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Citizen Assembly

## **VICTORIA-SAANICH CITIZEN'S ASSEMBLY ON MUNICIPAL AMALGAMATION – FINAL REPORT**

Memo from the Director of Legislative and Protective Services/Corporate Officer dated July 6, 2025.

To present on the Victoria-Saanich Citizen's Assembly's final report.

Peter MacLeod, Assembly Chair and Principal, MASS LBP gave a presentation on the Victoria-Saanich Citizen's Assembly's final report (PowerPoint on File).

Victoria-Saanich Citizen's Assembly's representatives stated:

- Large rural parkland and agricultural land would remain unaffected by potential amalgamation due to protections under the Province's Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and Agricultural Land Commission (ALC).
- A referendum on amalgamation could take place during the next municipal election in 2026.
- Amalgamation represents a long-term vision for the community.
- The rationale for amalgamation is rooted in a shared vision for the community's future.

In response to questions from Council, the Director of Finance stated:

- The project has not exceeded its budget to date.

In response to questions from Council, the Principal from MASS LBP stated:

- Proposing a specific governance structure was not included in the assembly's mandate.
- The assembly recommends that a third party develop educational materials on amalgamation before a vote occurs.
- Comparing outcomes from other municipal amalgamations is challenging due to differing local contexts.
- Successful amalgamations depend on effective implementation planning.
- Ecological integrity, including food security, was a key theme in the assembly's discussions.
- The assembly did not identify any major cost savings associated with amalgamation.

In response to questions from Council, representatives from the Victoria-Saanich Citizen's Assembly stated:

- A ward system could potentially lead to delays or obstruction in housing development.
- An amalgamated municipality would make its own decisions regarding the Urban Containment Boundary (UCB).
- The ward system was discussed as a potential way to preserve local representation.
- Having fewer Councillors per capita is not seen as problematic and is reasonable.

**MOVED by Councillor Westhaver and Seconded by Councillor Plant: "That Council receive the presentation from the Citizens' Assembly for information."**

In response to questions from Council, the Principal from MASS LBP stated:

- Amalgamating police services could improve resource sharing and reduce workload pressures.
- The MNP technical report cost \$275,000 and was awarded through a public tender process conducted by MASS LBP.
- An amalgamated municipality should have the maximum number of Councillors allowed under provincial legislation.

In response to questions from Council, the Corporate Officer stated:

- Staff will need time to review the report, determine when it will return to Council, and assess next steps based on Council's direction, including when the question may be put to the public.

In response to questions from Council, the Director of Finance stated:

- Most of Saanich's large contracts have terms of five years or more.

Council discussion ensued with the following comments:

- Other municipalities have experienced increased costs following amalgamation.
- Integration of IT systems could represent a significant expense.
- Saanich has a strong legacy of protecting agricultural land.
- A future staff report should address budget implications, ward system considerations, and other governance matters.
- Residents are reluctant to accept further tax increases.

**RESULT: Carried 9 TO 0**

**IN FAVOUR:** Murdock, Brice, Brownoff, Chambers, de Vries, Harper, Phelps Bondaroff, Plant, Westhaver

**OPPOSED:** None