

Questions From Residents

Overview

A public information meeting was held in the evening of April 20, 2006 to present the study goals, explain the current system of local government, and hear questions and comments from residents. Just over 100 people attended the meeting. The residency of the 96 who signed in is as follows:

- 25% were from the City of Duncan
- 55% were from the electoral areas (most from Area E)
- 18% were from the District of North Cowichan
- 2% were from elsewhere.

The questions and responses presented here were compiled and edited by the consultant. Similar, related or repeated points have been grouped into one question rather than listed separately for each time they were raised. Some comments have been restated as questions in order to allow a consistent format. Most of the answers presented here were also given at the meeting, but several have been researched since the meeting and then presented here.

The questions and answers are grouped into four broad categories:

- The study process
- A referendum
- Transition and boundary changes
- Services, finances, and land use

The study process

1. *Whose idea was the study in the first place?*
City Council initiated the work.
2. *Who chose the area to be studied, and why was it chosen at this time?*
The City chose the area to be looked at. The decision was made to do the study now because City Council wanted to know the results in a timely manner, and it had been many years since the issues was last looked at.
3. *Who appointed the Public Steering Committee?*
Duncan City council appointed the members of the Public Committee from a list of people who responded to the City's ad asking for volunteers.
4. *Isn't the objective of the study to make boundary expansion happen?*
No, the objective is to produce independent information for people to consider.
5. *Why aren't we doing a study like the 1977 one that looked at combining larger areas than the current study is looking at?*
A larger study could be considered at the conclusion of the current work. At this time, however, the focus is on a more modest municipal restructuring.
6. *Will regional values (like the regional growth strategy) be looked at?*
The study focuses on the direct impacts of an expanded City boundary and City services. Matters related to broader CVRD issues lie beyond the scope of work here.
7. *Would Langtry Road be in the municipal boundary?*
Possibly. It is included in the study area but that does mean it would be part of the expansion. A recommended boundary could exclude it.

8. *Shouldn't the Silver Park mobile home park, which lies in the North Cowichan municipality, be part of the study? It's right between the City and the proposed new area.*
The terms of reference focus on the City of Duncan, not the District of North Cowichan. Examining the status of this parcel could be looked at after the current study is done. The North Cowichan municipal council would have to be involved in this.

A referendum

9. *Shouldn't there be a referendum to decide if people approve of boundary expansion?*
The law says there must be a referendum of current City voters if 10% of them petition for a referendum. A referendum for electoral area voters is up to the Minister, though it should be noted that the province has a long history of holding such a vote when there is a significant population (say, over 500) in the electoral area portions of a proposed municipal boundary.
10. *How would a referendum work?*
The Minister would decide how a referendum would work. Options could include a single winner-takes-all count of ballots from all areas combined; separate ballots for the City and the electoral areas; and phased voting (say, the electoral areas vote first, with a City vote only if the electoral area vote passes). There could be other choices, too.
11. *Can we be assured that there will be a referendum?*
A decision to hold a referendum for electoral area voters is up to the Minister.
12. *Would the rest of Area D and E get to vote in a referendum? If not, they should.*
No, only voters in the directly-affected areas would get to vote.

Transition and boundary changes

13. *We would still be part of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), so how can you say there would be fewer layers of local government?*
For the entire study area, there would be less reliance on the CVRD for local services like planning, building inspection, and community parks, and this tends to reduce the presence of this local government. However, the area would still be part of the broad-area functions of the CVRD, and the City would still be a member of the regional board.
14. *I'm in Area E but outside the proposed City boundary. What would happen to me?*
The study will identify the probable changes in CVRD taxes on the remaining areas due to boundary expansion.
15. *What portion of the whole Area E is in the study area? And what portion of Area D? The report should identify this.*
The study area includes about 24% of the total Area E population (920 out of 3900) and less than 2% of Area D's population (50 out of 2690 residents). In terms of the tax base, it includes 41% of Area E's total and 6% of Area D's total.
16. *What would happen to property taxes in the leftover parts of Areas D and E?*
The study will identify these impacts where possible.
17. *What is the provincial policy on mitigation for the remaining parts of the electoral areas to protect them from rises due to boundary expansion? Can't the Minister force the City to pay mitigation?*
That would be up to the Minister. We don't yet know the extent to which mitigation could be needed.

Services, finances, and land use

18. *Areas D and E would lose tax revenues from businesses that become part of the City. Won't this raise the taxes in the remaining parts?*
This is possible, though it should be noted that some CVRD costs would fall too, so a tax rise might not be inevitable. The study will identify the possible tax losses.
19. *What assurances are there that the City wouldn't raise the tax rate multiple for businesses in Areas D and E?*
Unless the province imposes tax constraints on the City, there is no assurance – just as there is no assurance that the multiples won't change under the electoral area system.
20. *What are the advantages of boundary expansion from the City's viewpoint?*
Candidates from the City's perspective include more consistent sharing of core City costs (like downtown roads); enhanced ability to have one voice speak for the whole community; and an expanded tax base. There could be disadvantages too, like more road and policing costs.
21. *Would the electoral areas get sidewalks and street lights like the rest of the City? If not, would we have to share in the cost of the City's lights and sidewalks?*
This would be up to the City Council. It would be possible to exempt the areas without these services from the costs if the services are not going to be extended in those areas.
22. *Isn't this just a tax grab by the City? I don't want to pay more taxes.*
At this early stage, it isn't at all clear that boundary expansion would lower the City's taxes. Remember that the extra tax base would also come with extra road and policing costs (to name just two services that would be funded by City taxes).
23. *Will the study examine policing policies and costs?*
Yes, it will.
24. *Showing us the "before" tax picture is not enough. Will the study show the "before" and "after" taxes?*
Yes, both the "before expansion" and "after expansion" taxes will be identified.
25. *Wouldn't being part of the City mean the end of the farming community along Langtry Road? I don't want to lose that lifestyle.*
The provincial Right to Farm Act assures farmers that a local government like a municipality or a regional district can't prohibit accepted farming practices. Neither the City nor the CVRD can remove land from the Agricultural Land Reserve; that power rests with the Agricultural Land Commission, which is independent of local government. There are many instances of farming within a municipality.
26. *What would stop the City from changing the zoning to urban density?*
The City can't remove land from the ALR or prohibit farming, so the farming areas could continue. The City could rezone *non-farm* areas to more urban uses – just as the CVRD can do now, using essentially the same process.