

north shore news

Amalgamation not on ballot

District nixes reunification question on Nov. election ballot

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Amalgamation is under study in the District of North Vancouver - but it won't be on the ballot this November. Photo file, North Shore News

There'll be a host of options during the District of North Vancouver municipal election this Nov. 15, but amalgamation won't be one of them.

The clock was ticking at the Sept. 15 meeting, with chief administrative officer David Stuart advising council it would be "difficult if not impossible" to put a question on the ballot without clear direction from council that night.

Longtime amalgamation proponent Coun. Doug MacKay-Dunn proposed adding this question to November's election ballot: 'Do you support the district continuing to undertake a comprehensive investigation

regarding amalgamation of the North Shore municipalities?' "I'd like to take the temperature of our community to determine the level of support," he explained.

While there may be millions to be saved by consolidating North Shore governments, MacKay-Dunn stipulated that district residents may not share council's fervour for amalgamation.

There is "no reason" to put the confusing question

before the electorate, according to Coun. Roger Bassam. "We are not going to achieve reunification in six weeks. We may get a good question on the ballot in four years," he said.

Bassam also took issue with including West Vancouver in the question rather than focusing on the "universally supported" reunification of the two North Vancovers.

The amalgamation question would risk alienating the district from the City of North Vancouver,

according to Coun. Alan Nixon. "Let's not rush this. .. we've got four years to put our case forward," he said.

Over the next council term, the District of North Vancouver should work on a marketing campaign, convincing city residents to put pressure on their own council to address amalgamation.

Coun. Lisa Muri disagreed, suggesting the question would keep the issue of amalgamation alive.

"I think it will allow city residents to say: 'Why didn't we get to answer that question on our ballot?'" The question is unnecessary, according to Coun. Robin Hicks, who said the vast majority of district residents support amalgamation.

"I don't think we need a mandate from our citizens to proceed with any form of investigation," he said.

Council still needs to determine how much will be gained by consolidating city and district departments and how to stop salaries from ballooning when top staff balk at pay cuts.

A citizens committee is currently evaluating the benefits of amalgamation and putting a question on the ballot could undercut their work, according to Hicks. "They could well say the benefits aren't worth the money that's going into it," he said.

The ballot question is intended to sweep past politicians and bureaucrats and reach the people, according to MacKay-Dunn, who stressed the importance of keeping the issue alive while the next council takes office. "I don't want this to die," he said.

The motion was defeated 4-3 with Couns. MacKay-Dunn, Muri and Mike Little on the losing side.

Had it been approved, the question would have been non-binding and carried a negligible cost, according to district staff.

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 part of the North Vancouver policing bill.

However, those concerns may be unfounded, according to the city's chief administrative officer Ken Tolstam, who said a preliminary look at the numbers seem to indicate both parties are paying their fair share.