

north shore news

District North Vancouver mulls amalgamation

Jeremy Shepherd / North Shore News

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District of North Vancouver municipal hall Photo file, North Shore News

Honey, let's get back together.

That's the call of the District of North Vancouver as they continue to make overtures toward amalgamation with the resisting City of North Vancouver.

District council unanimously supported forming a tri-municipal North Shore committee to study the possible benefits of amalgamation at a council meeting Monday.

The question of merging the two North Vancoovers may also be on the district's ballot as a referendum question in November's municipal election — pending the result of further council discussion slated for September.

Both the City of North Vancouver and the District of West Vancouver have declined to help choose the citizen committee.

"It is time for us to take it away from the politicians and the bureaucrats and put it in the hands of the people," said Coun. Doug MacKay-Dunn.

Funding for the volunteer committee is estimated to cost \$20,000, which will be drawn from the council reserve.

That sum is a pittance compared to the millions that could be saved with an integrated planning model, according to MacKay-Dunn, who has frequently blasted the “silo mentality” that characterizes North Shore municipal planning.

In a period of unprecedented growth and densification on the North Shore, it is essential to take an overview of construction projects and transit, according to MacKay-Dunn.

“It makes no sense to have radical zoning differences on the border of two different municipalities,” MacKay-Dunn said while speaking to the City of North Vancouver in June.

Amalgamation could reduce the size and cost of local governments while maximizing efficiencies, according to Coun. Roger Bassam.

As the District of North Vancouver discussed amalgamation Monday, the City of North Vancouver mulled first reading of their official community plan two kilometres away.

The District and City OCPs are not co-ordinated, according to Bassam.

“They’re completely independent documents,” he said, adding that the municipalities were on different pages on some very important issues.

The City of North Vancouver initially rejected amalgamation over cost concerns connected to the 70 kilometres of asbestos concrete pipe running under the district. More recently, the city scuttled amalgamation talks over concerns the district isn’t paying their share of the North Vancouver policing bill.

While one West Vancouver councillor suggested the three municipalities should focus on combining services, such as the North Shore Emergency Management Office, other councillors were less receptive.

“There’ll be no amalgamation as long as I’m on council,” promised Coun. Bill Soprovich.

Citing irreconcilable differences between West and North Vancouver, West Vancouver Mayor Michael Smith said West Vancouverites had no interest in amalgamation.

District of North Vancouver Coun. Mike Little praised MacKay-Dunn for continuing to push for amalgamation despite reluctance from neighbouring municipalities.

“The frustration has always been that you need a dance partner,” he said. “I think what Coun. MacKay-Dunn has shown us is that sometimes you’ve got to get out on the dance floor and see who else will come and join you.”

Opposition to amalgamation — or as he termed it: reunification — seems to be based on emotion, according to Coun. and acting mayor Alan Nixon.

“I can just imagine what a tremendously great municipality the combined municipality would look like, given our respective talents,” he said.

The tri-municipal committee is scheduled to report back to council by Oct. 6.

Mayor Richard Walton and Coun. Lisa Muri did not attend the meeting.