

north shore news

North Vancouver amalgamation committee needs volunteers

Citizens committee looking for experts in taxation, planning

Jeremy Shepherd / North Shore News

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

How many North Shore residents does it take to erase the border between the City and District of North Vancouver?

Possibly nine.

The District of North Van is hunting for a nonet of volunteers with backgrounds in finance, taxation, planning and politics to form the North Shore Reunification Review Committee.

The group will have 39 days to finish a report that may put amalgamation on the ballot as a referendum question during November's municipal election - pending further debate in District of North Vancouver council chambers.

The committee may get a little help from City of North Vancouver Coun. Guy Heywood and District of North Van Coun. Robin Hicks, both of whom support amalgamation.

The two councillors are examining the finances of the two North Vancouvers in an effort to uncover redundancies that could be exploited to lighten the taxpayer's load in a unified North Vancouver.

"We are running two local governments in one community," Heywood said.

The duo's work has been made challenging by the disparate accounting systems used by the two municipalities, which make it tough to compare line items, according to Heywood.

Despite some reluctance from the city government, Heywood said he made a successful freedom of information request to find city salaries by position and department.

The early findings reenforced his opinion on amalgamation.

Including the salaries of two assistants, the office of the city's Chief Administrative Officer has a budget of \$500,000, according to Heywood.

"At the very top level you get the biggest benefit because you'd need only one CAO," he said.

Front-line workers won't be part of Hicks and Heywood's report.

"It's only in the back office and management levels that you have duplication," Heywood said.

In terms of facilities, Heywood said their report may look at phasing out district municipal hall and zoning it for residential use, if they can find extra office space at 14th Street and Lonsdale Avenue.

Heywood and Hicks are planning to pass their work to the reunification committee in mid-September.

The review committee is a way for residents to wrest control of amalgamation away from elected officials, according to district Coun. Doug MacKay-Dunn.

"It is time for us to take it away from the politicians and the bureaucrats and put it in the hands of the people," MacKay-Dunn said at a July council meeting.

The committee is slated to include at least two members from each North Shore municipality, despite disinterest from the City of North Vancouver and West Vancouver.

West Vancouverites have no appetite for amalgamation, according to Mayor Michael Smith.

The City of North Vancouver recently scuttled amalgamation talks amid concerns the district isn't paying their share of the North Vancouver policing bill.

The committee has a \$20,000 budget drawn from District of North Vancouver council contingency fund to pay for expenses, but volunteers will not be paid.

The deadline for the group to submit their findings is Oct. 6. The deadline for applications to join the committee is Aug. 29. Apply by visiting dnv.org/reunite.

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