalities grow, they routinely consider whether they should merge with neighbouring jurisdictions. This process, called amalgamation, means combining the governments, geographic boundaries, municipal services, and identities of two or more jurisdictions. In British Columbia, municipal amalgamation can only occur with Provincial approval after a vote has been taken in each municipality and with more than 50% of the votes in favour of the proposed amalgamation in each municipality.

Why is the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly taking place?
Over the past decade, the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich have considered whether they should amalgamate and become one municipality. During the 2014 B.C. municipal elections, eight municipalities in the region asked a non-binding ballot question of voters to gauge public support for studying amalgamation; Victoria and Saanich were among the seven municipalities where a majority of voters supported it. During the 2018 B.C. municipal elections, Victoria and Saanich each asked a Community Opinion Question, asking voters whether they were in favour of establishing a "Citizens' Assembly to explore the costs, benefits and disadvantages" of amalgamation. A majority of voters in both municipalities supported the proposal and, after being delayed by the pandemic, the Citizens' Assembly proceeded in 2024.

Who funded the Citizens' Assembly?
The 2018 ballot question specifically authorized spending up to $750,000 on the Citizens' Assembly, with one-third of this cost borne by each municipality, and one-third by the Province of British Columbia. A breakdown of the cost structure can be found on page 71.

Why is it only Victoria and Saanich participating in the Citizens' Assembly process? What about other municipalities in the region?
Following the 2014 B.C. municipal elections, various municipalities in the capital region considered whether to ask their voters to approve a Citizens' Assembly process, but only the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich, through their elected councils, opted to pursue the ballot question in 2018. Although it may seem to many residents of the area that amalgamation is a regional question, ultimately no other municipalities could join the Citizens' Assembly process without approval from their voters. These other municipalities may still elect to conduct their own processes in future.

How were Assembly members selected?
The 48 members of the Citizens' Assembly were randomly selected from a pool of registered volunteers using a type of blind draw called a Civic Lottery. Ten thousand households in Victoria and Saanich were randomly selected to receive an invitation to opt into the pool of volunteers. The Civic Lottery was stratified to ensure that the Citizens' Assembly broadly matched the demography of Victoria and Saanich. Given the differences in population, 27 seats on the Assembly were reserved for Saanich residents and 21 seats for Victoria residents. The Civic Lottery weighed factors like gender, age, local geography, ethnicity, and housing status, using demographic data from Statistics Canada and geographic data from the municipalities.

Why did the Assembly recommendation come out before the report?
The Assembly's draft report including its final recommendation was presented by members to council representatives and dignitaries on the final scheduled day of the Assembly process to ensure transparency and full membership attendance. This approach guaranteed that the recommendation reflected the authentic collective decision of the Assembly without external influence during the report documentation process.

Why does the Chair speak on behalf of the Assembly?
The Assembly Chair, though not a member of the Assembly, serves as the representative of the Assembly process, with the responsibility to ensure the process is well understood and clearly communicated to the public. This role is particularly critical given that the Assembly's work affects two separate municipalities.

Why does the Assembly's recommendation not include an implementation plan for amalgamation?
The Citizens' Assembly's mandate was to explore the costs, benefits, and disadvantages of amalgamation and make recommendations to councils. Determining the specific cost of amalgamation and considering how a plan would be implemented were beyond the scope of the Assembly's mandate. The mandate of the Technical Study, prepared by MNP, was to provide a comparative analysis of each municipality's services, finances, and governance structures to inform the Assembly's deliberations. The Technical Study does not offer conclusions regarding the benefits or disadvantages of the operations of the two municipalities. The Technical Study is not intended to determine if one municipality's operations are better or worse than the other, nor does the Technical Study draw any conclusions about the efficiency or effectiveness of operations. Should voters, councils, and the province approve amalgamation, an implementation plan would likely follow.

Who makes the final decision about amalgamation?
The voters of the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich will decide. The Citizens' Assembly's role was to study the issues on behalf of the wider communities and make a consensus recommendation to the councils of both Victoria and Saanich. The Assembly has recommended amalgamation. Both municipalities have committed to deliberating on this outcome, and if they endorse the members' work, they will work with the Province of British Columbia on initiating a public referendum, likely to take place at the time of the next B.C. municipal elections in October 2026. If a majority of residents from both municipalities vote in favour of amalgamation, the plan would still require the provincial government's approval to proceed.

What is the timeline for municipal amalgamation?
Assuming a referendum is put to voters of Victoria and Saanich and a majority of voters in both municipalities support amalgamation, a transition period would begin. Voters in the 2026 municipal elections would still elect separate councils for each municipality, and those councils would oversee a transition process that would include an implementation plan for merging the two municipalities, possibly by the time of the 2030 B.C. municipal elections. If that timeline holds, residents in 2030 would vote for a single, unified municipal council and mayor.

How much will amalgamation cost?
The issue of the cost of amalgamation to the municipalities (and taxpayers) was one of the central elements of the Citizens' Assembly's mandate and deliberations. However, determining a precise or even rough estimate of the cost of amalgamation was beyond the scope of the Technical Study (see page 68). The Assembly considered reports and case studies from other amalgamation processes across Canada over the past 50 years, and various expert guest speakers to the Assembly speculated on how the cost of amalgamation could be considered. The Assembly members weighed factors including but not limited to how long the amalgamation implementation process would last, which services would be affected by amalgamation and how, and the impact on municipal workforces, contracts, capital asset management, land use planning, and more. However, at no point, within the opportunities and constraints of the Citizens' Assembly process and budget, did a reliable figure emerge on the question of the cost of amalgamation. A future transition council or joint committee of the two municipalities, tasked with developing and overseeing an amalgamation implementation plan, would be appropriately suited to develop a cost estimate for amalgamation.

Have Citizens' Assemblies ever previously considered amalgamation?
In British Columbia in 2017, a Citizens' Assembly of 36 randomly selected residents from the City of Duncan and the District Municipality of North Cowichan considered the question of whether those two neighbouring municipalities should amalgamate. Following a six-month deliberative process, the Assembly members reached consensus on a recommendation for amalgamation, and their report was considered by both municipal councils and ultimately went before voters of both municipalities in a 2018 referendum. While a majority of voters in North Cowichan favoured amalgamation, a majority in Duncan voted against, and the municipalities remained distinct. Citizens' Assemblies on amalgamation have also been held in Belgium, Germany, and Finland.

Summary of Assembly Sessions and Public Meetings

Between September 2024 and April 2025, the Citizens' Assembly met eight times at Saturday all-day sessions and participated in four evening public meetings. What follows is a summary of each of these sessions and meetings. All presentations, videos, and materials were made available to the public on the Assembly's website.

Assembly Session ①

On **Saturday, September 21, 2024**, the 48 members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly walked into the Atrium at the Centre for Trades, Education and Innovation at Camosun College's Interurban Campus for their first of eight full-day sessions together. Over the course of seven and a half hours on Day 1, the Assembly members heard from three experts, two mayors, and the Assembly Chair about the special character of their mandate, the significance of their role, and the history of the region including its unique structural and governance models.

The day began with W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip) Elder **Ivy Seward** welcoming the Assembly to the territories traditionally inhabited by the lək̓ʷəŋən Peoples, represented by the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations, and the W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples, represented by the W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), BOḰEĆEN (Pauquachin), SṮÁUTW̱ (Tsawout), W̱SIḴEM (Tseycum), and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations.

Next, Victoria **Mayor Marianne Alto** and Saanich **Mayor Dean Murdock** jointly addressed the Assembly, expressing their gratitude on behalf of their governments to the members for volunteering for this historic civic duty. They emphasized the importance of Assembly members as representatives of their fellow residents of Saanich and Victoria as they deliberate on issues that affect everyone. And they pledged to accept the Assembly's final report and take up their recommendations in their respective councils when the report is delivered next spring.

Chair **Peter MacLeod** led the members through an overview of the process and mandate of the Assembly, speaking from the experience of having designed and led more than 60 Citizens' Assemblies in Canada over the past 17 years through his organization, MASS LBP. After the 48 Assembly members had the opportunity to stand and introduce themselves formally to each other, Peter welcomed the first of three speakers of the day.

Tracy Underwood is a Matriarch of the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations and a PhD candidate and assistant professor of Indigenous Studies at the University of Victoria. To the Assembly she delivered a "living presentation" she calls "JÁEŁNOṈET," which means to acknowledge and to thank. The presentation intertwined her story as someone who has grown up on W̱SÁNEĆ lands and explored the impact of cultural genocide on Indigenous language, culture, and history. She implored listeners to think beyond reconciliation to reconstruction, and to envision a reciprocal framework for respectful relationships and living on Indigenous land.

The Assembly next welcomed **John Lutz**, a professor of history at the University of Victoria, where he teaches courses on the history of British Columbia, the Pacific Northwest, and Indigenous-settler relations. Professor Lutz gave a presentation called "Harrowing Eden" about the legacy of colonial settlement and land division in the region and how that legacy impacts the cities we live in today, weaving in colourful anecdotes of history that illuminate what is special about this region we share.

Finally, the Assembly heard from **Robert Bish**, an economist and emeritus professor at the University of Victoria's School of Public Administration, who has researched, consulted, and written about the organization and operation of local governments since 1968. Professor Bish spoke to Assembly members about the broad structure of local government in British Columbia, how municipal services are managed and delivered, and the historical factors that sometimes lead the province and cities to consider amalgamation. Like the two speakers before him, Professor Bish engaged in a question-and-answer session with members following his talk.

Among all of these presentations, the Assembly members, working together in groups of six or seven at their tables, discussed what they hope to learn during the Assembly process, how they've seen the region change over the course of their lives, and what they value about local government.

Assembly Session ②

On **Saturday, October 19, 2024**, the 48 members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly gathered at Sherri Bell Hall at Camosun College's Lansdowne Campus for their second of eight full-day sessions together. Situated at a unique junction within the capital region's geography—inside the District of Saanich but with the boundaries of both the City of Victoria and the District of Oak Bay in sight from the hall's grand windows—the venue is an apt location for a group of citizens tasked with discussing the future of the area.

(It was also Election Day in British Columbia. Most Assembly members said they participated in early voting, but organizers ensured there was enough time for members to head to the polls after the session concluded.)

After an introduction and recap of Session 1 from Assembly Chair Peter MacLeod, the Assembly members welcomed **Jocelyn Jenkyns**, City Manager of Victoria, and **Brent Reems**, Chief Administrative Officer of Saanich. In back-to-back presentations, each administrator presented an overview of their municipality's demographics, economy, workforce, services, transportation, policing, community plans, budget and fiscal outlook, and the major issues facing local government and residents. Each speaker answered questions from the Assembly members seated in front of them at round tables.

Next, the Assembly welcomed **Ted Robbins**, Chief Administrative Officer of the Capital Regional District (CRD), who introduced the members to the history, structure, governance, budget, and distribution of services which the CRD is responsible for. Following the presentation, Chair Peter MacLeod welcomed all three of the morning's guests to sit together at the front of the room and take further questions from members.

After lunch, the Assembly welcomed **Bonnie Chan-Maier** and **James Richardson** of MNP, the consulting firm tasked with producing a Technical Study of the two municipalities, which, when it is completed and published in January 2025, will serve as a key submission for both the Assembly and the broader public to consider. Chan-Maier and Richardson led Assembly members through an overview of the key methodology of the study, their process of data collection, and what members should expect when they see the final report.

After a robust QandA with the MNP guests, Assembly members spent the bulk of the afternoon working in small groups to consider whether there were additional elements or areas of analysis they felt the Technical Study should consider. They then provided that feedback in dialogue with the guests in a collaborative effort to ensure the study provides them with the information they'll need to help make their recommendations.

Assembly Session ③

On a cool and drizzly Saturday, November 2, 2024, the members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly reconvened at Sherri Bell Hall at Camosun College, Lansdowne Campus, for their third of eight full-day sessions together.

Assembly Chair **Peter MacLeod** welcomed members back to their task by inviting them to share their reflections on what they'd learned in the previous session and the issues they'd been

thinking about over the past few weeks.

Following this plenary discussion, the theme of the morning turned to municipal planning, and how cities prepare for the changes and challenges of the future. The Assembly members welcomed **Lindsay Chase**, Director of Planning for the District of Saanich, and **Andrea Hudson**, Assistant Director of Citywide Planning for the City of Victoria. In back-to-back presentations, the two planners helped members understand each municipality's planning contexts: boundaries, demographics, population projections, future housing needs, zoning, land-use policies, resilience against climate change, the tools and challenges of urban planning, and how official community plans are developed with public input. The Saanich presentation also included an introduction to the Urban Containment Boundary, the Agricultural Land Reserve, and the special character of Rural Saanich.

Following the two presentations, Assembly members engaged in a question-and-answer period with the speakers, after which they spent time working in small groups at their tables refining their draft values.

After lunch, the Assembly welcomed, via Zoom from her office in Toronto, **Enid Slack**, Executive Director at the Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance at the University of Toronto. Slack presented a high-level overview of why cities and provinces sometimes consider amalgamation. She provided examples of municipal mergers (and de-mergers) in Canada, an overview of metropolitan governance models, a summary of municipal fiscal pressures, and some key advantages and disadvantages of amalgamation, including what the research literature says.

Following a robust QandA, the Assembly members spent the remainder of the afternoon working in small groups, discussing with each other what they considered to be the most important reasons that Victoria and Saanich should, and should not, amalgamate and/or pursue greater service integration, based on what they had learned so far. They also articulated the questions they felt still needed to be answered for them to feel adequately ready to consider recommendations.

Public Meetings: November 20 and 21, 2024

On Wednesday, November 20, 2024, the Assembly hosted an online public meeting, via Zoom. Assembly Chair **Peter MacLeod** provided an overview of the Citizens' Assembly process, including member selection and work to date.

Following a QandA, guests and Assembly members broke into virtual breakout rooms on Zoom, where a facilitator guided a one-hour conversation in which guests shared their thoughts on each of the following questions:

- What are the most important issues that will affect this region in the next 25 years?
- What do you think is important to consider when deciding whether or not Victoria and Saanich should amalgamate?
- What do you think are the potential benefits of amalgamation or deeper integration?
- What do you think are the potential disadvantages?
- What advice would you like to give the members of the Assembly?

Members of the public and members of the Assembly engaged with each other thoughtfully and respectfully about issues of civic governance as well as hopes and concerns about the future of the two municipalities and the region at large.

The following evening, Thursday, November 21, 2024, the Assembly hosted an in-person public meeting at the historic Crystal Garden at the Victoria Conference Centre, following the same format. Attendees sat at round tables with Assembly members and facilitators and engaged in similar discussions on the issues and potential future scenarios.

Assembly members expressed their deep appreciation to guests for the opportunity to hear directly from the public on the considerations that bear on their work.

Assembly Session ④

On the last day of November, the members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly gathered once more at Sherri Bell Hall at Camosun College, Lansdowne Campus, for their fourth and final meeting of 2024.

The day began with breakfast and reflections on the public meetings, which took place on November 20 and 21. During those meetings, more than 100 members of the public had the opportunity to learn about the Assembly's work, share their perspectives and questions about civic issues including potential amalgamation, and meet and interact with members of the Assembly.

Assembly Chair **Peter MacLeod** invited members to share in plenary what they had heard and learned from their conversations with the public, after which they continued their discussions in smaller groups to identify the issues raised by the public that deserve further study or consideration by the Assembly. Members next spent time reviewing the 19 public submissions made to the Assembly between September and November. They discussed the issues and considerations raised in the public submissions and identified those that they should carry forward in their deliberations.

Following a mid-morning break, the Assembly welcomed its first guest speaker of the day, **Julian Daly,** chief executive officer of Our Place Society, which provides services to the region's most vulnerable communities, including people struggling with homelessness, mental health challenges, substance use issues, and others. Daly shared the stories of some of the people who come to use services of organizations like Our Place and provided an overview of the issues of homelessness, poverty, and addiction currently facing the capital region. He emphasized the need for communities to work together to overcome not only the challenges of solving housing and addiction crises but also the fear and stigma surrounding these issues. Members engaged in a robust question-and-answer period with Daly, including clarifying how municipalities should tackle these issues in the future, before breaking for lunch.

After lunch, members returned to their tables, and Chair Peter MacLeod directed them to resume their discussions from Session 3 around the various potential scenarios for the future of the two municipalities: amalgamation, further service integration, or maintaining two separate municipalities. Members spent time in conversation identifying the gaps between what they know and what they still need to know about the key issues bearing on their mandate, and what assurances they would need to support each of the various potential outcomes.

Following the afternoon break, members welcomed **Clayton Pecknold**, the former Police Complaint Commissioner of British Columbia and former Assistant Deputy Minister and Director of Police Services for the province. Pecknold's presentation included an overview of municipal policing in British Columbia, the various models and service agreements in effect, and the costs of policing borne by different levels of government. He clarified the differences between services provided by the RCMP and municipal police departments, discussed ways in which municipalities and jurisdictions currently share services and coordinate their work, and also provided members with the framework of oversight and regulation in police services. Members then engaged Pecknold in a vigorous QandA to further understand how questions of police services, funding, and further integration should bear on their work.

Session 4 of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly closed with a look ahead to the Assembly's interim report, which will be released before the end of December, and the Technical Study Report, which will be presented to the Assembly at their January session and released to the public shortly thereafter.

Assembly Session ⑤

On January 11, 2025, the members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly reconvened following the holiday break for their fifth session, gathering again at Sherri Bell Hall at Camosun College's Lansdowne campus.

Assembly Chair **Peter MacLeod** welcomed

members back in session by inviting them to share any insights from their conversations with friends, family, colleagues, and fellow residents about the issues under consideration. Members also discussed some of the recent media coverage of the Assembly, including articles and editorials in the Times Colonist and Saanich News.

The Assembly was originally scheduled to receive and review the Technical Study Report at this session; however, the report was delayed while the municipalities completed their final review. It will be released to members ahead of Session 6 and to the public thereafter.

Next, Assembly program coordinator and lead facilitator Richard Johnson reviewed the Assembly's Interim Report, which was published in December, and invited comments and feedback that may aid the process when members begin to prepare their final report later this spring.

Following a morning break, members returned to their tables and Chair Peter MacLeod presented an overview of municipal governance models. The Assembly had previously requested more knowledge on these models, including ward systems and hybrid models, to better understand the options for community representation in elected government. Following the presentation, members worked in small groups at their tables to discuss the pros and cons of each model, and consider whether any may be relevant for their deliberations on the question of amalgamation.

After a 45-minute lunch break, the Citizens' Assembly welcomed two guests,

James Anderson and **James Legh**, who are representatives of the community advocacy group Amalgamation Yes. Anderson and Legh spoke to the Assembly for 20 minutes about the history of their group and the reasons they support amalgamation. The Assembly members then engaged in a 40-minute QandA with the guests. (At the next meeting of the Assembly, members will have the opportunity to hear from an opposing community perspective about amalgamation.)

Following a mid-afternoon break, members spent the remainder of their session discussing at their tables the considerations for each of the potential scenarios they may eventually reach consensus on: amalgamation, remaining two separate municipalities, or remaining two separate municipalities but with recommendations for further service integration. Members returned to their list of issues about each scenario from their third and fourth sessions, prioritized the most important issues, and considered what assurances they would need to have in order to overcome their concerns. They also discussed what could be done to provide those assurances.

The session concluded with Chair Peter MacLeod updating members about the program for the sixth session. Members were also reminded that the date of the next session, February 8, is also the date of a City of Victoria referendum on the future of Crystal Pool, and that they may vote early or by mail if they feel there may not be enough time to reach the polls on voting day.

Assembly Session ⑥

On February 8, 2025, the members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly gathered once again at Sherri Bell Hall at Camosun College for their sixth session together. They first sat for a warm breakfast together following a week of wintry weather that had brought snow and freezing temperatures to the region.

Peter MacLeod, Chair of the Assembly, opened the session at nine o'clock with a recap of the previous session and a presentation of the agenda for the day ahead. He then welcomed to the podium **James Richardson**, a partner at the accounting firm MNP, who had arrived from Edmonton to present the draft Technical Study Report to the Assembly members.

The Technical Study is the product of nearly a year's worth of extensive collaboration between MNP, the City of Victoria, and the District of Saanich. The report identifies and analyzes key operational, financial, and administrative elements of the two municipalities in order to provide a clear and objective comparison, and offers considerations that may factor into future deliberations on amalgamation. Produced by MNP as an independent third-party consultant, the report is intended to establish a common

fact base to inform the Citizens' Assembly's deliberations as well as public knowledge about municipal affairs and governance.

During the MNP presentation, Assembly members engaged in productive dialogue with Richardson about the scope and findings of the report, providing feedback in real time. Following the presentation and a short coffee break, members then spent an hour working in small groups, each taking a different section of the report to examine more closely and highlight any questions, clarifications, or revisions. Members especially looked for content in the report that addressed their list of assurances they had developed in their November and January Assembly sessions. A representative from each small group then reported back to the whole in plenary, with Richardson addressing further questions and comments.

The Assembly members then broke for a well-deserved lunch break, after which they returned to their work and welcomed a panel of five guest speakers who were invited to offer their perspectives on the region, its challenges, opportunities, and future: **Dallas Gislason**, deputy director, regional economic development, of the South Island Prosperity Partnership; **Jonathon Dyck**, senior director of marketing and communications at the Victoria Foundation; **Joanne Peake**, secretary of the Prospect Lake District Community Association; **Leo Spalteholz**, co-founder of Homes for Living; and **Andrew Duffy**, columnist and municipal affairs reporter with the Times Colonist.

Chair Peter MacLeod introduced each guest and invited them to speak about their own organizations and how they see the region growing and changing, after which Assembly members spent an hour engaging the panel in a vigorous QandA about many of the key issues and considerations before them, soliciting their further perspectives and thanking them for their service to the Assembly.

Following a mid-afternoon break, members welcomed the final guest speaker of the day: **Allison Habkirk**, a registered planner, the former mayor of Central Saanich, and an instructor at Capilano University. Habkirk joined remotely via Zoom and her presentation, titled "Big is better or small is beautiful," offered a counterpoint to the presentation by the organization Amalgamation Yes at the previous Assembly session, ensuring that members heard and engaged with local community perspectives on both sides of the question of amalgamation in the region. Members then had the opportunity to ask questions of Habkirk via the ceiling-mounted camera and sound system of Sherri Bell Hall.

Before wrapping up the sixth session, Chair Peter MacLeod invited each Assembly member to spend about 30 minutes quietly reflecting on the sum of the information and considerations they've received to this point, and noting on small cards which potential outcome of the Assembly—recommending amalgamation or not, including recommendations for further service integration—they may be leaning towards as individuals. MacLeod invited each member to take the cards home with them and continue to weigh the issues and considerations before the Assembly convenes again in March.

The session drew to a close with a reminder about the upcoming public meetings on February 25 and 27, and a preview of what members can expect when they reconvene next month.

Public Meetings: February 25 and 27, 2025

During the last week of February, the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly hosted two public meetings—one online and one in person—the goals of which were to provide opportunities for residents of the region to learn about the Assembly's work, to understand the Technical Study Report, to meet members of the Assembly, and to provide their perspectives on the issues that bear on the question of amalgamation.

On Tuesday, February 25, 2025, the Assembly hosted the online public meeting, via Zoom (a common video conference service). Two nights later, on Thursday, February 27, 2025, the Assembly hosted the in-person public meeting at the historic Crystal Garden (Victoria Conference Centre).

Each meeting unfolded in a similar fashion: Assembly Chair **Peter MacLeod** provided an overview of the Citizens' Assembly process and its work to date, and then introduced **James Richardson** from the accounting firm MNP, who presented an overview of the Technical Study Report. Following a QandA with Richardson and MacLeod, guests and Assembly members broke into small groups (virtual breakout rooms on Zoom and small round tables in person). A facilitator guided a one-hour conversation in which guests shared their thoughts on civic issues and the question of amalgamation. Facilitators shared a document that outlined each of the potential three scenarios and outcomes of the Assembly's work and used the following questions to prompt the conversation.

1. Which of the three potential Assembly recommendations do you support:
   - More Integration (2 municipalities)
   - Status Quo (2 municipalities)
   - Amalgamation (1 municipality)
2. Why? What are the main reasons or issues that lead you to support one of the above outcomes?
3. How strongly do you feel about each potential outcome?
4. For the outcomes you do not currently prefer, what two or three assurances would you need to support them?
5. What advice would you like to give the members of the Assembly as they conclude their work over the next six weeks?

Members of the public and members of the Assembly engaged each other thoughtfully and respectfully about the issues as well as hopes and concerns about the future of the two municipalities and the region at large. Assembly members expressed their deep appreciation to guests for the opportunity to hear directly from the public on the considerations that bear on their work. In closing, Assembly Chair Peter MacLeod invited reflections from guests on their experience of the public meetings and about the work of the Assembly.

Assembly Session 7

On a drizzly spring **Saturday, March 8, 2025**, the members of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly reconvened at Sherri Bell Hall at Camosun College for their seventh session together. Assembly Chair **Peter MacLeod** began the day by asking members to share reflections on their conversations with friends, family, and community members over the past month since their last meeting.

The Assembly then welcomed **Jocelyn Jenkyns**, City Manager of Victoria, and **Susanne Thompson**, Victoria's Director of Finance, to give a brief presentation. Following the release of the Technical Study Report, both municipalities were invited to speak to the Assembly to provide any additional perspectives and address any disagreements with the findings of the report. Victoria opted to take up this opportunity while Saanich declined.

Following a QandA with the Victoria guests and a short coffee and tea break, MacLeod and Assembly Lead Facilitator **Richard Johnson** led the members in a review of the public meetings, public submissions, and the response to the Assembly's written questions provided by the Agricultural Land Commission. The public meetings, held on February 25 and 27, included a total of approximately 165 local residents and 20 members of the Assembly in dialogue about the issues and considerations regarding amalgamation. The Assembly received 38 public submissions since its last review at Session 4 on November 30. The Agricultural Land Commission provided a three-page response to seven questions posed by Assembly members concerning the mandate, governance, and processes of the ALC concerning rural lands, the Urban Containment Boundary, and the Agricultural Land Reserve, including how that land is preserved.

Next, the members then rearranged the room to form one circle and MacLeod invited each member to take a few minutes to share the story of how they have arrived at their current perspective on the question of amalgamation and why they believed this perspective is right for their community. Over the course of more than

two hours of thoughtful discussion and reflection, a rough consensus began to emerge concerning the final recommendation of the Assembly.

The members then broke for lunch together, and afterwards gathered at their familiar small round tables. MacLeod asked the members to confirm a broad list of issues that the Assembly had, over the course of their deliberations, deemed important to their mandate. Each issue was assigned to a table, and members self-selected which table they wanted to join and then spent the bulk of the afternoon working with their colleagues to draft considerations, clarifications, or further recommendations in support of their consensus decision, to appear in their final report. During a break in the afternoon work, a representative from each table was invited to present a draft of their work to the Assembly whole and hear feedback and guidance from other members.

The Assembly concluded its session with an understanding that the work of drafting their final report will continue on the morning of their eighth and final session next month, and the Assembly team will share with members in the interim period the rough drafts as written by members. MacLeod thanked all members for their collegial and considerate efforts to reach a rough consensus and work towards satisfying the mandate of the Assembly.

Assembly Session ⑧

The Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly gathered for its final session on Saturday, April 5, 2025, once again at Sherri Bell Hall at Camosun College. After breakfast, Assembly Chair **Peter MacLeod** started the day by reminding everyone of the long journey the Assembly process has taken, from the ballot questions during the 2014 and 2018 municipal elections to the present day. He also shared with the Assembly the sad news of the passing of Warren Magnusson, a member of the Advisory and Oversight Group who had been a strong advocate for the process and their work.

He then reminded everyone where they had left off last time, noting there had emerged a high degree of consensus among a majority of Assembly members concerning amalgamation and its perceived benefits. Meanwhile, there were also a number of members who did not support amalgamation, and the Assembly's goal was now to produce a compelling and succinct report that communicated the recommendation and rationale for amalgamation while also acknowledging and addressing the concerns of contrary-minded members.

Members then spent two hours working in small groups to refine their considerations and recommendations, and reflected these back to the full group in plenary. Following a short break, the members broke out into five new groups, each one working to draft a different section of the preamble of the report over the next hour and a half. The members continued drafting their report through lunch in preparation for the presentation to guests at the afternoon closing ceremony.

1. Should Victoria and Saanich:
   a. Amalgamate
   b. Remain separate municipalities but pursue opportunities for deeper service integration
   c. Remain separate municipalities and maintain their existing approach to providing services

2. Do you agree that the draft report appropriately reflects our deliberations and should be submitted to the municipal councils for their consideration?
   a. Yes
   b. No

On the first question, among the 46 members present, the result was 39 members in favour of amalgamation; seven in favour of remaining separate but pursuing deeper service integration; and zero in favour of maintaining the existing approach; with two members not present for the vote. On the second question, 45 members indicated by show of hands Yes, and one member indicated No.

At 2:30 p.m., the Assembly members welcomed to Sherri Bell Hall approximately 40 guests including Victoria **Mayor Marianne Alto**, Saanich **Councillor Susan Brice** (acting on behalf of Mayor Dean Murdock, who was unable to attend), other Victoria and Saanich councillors, staff from

both municipalities as well as the Province of British Columbia, and many of the speakers who had previously presented to the Assembly.

Chair Peter MacLeod welcomed all to the closing ceremony and described the process, after which members of the Assembly came up to the podium to read out their full draft report, including their recommendation that the municipalities should amalgamate and that a public referendum be held to affirm it. Following the read-out, Mayor Alto and Councillor Brice thanked the Assembly for its work, and members were invited to share their reflections on the process and take questions from the audience.

The ceremony closed with Mayor Alto, Councillor Brice, and Assembly Chair MacLeod presenting certificates of public service to each Assembly member. Members and guests enjoyed cake and refreshments and celebrated the end of an incredible experience.

Although the Assembly presented a draft version of their report and issued a press release to communicate their principal recommendations and rationale to the public, they were provided the opportunity to continue to polish their draft in the weeks following the final session, before it would be published and presented to councils and the public.

Public Submissions

Between October 1, 2024, and March 3, 2025, residents of Victoria and Saanich were invited to make a public submission to be shared with Assembly members. The aim of the public submissions process was to provide an opportunity for members of the public to submit their perspective on the question of amalgamation or raise an issue they would like the Assembly to consider. Fifty-seven submissions were received, totalling nearly 26,000 words. Submissions were published on the Assembly website and provided to Assembly members on a monthly basis. The Assembly devoted parts of sessions 4 and 7 to reviewing and discussing the public submissions.

Summary of Engagement with Indigenous Communities

The Citizens' Assembly was asked to strive to ensure that "all analysis and recommendations of the Assembly are informed and mindful of the ongoing work with local First Nations towards Reconciliation."[21] The lands that comprise Victoria and Saanich are the traditional territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən Peoples represented by the Songhees and Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) Nations and the W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples represented by the W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), BOḰEĆEN (Pauquachin), STÁUTW̱ (Tsawout), W̱SIḴEM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations.

In April 2024, prior to the selection of the Assembly members, the mayors of both Victoria and Saanich reached out, via their regular communications channels, to the leadership of each of the seven area First Nations to introduce the Citizens' Assembly to them. In June 2024, Assembly organizers dispatched letters to each First Nations chief and council inviting them to meet with the Assembly team, "listen to your perspective on the Assembly and discuss how to meaningfully engage the Nation in the Assembly's process." No responses were received; however, the Assembly was mindful that First Nations often receive more requests to be consulted than they are able to commit to.

The Civic Lottery process that selected the 48 Assembly members in June 2024 was designed to ensure representation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples—as individuals, not as official representatives.

21) "Terms of Reference – Citizens' Assembly between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria"; revised March 22, 2021.

Two of the selected members self-identified as belonging to FNIM communities.

At the opening session of the Citizens' Assembly in September 2024, Tsartlip First Nation Councillor Joe Seward accepted Assembly's invitation to welcome the Assembly to territory at its first session. (Due to illness, Councillor Seward could not attend and instead asked his mother, Tsartlip Elder Ivy Seward, to deliver the ceremonial welcome.) As part of that inaugural session, the first speaker to address the Assembly was Tracy Underwood, a Matriarch of the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations and a PhD candidate and assistant professor of Indigenous Studies at the University of Victoria. To the Assembly she delivered a "living presentation" she calls "JÁEŁNOṈET," which means to acknowledge and to thank. The presentation intertwined her story as someone who has grown up on W̱SÁNEĆ lands and explored the impact of cultural genocide on Indigenous language, culture, and history. She implored listeners to think beyond Reconciliation to Reconstruction, and to envision a reciprocal framework for respectful relationships and living on Indigenous land.

In November 2024, Victoria Native Friendship Centre accepted the Assembly's invitation to join a Community Perspectives panel. However, the VNFC leadership was unable to attend any of Assembly sessions 4, 5 or 6, and sent their regrets. In February 2025, the Assembly organizers again dispatched letters to the seven area First Nations councils and chiefs, inviting them to attend the closing ceremony of the Assembly and engage with or provide their perspective on the Assembly's work and recommendations. Likely due to other, more pressing matters, representatives of the First Nations communities were unable to attend.

In its work to consider the issues and reach consensus on a recommendation, the Assembly continually bore in mind the lessons gleaned from Indigenous perspectives. In developing its Considerations and Further Recommendations (see page 45), the Assembly formed a small working group specifically to address Municipal Government to Indigenous Government Relationships in its final report. As noted in the Assembly's Acknowledgement of the Land and its Peoples, the consensus model of decision-making that forms the basis of the Assembly's recommendations, while still a product of colonial systems, shares important traits with Indigenous models of governance. The Assembly's practices and principles of arriving at consensus—rooted in community engagement, volunteerism, dialogue, deliberation, value-sharing, collaborative decision-making, and collective action—are further emblems, however stained by colonialism, of Indigenous methods of governance that evolved over centuries here.

Citizens' Assembly Guiding Principles

Both municipalities determined that the following nine principles should guide the work of the Assembly. These principles were developed by the Joint Committee of the District of Saanich and City of Victoria and included in their Terms of Reference.

Openness and Transparency
The Assembly will regularly share its learnings and deliberations with the public on an ongoing and predictable basis.

Accountability and Legitimacy
The Assembly will work within a defined mandate and budget on behalf of the residents of Saanich and Victoria. The Assembly will deliver its Final Report directly to
the Municipal Councils of Saanich and Victoria.

Effective Representation
The Assembly will be charged with the responsibility of representing the needs and interests of the residents of Saanich and Victoria. The members of the Assembly will be selected to broadly represent the demographics of the municipalities

Accessibility
The Assembly will provide reasonable supports to address barriers that may prevent a member of the Assembly from participating successfully.

Independence
The Assembly will have full independence to determine how to best fulfill its mandate, under the advisement of an experienced, third-party consultant who will facilitate the Assembly process.

Well-Informed
The Assembly's recommendations will be informed by a range of perspectives and sources of expertise including the technical report.

Balance
The Assembly will consider a diversity of voices and perspectives in its deliberations. The Chair will work to ensure that there is room for all voices.

Collaborative Decision-Making
The Assembly will work towards consensus when drafting their recommendations, while also respecting and documenting differing perspectives among its members.

Respect
The Assembly will strive to be conscientious and fair-minded in their deliberations and in their consultations with the residents of Saanich and Victoria.

Civic Lottery Sample

Below is an example of the invitation letter and other documents randomly distributed to 10,000 households across the City of Victoria and District of Saanich.

CITY OF VICTORIA | Saanich | VICTORIA SAANICH CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

April 12, 2024

Dear Resident,

This letter is a special invitation to volunteer to serve on the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly on Municipal Amalgamation. The Assembly will explore the costs, benefits and disadvantages of amalgamation between the two municipalities.

As they grow, municipalities sometimes consider whether they should merge with neighbouring jurisdictions. This process, called amalgamation, means combining the governments, geographic boundaries, municipal services and identities of two or more jurisdictions.

Over the years, the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich have considered whether they should amalgamate and become one municipality. During the 2018 General and Local School Board Elections, both municipalities asked a "Community Opinion Question" to gauge public support for establishing and funding a Citizens' Assembly to study the issue and reach a consensus on a recommendation. A majority of voters in both municipalities approved the measure and now, after being delayed by the pandemic, the Citizens' Assembly is moving forward.

The Citizens' Assembly is an independent process commissioned by the elected councils of both municipalities. Forty-eight randomly selected residents will serve on the Assembly, meeting over eight full-day sessions and two evening public meetings between September 2024 and April 2025.

This letter is an invitation to anyone in your household age 16 or older to volunteer as a candidate for the Citizens' Assembly.

With the assistance of independent experts from within and outside the region, the Assembly will learn about the municipalities and the issues around amalgamation, and deliberate together on whether and under what conditions amalgamation or further service integration should take place. The Assembly members will draft a report with their recommendations, which will be delivered to the elected councils of Victoria and Saanich in the summer of 2025.

The Assembly is one stage in a process. Before amalgamation could proceed, it would need to be endorsed by both councils and approved by a majority of voters in both municipalities during a referendum. The plan would then require the approval of the Government of British Columbia.

You do not need to be an expert to participate. It's your perspective as a local resident that matters most. From all the residents of Victoria and Saanich who respond to this invitation and volunteer, forty-eight people will be randomly selected in a way that ensures broad representation from across both communities.

If you have any questions about how you can participate as a member of the Assembly, please call the Assembly hotline at 1-833-319-1901.

Please turn over

Response required by
May 30
Respond today

CITY OF VICTORIA | Saanich | VICTORIA SAANICH CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

CANADA POST / POSTES CANADA

Help determine whether Victoria and Saanich should amalgamate

1-in-12 households received this special invitation, please volunteer to serve your community

Dear Residents of
#101-1234 Pine Street
Anycity, BC, V#A #B#

Time-sensitive information inside

Response required by
May 30
Respond today

Candidate Response Card

❑ **YES, I would like to volunteer as a member of the Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly**

❑ No, I do not wish to volunteer, but would like to receive updates about other ways to participate

First Name: ___ Last Name: ___

Gender: ❑ Man / ❑ Woman / ❑ ___ Age: ❑ 16 to 29 ❑ 30 to 44 ❑ 45 to 64 ❑ 65+

Primary Phone Number: ___-___-___ Secondary Phone Number: ___-___-___

Email: ___

Dear Residents of
#101-1234 Pine Street
Anycity, BC, V#A #B#

KEYCODE

Response required by
May 30
Respond today

If you have any questions about the Assembly, please call 1-833-319-1901.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Citizens' Assembly?
A Citizens' Assembly is a representative body of citizens tasked by a government to study, deliberate, and develop recommendations on a specific issue. Typically, members of a Citizens' Assembly are randomly selected from a pool of volunteers who pledge to work on behalf of all community members over several weeks or months. The Assembly's recommendations are generally developed by consensus and are intended to represent the community's best interests.

Why have a Citizens' Assembly?
The Citizens' Assembly on Municipal Amalgamation is a deliberative process intended to provide local residents with an opportunity to actively participate in developing and evaluating the case for amalgamating the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich. The Citizens' Assembly will be an impartial advisory body that provides detailed recommendations representing a broad consensus concerning the proposed amalgamation. The Assembly will work to represent all residents and exemplify high standards of transparency, accountability, and robust civic participation.

The decision to amalgamate has far-reaching consequences, and both councils believe they will benefit from the perspective of area residents participating in an informed arm's-length process.

What is the mandate of the Citizens' Assembly?
The Assembly will explore the costs, benefits and disadvantages of amalgamation between the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich. They will detail their work and guidance in an interim and a final report which will be presented to the councils of the two municipalities. The final report will include the Assembly's recommendation(s) and could include suggestions related to service integrations.

The Assembly is one stage in a process. Before amalgamation could proceed, it must be endorsed by both councils and approved by a majority of voters in both municipalities during a referendum. The plan would then require the approval of the Government of British Columbia.

What would be my role as a Citizens' Assembly member?
Over eight (8) Saturdays beginning in September 2024 and ending in April 2025, Citizens' Assembly members will learn and work together to develop interim and final public reports that will provide guidance to both councils concerning the prospect of amalgamating the City of Victoria and District of Saanich.

To assist the members of the Assembly with their work, a thorough program will provide each member with the opportunity:

- to learn about the municipalities' respective infrastructure, services, operations, and governance;
- to inform and review the Amalgamation Study being undertaken concurrently with the Citizens' Assembly;
- to learn from past municipal amalgamations; and,
- to consult with and learn from independent experts as well as fellow residents.

Assembly members will be asked to attend two (2) public meetings in the home municipalities to learn from and consult residents. These meetings will take place in the fall of 2024 and winter of 2025 — final dates and locations will be announced and promoted within each community.

How do I become a member of the Citizens' Assembly?
First, you must respond to this invitation using the unique keycode by Thursday, May 30, 2024.

- Call the toll-free hotline 1-833-319-1901;
- Register securely online at victoriasaanich.ca; or,
- Complete the enclosed candidate response card and mail it back in the prepaid envelope.

If you are selected for the Assembly via the Civic Lottery (see below), you will receive an email on Tuesday, June 4, 2024. An Assembly team member will then telephone you to confirm registration details, answer any questions you may have, and prepare you to serve on the Assembly. If you are unable to participate, please encourage another member of your household 16 years of age or older to volunteer.

How will members of the Citizens' Assembly be chosen?
On June 3, the 48 members of the Citizens' Assembly will be selected by a special random draw, called a Civic Lottery, from the pool of registered candidates. Twenty-seven (27) participants will be randomly selected from the District of Saanich, and twenty-one (21) will be selected from the City of Victoria. The Civic Lottery process also ensures that the Assembly is representative of other criteria, such as age, gender, housing status, and self-identified ethnicity. The result will be 48 Assembly members that broadly represent the residents of Victoria and Saanich.

Why are the members of the Assembly randomly selected?
Today, similar selection processes are routinely used in Canada and abroad to ensure that the membership of an Assembly broadly reflects the demography and diversity of thought and experience within any given community or population.

Who is eligible to serve on the Citizens' Assembly?
You are eligible to volunteer for and serve on the Assembly if you:

- are a resident of the address where the invitation was mailed;
- can provide the unique keycode printed on your candidate response card;
- are a resident of Victoria or Saanich and have been for at least six months;
- are 16 years of age or older as of May 30, 2024; and,
- can attend and participate in all eight (8) Assembly sessions.

You do not need to be a Canadian citizen to volunteer. Special provisions will be made for unhoused or underhoused residents who wish to participate. For more information, please contact the toll-free hotline at 1-833-319-1901.

Return Address

Response required by:
May 30, 2024

Register by mailing the response card enclosed or by calling 1-833-319-1901

CANADA POST / POSTES CANADA
Postage paid if mailed in Canada / Port payé si posté au Canada
Business Reply Mail / Correspondance-réponse d'affaires
0007290152 01

1000465445-V9A0C3-BR01

CITIZENS ASSEMBLY
PO BOX 45043 RPO WESTSIDE
VICTORIA BC V9A 9Z9

Project Team

The Victoria-Saanich Citizens' Assembly is led by MASS LBP, one of Canada's leading firms in public engagement and deliberative democracy. Since its founding in 2007, MASS has completed more than 50 Citizens' Assemblies and Reference Panels and is internationally recognized for its innovative efforts to popularize deliberative processes.

MASS LBP has staff in Victoria, Edmonton, Toronto, and Montreal. It has led similar processes for governments and public sector organizations across Canada including with the Province of British Columbia, the City of Vancouver, as well as the municipalities of Duncan and North Cowichan, which previously explored amalgamation in 2017 and convened a Citizens' Assembly. Find out more at massllbp.com.

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Chris Ellis

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We wish to thank the catering, IT, and other support staff of Camosun College for their hospitality and warmth in support of the Citizens' Assembly.

We wish to thank the City of Victoria and the District of Saanich and their dedicated staff who supported the Citizens' Assembly process, including the presentations and materials provided to the Assembly members, data and information that supported the Technical Study, and communication to the public about the Assembly's work, public meetings, and public submissions.

We wish to thank the staff and volunteers of Our Place Society who helped distribute invitations to the Assembly's Civic Lottery among unhoused and transitionally housed members of the two communities.

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VICTORIA SAANICH CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

victoriasaanich.ca