

The “South Cowichan” Dilemma

Judging from the communications to date, it seems that the CVRD position and that of the provincial government is that if we are to incorporate as a municipality it is only feasible if we amalgamate Cobble Hill, Shawnigan and Mill Bay. Somewhere along the line the assumption has been made that “bigger is better”, or at least that “bigger is essential”. The fictional area of “South Cowichan” has been invented to describe a rural watershed that is not actually in the Cowichan drainage, a rural area with its own unique agricultural and residential character and a burgeoning highway junction town. We might as well call it “Not Duncan”!

The idea is that in order to have the tax base necessary to fund an incorporated community in which we then have local control of service and development decisions is to give up the autonomy that would make such control meaningful. The traditional answer to being caught on the “horns of a dilemma” is not to accept that there are only two alternatives – in this case “go big or stay poorly represented”.

There is a third way for Shawnigan. We could consider an incorporated area that centres on the Lake, takes in the headwaters of our watershed, includes the two main village areas and the areas already densely built. Instead of committing to an infrastructure that would look a bit like the patchwork of the Frankenstein Monster and be excessively costly, we might cut our suit to fit our cloth. (How’s that for similes and metaphors!) We could decide that our rural lifestyle and community character is too important to submerge in a larger entity that assumes unstoppable growth. We could decide that we should live with the services that our tax base can comfortably sustain and pay as we go like the Municipality of Metchosin.

Before we are impaled, we should be having this discussion.