

BIRCH BAY INCORPORATION ASSOCIATION

County Executive Satpal Sidhu
311 Grand Ave. Suite 108
Bellingham, WA 98225

March 28, 2024

Dear Sir,

This letter contains information about our community's interest in pursuing the possible incorporation of Birch Bay as a city.

Executive Summary

#1 The Birch Bay Incorporation Association (BBIA) formally requests expedited funding for an updated Feasibility Study for the Incorporation of Birch Bay along with funding for community outreach.

#2 BBIA requests help in gathering information particularly in identifying Birch Bay's financial contributions to the county and the cost of contracting county services.

#3 We also request the appointment of a designated county liaison to facilitate communication and collaboration between BBIA and Whatcom County.

The information attached explains in more detail our community's interest in pursuing the possible incorporation of Birch Bay as a city. It also contains requests for funding and administrative support related to incorporation decision-making.

The support BBIA has already received from Whatcom County has been greatly appreciated. We look forward to working together to develop a well-researched and supportable decision that will shape the future of Birch Bay.

Sincerely,



Matt Berry
Chairman
Birch Bay Incorporation Association

CC Director Mark Personius

History of Birch Bay Incorporation Association (BBIA)

At its first annual general meeting in November, 2023, 110 community members actively participated in shaping the future direction of BBIA by:

- Adopting formal bylaws and a statement of purpose, thus establishing a structured foundation for operations centered on inclusivity and transparency.
- Affirming proposed incorporation boundaries that align with the existing Birch Bay Urban Growth Area and the 2008 Feasibility Study Boundaries, demonstrating our commitment to strategic and informed planning.
- Electing 15 Steering Committee members from a competitive pool of 22 candidates.

BBIA's membership has now grown to 199 people. Our communication network now includes 788 community members, representing 8.8% of the total population.

Why Explore Incorporation Now?

Incorporation was last pursued in Birch Bay in 2008. That effort made great progress, including a county-funded feasibility study. The effort lost momentum when property values dropped during the Great Recession. Here's what's changed since then:

- **Policy Alignment:** Policy 2Q-5 of the current Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan explicitly encourages and supports the incorporation of Birch Bay when deemed appropriate. Initiating an updated feasibility study aligns with this policy and serves the best interests of our community.
- **Urban Growth Area Status:** Birch Bay is one of the largest standalone Urban Growth Areas in the state. The encouragement of urban growth within these areas is outlined in RCW 36.70A. This law emphasizes the importance of reevaluating Birch Bay's governance to best serve its growing population and evolving needs.
- **Population Growth:** Since 2008, the population of the Birch Bay UGA has increased 51%, to 8,909 residents according to the Washington Office of Financial Management, Small Areas Estimates Program. The current Comprehensive Plan predicts another 50% increase by 2036.
- **COVID-19 Impact:** The pandemic accelerated the trend of increased permanent resident population in Birch Bay, transitioning it from a resort/vacation community to a thriving residential area.
- **Community Interest:** We have clearly demonstrated that there is a strong interest within the community in generating credible information on the potential expenses, timeline, benefits, and drawbacks of incorporation.

Requests for Support

Given the interest in pursuing incorporation, the governance structure and processes the community has put in place, and the policy noted in 2Q-5 of the current Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, BBIA is requesting your help to determine the feasibility of incorporating Birch Bay.

1. Expedited funding for an updated Birch Bay Incorporation Feasibility Study

Our top priority is to swiftly move to update the 2008 Birch Bay Incorporation Feasibility Study. This would provide critical insight and guidance for the future governance of development of Birch Bay.

Policy 2Q-5 of the current Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan explicitly encourages and supports the incorporation of Birch Bay when deemed appropriate. Initiating an updated feasibility study aligns with this policy and serves the best interests of our community.

Timing is critical. The findings of this updated plan should be included in the County's 2025 Comprehensive Plan.

Funding for community outreach

BBIA is committed to developing a diverse, inclusive, democratic and transparent process as we explore the pros and cons of incorporation.. We ask for financial support for a comprehensive community outreach program that would help ensure a well-informed public conversation.

Our communications strategy includes the [BBIA website](#), email newsletters, mailings, social media postings, news coverage and statistically significant surveys.

Core to the strategy is a series of community meetings and events over the coming year designed to encourage participation in the incorporation study process. These gatherings will serve as vital platforms for open dialogue, information sharing, and collaborative exploration of what incorporation could mean for Birch Bay. By investing in targeted and accessible outreach initiatives, we aim to ensure that every voice in our community is heard, and that the diverse perspectives and insights of our residents inform each step of our journey toward a decision on incorporation.

Non-monetary support

2. Administrative Support for BBIA Research

BBIA's Research and Feasibility Committee is charged with collecting information that would allow the Birch Bay community to make an informed decision about whether to move forward. This information would complement the proposed Updated Feasibility Study by providing timely preliminary information to our community about potential costs and benefits.

The committee's main areas of focus are (1) to establish how much the Birch Bay community contributes to the County from taxes, fees and levies, together with details about the level of services these County revenues provide, and (2) to establish the costs that would result from contracting with various County agencies and Departments to provide services to a City of Birch Bay.

Your assistance in facilitating meetings with department heads, and communicating our needs, perhaps through a designated liaison as noted below, would be invaluable to our efforts to provide reliable data to the community.

3. Appointment of a County Liaison for Birch Bay

We request that a designated county liaison be named to serve as a direct point of contact between the BBIA and Whatcom County. This would facilitate efficient and effective communication, and ensure that our inquiries, This liaison would streamline our interactions with various county departments, aid in data collection, coordinate meetings with department heads or their representatives, and assist in our information-gathering efforts.

This would significantly enhance our ability to inform our community about the processes and considerations relative to potential incorporation.

We believe this request aligns with best practices for such significant civic processes. With a designated county liaison, we can more effectively navigate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead and contribute to a well-informed, transparent, and inclusive process for all stakeholders.