



CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT

NOTICE OF MOTION

From: Councillor Tim Morrison

Introduced: Council Meeting – February 24, 2025

Subject: **Request to the BC Minister of Education and Child Care for a Greater Victoria School District 61 Task Force for consideration of SD 61 Board of Education electoral reform**

WHEREAS: the vast majority of B.C. School Districts that serve multiple municipalities have implemented a Trustee Electoral Area election model whereby local communities each separately elect their own School Trustee representative(s) to help optimize fair and equitable school board representation among the various municipalities,

AND WHEREAS: Part 4 – Division 1 – Section 30 of the *BC School Act* grants authority to the Minister of Education to approve and implement a more fair and equitable Trustee Electoral Area election model for electing school board trustees,

AND WHEREAS: the previously elected Greater Victoria School District 61 Board of Education has now been terminated, and a new Board of Education will not be elected until October 2026,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: that the Township of Esquimalt ask the Honourable Lisa Beare, Minister of Education and Child Care, to direct School District 61 to create an inclusive and collaborative task force to consider a Trustee Electoral Area election model for the Minister's ultimate consideration of approval for implementation in time for the 2026 Local Government/Board of Education elections.

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: that the Township of Esquimalt author letters to School District 61 official trustee Sherri Bell, the City of Victoria, District of Saanich, District of Oak Bay, Town of View Royal, District of Highlands, the Songhees Nation and Esquimalt Nation, as well as area MLAs within School District 61 to inform them of the Township's request to the Minister of Education and Child Care.

STRATEGIC RELEVANCE:

- Good Governance & Organizational Excellence
- Strong Relationships & Partnerships

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Not Applicable.

BACKGROUND:

Chronology

At the September 23, 2024, Township of Esquimalt Council Meeting, the following motion was unanimously passed by Council:

“The Township of Esquimalt ask that the Greater Victoria School District 61 Board of Education consider a Trustee Electoral Area election model to be implemented in time for the 2026 Local Government/Board of Education elections.”

At the November 25, 2024, School District 61 (Greater Victoria) School Board meeting, the Township of Esquimalt’s letter was placed on the board’s agenda. However, it received almost no consideration nor discussion with only one school trustee, Karin Kwan (now terminated), stating the following:

“It is basically up to the Minister whether trustee electoral areas are used in a school district, so while we appreciate the advocacy from the Township and other municipalities that have weighed in on their letter, I think probably the letter is misdirected and perhaps it needs to be directed to the Minister.”

That was the only comment on this matter from the now terminated School Board with no other discussion.

Unfortunately, Karin Kwan’s comment was rather selective in that it neglects to recognize that it is up to existing local school boards to initiate and conduct a community consultation process regarding the implementation of a Trustee Electoral Area election model **prior** to submitting a formal request to the Minister of Education for final consideration and approval of such a model. This is the correct process to be followed as was confirmed by the Minister of Education in the Township of Esquimalt’s meeting with the Minister and Ministry of Education senior officials at UBCM. Initiating such a process was the entire point of the Township’s request of the SD 61 School Board, which they unfortunately did not seem to understand as part of their governance role.

For reference, the applicable section of the **B.C. School Act** states the following:

Part 4 — School Trustees
Division 1 — Establishment of Boards of Education
Composition of board

- Sec 30 (1) There is to be a board of education for each school district.
- (2) A board consists of 3, 5, 7 or 9 trustees, as determined by order of the minister under this section.
 - (3) The minister must, by order, establish the following for each school district:
 - (a) the number of trustees for the school district;
 - (b) whether trustees are to be elected:
 - (i) from the school district at large, in which case the school district is the trustee electoral area,
 - (ii) from a number of trustee electoral areas specified by the minister that are in total the entire school district, or
 - (iii) in another manner that is a combination of the methods under subparagraphs (i) and (ii);
 - (c) if there is more than one trustee electoral area, the number of trustees to be elected from each.

As per the powers granted to the Minister, the traditional practice has been that the Minister will consider implementing a change in the electoral model at the request of the applicable School

Board and upon the School Board demonstrating a community consultation process regarding any such changes. In the event that no School Board exists, then the Minister also has the power to create the election model for electing the newly created School Board.

What happens now?

The entire SD 61 School Board was terminated on January 30, 2025, with the Minister appointing an official trustee, Sherri Bell, to serve in their place until the next regularly scheduled elections of October 2026. This presents a new and timely opportunity for the Township of Esquimalt and all communities served by SD 61 to advocate directly to the Minister of Education as well as with Official Trustee Sherri Bell on the possible implementation of a Trustee Electoral Area election model for SD 61.

The following steps would be a good governance approach to ensuring fulsome community consultation and collaboration in exploring and designing a SD 61 Trustee Electoral Area election model to be submitted to the Minister of Education for her consideration of approval and implementation in time for the 2026 local elections:

1. Request that the Honourable Lisa Beare, Minister of Education and Child Care, direct SD 61 to create a task force to consider a Trustee Electoral Area election model and request that the task force include representation from each municipality and the two First Nations within SD 61, as well as any other stakeholders as deemed appropriate by the Minister and/or SD 61.*
2. The task force explore, identify, and create a proposed list of designated SD 61 Trustee Electoral Area geographic zones and boundaries.
3. The task force invite input and consultation from all stakeholders within SD 61 regarding the proposed Trustee Electoral Areas.
4. The task force submit a final report and formal request to the Minister of Education to consider approval and implementation of a new SD 61 Trustee Electoral Area election model to be implemented in time for the 2026 Local Government/Board of Education elections.

(*See attached DRAFT letters to the Minister, Official Trustee, local MLAs, and partner municipalities/ First Nations within School District 61).

Key points to consider:

- The Township of Esquimalt has an opportunity to reinforce our strategic commitment of being a leader in good governance, strong relationships and partnerships with School District 61 in a respectful effort to make our community, together with our neighboring communities, better connected to the important School Board governance done on our behalf.
- There are six municipalities and two Indigenous nations all sharing one amalgamated District 61 School Board with a system of nine school trustees elected at-large but with no direct representation elected from within each community resulting in the Township of Esquimalt and some of its neighbouring communities not being directly represented at the District 61 School Board table.
- This predicament results in a School Board democracy deficit in need of a solution.

- The good news is that the solution already exists and, in fact, exists in just about every other school district in B.C. that serves more than one municipality, including three of the four school districts serving the Capital Regional District. *
- It is a solution that certainly has become established best practice in ensuring fair and equitable geographic balance in how School Boards are elected, and School Board representation is determined almost everywhere in BC except for Greater Victoria District 61.
- This widely used solution across B.C. is what is referred to as the Trustee Electoral Area election model whereby local communities each separately elect their own School Trustee representative(s) to help optimize fair and equitable, geographically balanced school board representation and to better ensure all voices are being heard among the various municipalities at the School Board table.
- More commonly referred to as a ward system, it basically ensures that no matter where you live or whichever family of schools you belong to, you will have a much better chance of guaranteed representation elected from your community by your community and for your community.

*See attached:

Appendix A: Election Systems for CRD School Districts

Appendix B: List of BC School Districts that Elect Trustees Equitably By Community/Trustee Electoral Areas