

# New study probes amalgamation of Greater Sudbury, and prompts more questions

By Angela Gemmill, [CBC News](#) Posted: Jul 15, 2016 5:30 AM ET Last Updated: Jul 15, 2016 7:16 AM ET



Amalgamation is supposed to alleviate fiscal pressures for those communities that join together. But did that happen for Greater Sudbury after amalgamation in 2001? (Yvon Theriault/Radio-Canada)

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It's been 15 years since seven lower-tiered communities and a few unincorporated townships amalgamated to form the City of Greater Sudbury.

New research from the Northern Policy Institute looked into whether this consolidation was fiscally beneficial.

James Cuddy is the in-house economist and researcher behind the study.

He says, in general, amalgamation is supposed to alleviate fiscal pressures. The study was launched to see if the amalgamation of Greater Sudbury did what it was supposed to do. That is, did it alleviate fiscal pressure?



In-house economist at the Northern Policy Institute, James Cuddy, looked at the effects of Sudbury's 2001 amalgamation on municipal expenditures. (Northern Policy Institute)

The research found amalgamation provided savings in general government expenditures, like administration, corporate management and program supports.

The research looked at expenditures, from before and after amalgamation, from six municipal services: cemetery, fire, garbage collection, libraries, parks/recreation and street lighting. All had been responsibilities within the lower-tiered communities.

Cuddy's research found the cost in most of these expenditures increased after the communities joined forces, with the exception of street lighting.

When he started to collect the information Cuddy says much of the data he was looking for wasn't openly available.

## **Transparency a roadblock**

He requested the stats on expenditures from the Ministry of Municipal affairs and Housing. Even some of that data wasn't organized properly. He cobbled that side of the report together but was unable to complete the part which focused on quality and level of services.

But he says expenditures are just half of the total equation.

The study created further questions with the quality of services Sudbury taxpayers received.

"We don't have access to any data that fills the other side of the equation, the actual level and quality of services; what [level of services] you're getting, for what you pay for."

Cuddy says this was a major roadblock to the study. He calls it a transparency issue. He says taxpayers should know if they're getting their money's worth.



It was 15 years ago, back in 2001, that seven lower-tiered communities and several unincorporated townships amalgamated - creating the City of Greater Sudbury.

The biggest recommendation from the Northern Policy Institute report is to enhance the transparency around reporting on the quality of the service being provided.

Cuddy wants to see a more standardized, province-wide approach for reporting this information through the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

He says this would allow for consistent, reliable, publicly-available data across all municipalities in Ontario. It would also be a vital step to understanding if municipalities are running more efficiently or not.

Things are different around Greater Sudbury now than they were at the time of amalgamation in 2001. The city has an [open data portal](#), where municipal data from the past several years can be accessed.

## **Open data portal launched July 2015**

Greater Sudbury's manager of Software and Business Applications in Information Technology, Ron St. Onge says they offer raw data online for the public.

He says the information is useful, but doesn't deal with the level or quality of a particular service.

"We just put in the raw data so that you can make your own determination. We don't want to summarize data. We'll give you the full list of data so that you can actually review it and make your own analysis, determinations and look for insights that are useful to yourself."

St. Onge says some of the data dates back to amalgamation, but most is from the past few years. The IT staff continues to add more and more data which the public can openly access.

He says the portal just marked its one year in existence.

They'll be reporting to council in the fall on what data they've provided on the site and the next steps they will take.



Some of the datasets available on the Greater Sudbury Open Data Portal ([opendata.greatersudbury.ca/](http://opendata.greatersudbury.ca/))

Source: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/programs/morningnorth/was-sudbury-s-amalgamation-a-good-thing-1.3680391>