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## Growing Pains of Large Urban Communities

### Case No. 1, Vancouver

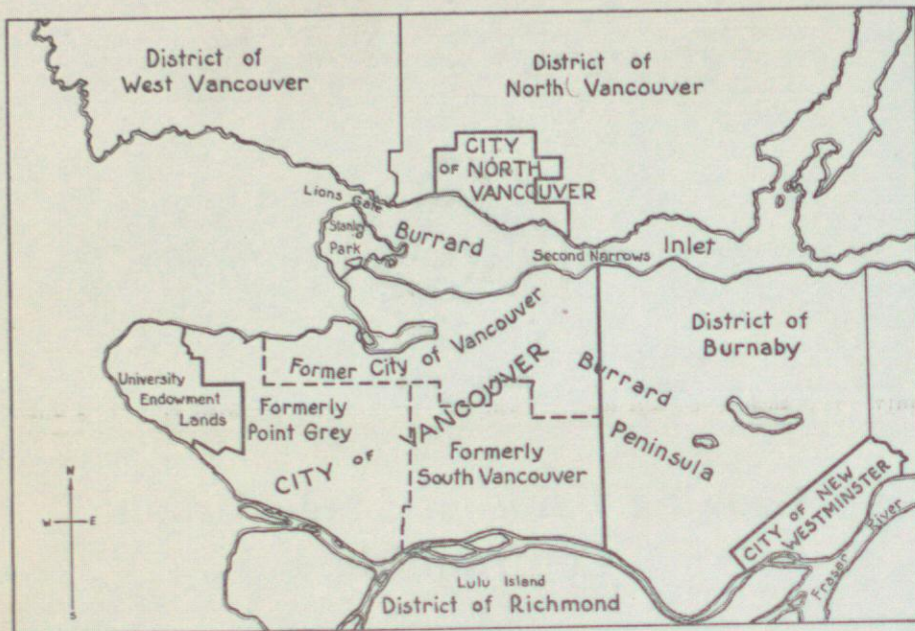
Since the beginning of time large cities have always presented large human problems. In a new country like Canada, many of these problems are accentuated by the extremely rapid growth of urban centers, consisting of a city "core" and a ring of satellite municipalities. At least, in such centers, these problems have become acute so rapidly as to compel wide spread attention. Of no city in Canada is this more true than of Toronto.

### Citizens Are Asking

- (a) Should municipal government in an urban area be completely centralized in one local government through annexations.
- (b) Should only certain functions be centralized in a metropolitan government or governments, leaving the satisfaction of strictly local needs to autonomous local municipalities.
- (c) Should the status quo be maintained, leaving each municipality to "hoe its own row" or "fry in its own fat," with only such casual cooperations as may be affected by mutual agreements.

What has happened and is happening in other Canadian centers? Such information should help Toronto citizens to make up their minds as to what Toronto should do about the Suburban Problem.

# Vancouver and Its Suburban Areas



The map above gives an idea of Vancouver and its environs. The City itself is situated on the Burrard Peninsula on level land or easy slopes. The City of North Vancouver is situated on the opposite side of Burrard Inlet. Adjoining it are the Districts of North Vancouver and West Vancouver, capable of ready development on the strip of comparatively level land between the mountains and the Inlet. The District of Burnaby, east of Vancouver, has considerable broken land. New Westminster is an old settlement not strictly within the Greater Vancouver area.

When incorporated in 1886, Vancouver had an area of 6,750 acres. In 1911 the area was increased by annexation to 10,050.\*\*\* The population at that time was 100,401. Between 1911 and 1928, there was frequent discussion of the annexation of Point Grey and South Vancouver largely at the instance of the latter, but on account of the financial condition of South Vancouver, the proposals were not entertained by either Vancouver or Point Grey. In 1928, however, the question of the amalgamation of the three areas was decided in the affirmative by large majorities of each body of ratepayers. The union took effect on Jan. 1st, 1929. The present population is 245,307, and the present area is "about 45 square miles compared with Toronto's 40 (34 land) and Montreal's 50 square miles."

The Municipality (District) of Point Grey at the time of amalgamation was, and still is, largely a high value residential area which had been carefully planned. The table below gives some financial facts, on the per capita basis, for the Municipality of Point Grey:—

	Taxable Assessment	Tax Levy	Tax Arrears	Tax Sale Lands	Gross Capital Debt	Sinking Funds
1917	\$1520*	\$39.03	\$25.53	\$5.48	\$388.45	\$25.55
1918	928*	40.50	6.95	8.90	311.41	36.60
1928	848**	38.30	6.78	2.88	328.75	46.59

\*Improvements not taxed. \*\*Improvements taxed at 22%. \*\*\*In 1928, it was 10,547.

It will be noted that the financial position of the municipality improved greatly during the eleven years preceding amalgamation and that it greatly reduced its inflated assessment.

The water works system usually had an annual deficit. Other public utilities were supplied by a private corporation.

The Municipality (District) of South Vancouver at the time of amalgamation was, and still is, mainly a residential district of medium and low priced houses. Its development had not been carefully planned as had a great part of the area of Point Grey. In 1918, difficulties in financing led to a Provincial Act which vested in a Commissioner appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council all the powers of the Reeve, Municipal Council, Board of Police Commissioners, Board of School Trustees and all other officers of the Corporation. In April, 1923, all the usual powers of local government were restored, and the electors once more chose the usual elective bodies. During the period of the Control of the Commissioner, no debenture debts were incurred except small amounts for housing and unemployment relief. Tax collections were speeded up, the shortage in sinking funds was reduced and there was established a balanced budget as the usual thing. The table below tells the story of what economic administration did:—

## PER CAPITA

Year	Taxable Assessment	Tax Levy	Tax Arrears	Tax Sale Lands	Outstanding Capital Debt	Sinking Fund
1917	\$620	\$24.05	\$30.16	.....	\$270.42	\$ 5.66
1923	478*	27.15	10.44	\$30.25	190.90	12.55
1928	414*	23.59	4.97	25.05	175.02	25.58

\*Improvements not taxed in 1917 were taxed at 50% of the Assessed Value.

The Water Works usually had an annual deficit. Other public services were supplied by a private corporation.

Please note the steady reduction in per capita tax arrears, and per capita debt and the increase in the sinking funds, while the tax rate remained fairly stable on a reduced per capita taxable assessment.

During the 11 years period the population increased about 40%.

The City of Vancouver after Amalgamation was not essentially changed in its general character. It already contained residential districts of different value levels. It had, in addition to its central business districts, local business districts. It had large manufacturing areas. It was fairly well built up, and the amalgamation afforded opportunity for further development within its own area. On amalgamation, the new city assumed all the liabilities of its constituent municipalities. School districts were merged. Officers, officials and employees were taken on at existing salaries and were to be kept at similar levels of rank and pay according to seniority as far as expedient.

The new city has a Mayor elected at large for a two year term and 12 aldermen from 12 wards, elected for two year overlapping term, the representatives of six wards retiring each year.

The Board of School Trustees is made up of 9 members elected at large for two year overlapping terms. The Board of Parks Commissioners is also elected at large for two year overlapping terms. The Police Commission is made up of the Mayor and four citizens, not members of the Council by which they are appointed annually.

The table below gives some per capita figures for Vancouver before and after amalgamation:—

Year	Taxable Assessment	Tax Levy	Tax Arrears	Tax Sale Lands	Outstanding Capital Debt	Sinking Fund
1917	\$1364	\$40.14	\$49.27	.....	\$351.18	\$51.19
1923	1355	42.24	16.42	\$8.32	271.42	66.96
1928	1207	43.98	6.21	5.36	247.90	57.21

Amalgamation with Point Grey and South Vancouver took place on Jan. 1st, 1929.

1930	1063	49.28	9.42	8.24	276.50	54.41
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During the thirteen year period the population increased from 102,550 to 242,629. Just how much of the per capita increases in 1930 were due to the depression, to temporary disorganization, or to the sudden amalgamation of staffs and other transitory causes, has not yet appeared. How much, if any, was due to expenditures which had been held off by the constituent municipalities and assumed as part of the programme of the new, vigorous, optimistic City can hardly be determined. The event in two or three years should provide facts of value in guiding other large urban centers.

### Metropolitan Districts

Before the final amalgamation of the three municipalities, joint problems brought about the formation of two Metropolitan Boards, viz., the Vancouver and Districts Joint Sewerage and Drainage Board and the Greater Vancouver Water District.

The Vancouver and Districts Joint Sewerage and Drainage Board, organized in 1914, covers the whole area of the new Vancouver, the Burnaby District and a part of the area of New Westminster. The Board may construct, maintain and operate such main sewers, sewers and drains and other works in connection therewith as it may deem necessary and may borrow money up to a specified sum through debenture issues with a maximum term of 40 years, said debentures being upon the credit of and repayable by the various municipalities according to a scheme set up by the Act. The Board is made up of a Chairman, appointed by the Provincial Government, the Mayor or Reeve of each of the Municipalities concerned and two additional members appointed annually by the Vancouver City Council. Vancouver's share of the cost of the Board in 1931 was 90.9% of the total and the net debt of the Board outstanding was \$5,818,332 in 1930.

The Greater Vancouver Water District incorporated in 1924,† supplies water throughout the present City of Vancouver, the District of Burnaby (1927), municipalities of North Vancouver (1928), West Vancouver (1929), and in 1931 the Cities of New Westminster and Port Coquitlam and the municipalities of Richmond and Coquitlam, and may undertake to supply water to such other municipalities in the metropolitan District as may decide to join the system.

The Governing Body or Administrative Board comprises one member for each municipality and a sufficient number for Vancouver to give it a majority of one on the Board. The Chairman is elected annually by the Board. The Board also appoints a Commissioner (and may appoint 3) to manage the system.

The water is supplied in bulk at cost to the constituent member municipalities. The district has no tax levying powers.

The corporation has power to borrow money on its own credit and on the joint and several obligations of each of its member municipalities. (Present net debt \$3,827,954.)

Thus the problems of a growing Vancouver district, have led to the partial adoption of both methods of centralization viz:

1. Amalgamation or annexation.
2. The formation of joint Metropolitan areas for different functions. Which one will win out in the end, or whether or not both methods may be resorted to simultaneously and indefinitely, only time will tell.

Below is a table showing salient facts for present suburban municipalities.

#### PER CAPITA FIGURES FOR 1930

Municipality	Taxable Assessment	Tax Levy	Tax Arrears	Tax Sale Lands	Gross Capital Debt	Sinking Fund
Burnaby.....	\$452	\$29.66	\$ 8.93	\$43.67	\$165.31	\$18.11
North Vancouver City.....	1073	42.11	12.51	53.77	395.30	124.98
North Vancouver District.....	1150	62.65	50.16	96.30	439.26	101.43
West Vancouver District.....	462*	29.58*	15.37*	31.11*	215.67*	62.18*

\*On estimate of population by Inspector of Municipalities.

The total population of these municipalities is about 46,000. All except Burnaby are on the other side of Burrard Inlet from Vancouver. New Westminster is not included in the table as it is an old City with well established central business and manufacturing districts of its own.

It will be interesting to know what action, if any, will be taken either in the way of further amalgamation or further inclusion under Metropolitan Boards.

†And becoming effective March 1926.