

NEWS RELEASE

B.C.'s unique model of local government makes amalgamation unnecessary

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For Immediate Release

VANCOUVER—While municipal amalgamation is often touted as the best way to facilitate cost-savings and efficiencies for local governments, British Columbia's regional district system may be a better option for Greater Victoria, concludes a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

“For more than five decades, B.C.'s regional districts have facilitated cooperation among municipalities to produce services in a cost-effective manner. Based on experience elsewhere, there's simply no evidence that amalgamation can achieve similar results,” said Robert Bish, professor emeritus at University of Victoria and co-author of *Governing Greater Victoria*.

In the 1960s, the B.C. government passed legislation to enable the creation of regional districts where neighbouring municipalities voluntarily share services such as water supply, sewerage disposal and solid waste management.

Relative to counties or special regional authorities created by other North American jurisdictions, regional districts in B.C. have a unique combination of characteristics: they are multipurpose, that is, may supply any service a municipality can supply; may supply services to any combination of municipalities and non-municipal electoral areas; and councillors themselves determine the activities regional districts undertake.

To provide a complete picture of how local services are governed and produced in Greater Victoria, the study spotlights the Capital Regional District and its 13 member municipalities plus other important local service entities such as the regional transit commission, library systems and the Westshore Parks and Recreation Society.

Since elected municipal councillors govern all of these entities, a level of cooperation and integration among services is achieved that's not found in other North American metropolitan areas.

Periodically, proposals are made to replace regional districts with a reduced number of governments—also known as amalgamation.

According to the study, however, regional districts achieve economies of scale (costs decreasing as they're spread out over municipalities) in services without incurring the excessive costs of larger bureaucracies, as was the case after several forced amalgamations in eastern Canada.

“Regional districts foster a bottom-up approach to democracy, allowing municipalities to enter into voluntary agreements with other municipalities. The replacement of this system with larger bureaucracies where local decisions are made by bureaucrats instead of locally elected officials would be a major change in the political culture of Greater Victoria,” Bish said.

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