

1420-30  
Citizens' Assembly

## **CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON AMALGAMATION - FINAL REPORT**

Report of the Director of Legislative and Protective Services/Corporate Officer dated September 8, 2025.

To present options to Council and seek direction on next steps in regards to the final report of the Citizens' Assembly.

The Director of Legislative and Protective Services/Corporate Officer and the Strategic Advisor stated:

- The Assembly was tasked with exploring the costs, benefits and disadvantages of amalgamation between the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria.
- Costs were not identified in the Citizens Assembly Report.
- The Assembly has recommended that the question of amalgamation be put to the residents of Saanich and Victoria.
- Time is of the essence to prepare a ballot question in time for the 2026 municipal election.
- If the vote for amalgamation in both municipalities is in favour, an implementation plan would be necessary and there would be costs associated with that.
- There would be no additional cost to put a question on the ballot; there may be additional costs if Council wishes to have additional information to support the ballot question.

**MOVED by Councillor Harper and Seconded by Councillor Plant: "That Council:**

- **Direct staff to work with the City of Victoria on the ballot question to be approved by both Councils;**
- **Subject to Council approval of the ballot question, that Council direct staff to list the question regarding amalgamation between Saanich and Victoria on the ballot for the 2026 General Local Election; and**
- **Direct staff to work with the City of Victoria and report back to Council, if necessary, on whether there is any additional information needed to support the ballot question."**

Council discussion ensued with the following comments:

- The majority of voters in 2018 wanted to explore this process.

In response to questions from Council, the Director of Legislative and Protective Services/Corporate Officer and the Strategic Advisor stated:

- \$750,000 was budgeted for this process; the total cost of the process to date is \$681,281.
- The information provided in the Citizens Assembly Report and the MNP Technical Study as well as all presentation materials provided to the Assembly could be used to educate the public.

**MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Chambers: "That the motion be amended to delete the second bullet point as follows: "Subject to Council approval of the ballot question, that Council direct staff to list the question regarding amalgamation between Saanich and Victoria on the ballot for the 2026 General Local Election"."**

Council discussion ensued with the following comments:

- Discussions with the City of Victoria should take place prior to directing staff to list the question on the ballot.
- At every step of the process, Council has agreed that the question would be put on the ballot.

- Saanich and Victoria will have to agree on the wording of the ballot question prior to it coming back to Council.
- Removing the second bullet may lead residents to think Council is abandoning the ballot question.

In response to questions from Council, the Director of Legislative and Protective Services/Corporate Officer stated:

- The City of Victoria recently approved the motion to put the question on the ballot.
- The Province received reports on progress throughout the assembly process and to date, have not provided any further direction.
- The Province is in receipt of the report from the Assembly.
- Saanich and Victoria would prepare a concise, easy-to-understand question to put on the ballot.

**RESULT (AMENDMENT): Failed 6 TO 3**

**IN FAVOUR:** Brownoff, Chambers, Plant

**OPPOSED:** Murdock, Brice, de Vries, Harper, Phelps Bondaroff, Westhaver

**MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Chambers: “That the motion be amended to add the following to the third bullet: “and that this information be focused primarily on financial implications of amalgamation”.”**

Council discussion ensued with the following comments:

- Concerns regarding the lack of financial information.
- Residents should have access to all information prepared by the Assembly; it is important that Saanich and Victoria remain neutral in the process.
- There could be suggestions of bias if additional information was provided.

In response to questions from Council, the CAO stated:

- There are two separate costs to be considered; the cost of amalgamation of the two organizations and the cost of implementation.
- At this time, costs are difficult to estimate.

In response to questions from Council, the Director of Legislative and Protective Services/Corporate Officer stated:

- The third bullet ensures that staff from Saanich and Victoria work together in supporting the ballot question.

**RESULT (AMENDMENT): Failed 2 TO 7**

**IN FAVOUR:** Chambers, Plant

**OPPOSED:** Murdock, Brice, Brownoff, de Vries, Harper, Phelps Bondaroff, Westhaver

In response to questions from Council, the Director of Legislative and Protective Services/Corporate Officer stated:

- A communications strategy will be put in place to ensure reports and background material are made available to the public.

**MOVED by Councillor Phelps Bondaroff and Seconded by Councillor Chambers: “That the motion be amended to add a fourth bullet as follows: “That Council direct staff to work with the City of Victoria to explore the hiring of a third-party to manage civic engagement and public education around the referendum process and question”.”**

Council discussion ensued with the following comments:

- Using a neutral third-party would be beneficial in ensuring messaging is clear and consistent between the two municipalities.
- Providing proactive communication and unbiased information to the public is important.

**MOVED by Councillor de Vries and Seconded by Councillor Harper: “That the meeting recess for three minutes.”**

**RESULT: Carried 9 TO 0**

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

**OPPOSED:** None

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 The meeting recessed at 10:44 p.m. and resumed at 10:48 p.m.  
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**MOVED by Councillor Harper and Seconded by Councillor Plant: “That the meeting continue past 11 p.m.”**

**RESULT: Carried 9 TO 0**

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

**OPPOSED:** None

Council discussion ensued with the following comments:

- The Citizens’ Assembly recommended hiring a neutral third-party.
- Civic engagement is important in ensuring that residents are educated and that they come out to vote.
- If staff are able to point members of the public to the website, there may not be a need for a third-party.

In response to questions from Council, the Director of Legislative and Protective Services/Corporate Officer stated:

- Legislative staff would refer questions to the Citizens’ Assembly website.
- Legislative staff sign an oath to remain neutral and impartial during the election.
- Information pointing residents to the Citizens’ Assembly website could be included in the Elections Guide.
- The *Local Election Campaign Financing Act* ensures that elector organizations register.

**RESULT (AMENDMENT): Failed 4 TO 5**

**IN FAVOUR:** Chambers, de Vries, Phelps Bondaroff, Plant

**OPPOSED:** Murdock, Brice, Brownoff, Harper, Westhaver

**RESULT (MAIN MOTION): Carried 9 TO 0**

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

**OPPOSED:** None

**MOVED by Councillor Plant and Seconded by Councillor Chambers: “That Council request staff, when they report back on the discussions with the City of Victoria, to layout at a high level, the steps they will be taking to inform the public about the Citizens’ Assembly.”**

**RESULT: Carried 9 TO 0**

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

**OPPOSED:** None