



Date: August 30, 2023

To: Kaylee Galloway, Whatcom County Council

From: Doralee Booth, Director Birch Bay Chamber – County Liaison
Dianne Mars-Smith, President, Friends of Birch Bay Library

Cc: Christine Perkins, Executive Director, Whatcom County Library System

Re: Birch Bay Vogt Library Express

Dear Kaylee:

Thank you for your interest in finding a way for the Whatcom County Council to support the construction of a valuable community asset in Birch Bay. A County Council commitment of \$314,597 for the Birch Bay Vogt Library Express would get us to full funding and we could confidently let residents know that this dream will be realized.

As you know, a significant portion of the funding for this project has been secured through the \$2 million Washington State Department of Commerce appropriation. Now we are looking to our local community to come up with the balance. Financial support from county government would show Birch Bay residents that the Council is aware of the growing Birch Bay population and is actively working to provide much-needed amenities to this under-served area.

Once built, we believe the Birch Bay Vogt Library Express can benefit Whatcom County and our northwest county patrons through creative programs, educational classes, computer supports, and a place for community gatherings. We look forward to speaking with you more about our project. If you have any specific questions for us, please let us know.

THE PROJECT RATIONALE

Whatcom County Library System (WCLS) conducted a Library Service Area Analysis in 2016 and determined that a public library was long overdue. More than 10,000 people live in Birch Bay, which is one of the fastest growing corners of our county. This popular and growing place to live lacks civic infrastructure.

More than 1,800 children live in Birch Bay but there is currently no public school nearby. The community lacks public gathering spaces, access to computer workstations and internet, and library resources such as books, movies, music, or research tools. In 2017, WCLS conducted an online survey and more than 80% of those responding indicated support for a library in Birch Bay.

Extensive conversations between the Whatcom County Library System and the Birch Bay community followed that survey and inspired plans to bring vastly expanded library services to this community. Currently, Birch Bay is served only by a Wednesday afternoon, 4-hour, Bookmobile visit. Updated plans for a Birch Bay Vogt Library Express project will deliver on the community-driven need to provide more library services including:

- Public gathering space;
- Access to computer workstations and internet;
- Library resources such as books, movies, music, and research tools;
- Programs for youth, adults and seniors
- Access to library staff for reference support and reading conversations.

Community members prioritized these services and resources during public meetings. With the need determined, WCLS began researching locations. The Vogt family, stalwarts of the community going back many decades, stepped up and made available an historic structure that had been in their family since 1913. While not an outright gift, the house and land were sold to the WCLS at a price well below market for land/structure and 160 feet of shoreline access included in the sale.

ADDITIONAL RATIONALE

Limited library services in the Birch Bay community are currently provided by WCLS's weekly Bookmobile visits. However, library patrons living in Birch Bay have asked for more than just pick-up/drop-off services. They now have to travel to surrounding communities to access collections and other resources offered in a way only brick-and-mortar facilities can provide.

These visits to other county libraries are negatively impacted by distance, limited public transportation and barriers such as train traffic on roads to and from Birch Bay. This is not insignificant, particularly for school children. Birch Bay children comprise 60% of the Blaine Public School District population. Travel to Blaine is often encumbered by BSNF long-train delays. In addition, once a child is delivered home, it is unlikely that a second round-trip to a nearby library (Blaine, Lynden or Ferndale) is in the family plans given their many other obligations.

Outdoor library programs held at the Birch Bay property in partnership with groups such as the Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce, Whatcom County Parks & Recreation and Lummi Nation draw

a large attendance. These experiences indicate the Birch Bay Library will be the gathering spot and educational resource long desired by local residents.

PROJECT PLANS

The interior of the main level is slated for a full remodel with all mechanical and electrical to be replaced. The home's second level will remain inaccessible to the public due to ADA requirements, but it may be used by staff and for storage. The crawlspace is to be filled in per Whatcom County permitting requirements and Washington State Department of Archaeological and Historic Preservation rules, and a new slab and concrete stem walls with flood vents will be added. Exterior cladding and all windows will be replaced. Parking areas, landscaping and a new fire hydrant are required as indicated on the site plan (attached). Washington State Department of Commerce also requires that the project be LEED Silver Certified, although this may ultimately be waived because the overall size of the project is below the threshold.

When complete, the renovated first floor of the historic structure will encompass a 1,700 square foot library and a 6,000 square foot outdoor programming space to support continued partnerships with community organizations. This destination library is ideally situated along a new 1.6-mile-long pedestrian walkway along Birch Bay Drive and plans to complete a new Whatcom County Park located just south of the library property have been approved.

The Whatcom County Library System is prepared to provide staffing and operational support in an ongoing arrangement. Opening a facility to provide a full range of library services is nearly within reach.

Project plans by Zervas Architects provide detailed structural analysis, space planning, and cost estimates. The new facility design supports the full range of library services desired by the community, including after-hours access to pick up library materials.

We will note that we currently provide a stable internet connection on-site to Whatcom County Sheriff deputies who use it to file reports when patrolling in Birch Bay. WCLS is committed to continuing this arrangement when the library is completed.

REQUEST

The Friends of Birch Bay Library need \$314,597 to complete this project. Costs and assets are detailed below.

We know we can do this.

We invite Whatcom County to join us now!

BIRCH BAY LIBRARY EXPRESS COSTS

Construction Project Total	\$1,550,880
Architecture & Engineering Fees	187,525
Site Acquisition	677,000
LEED Silver Fees	72,000
Sales Tax	<u>139,072</u>
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 2,626,477

BIRCH BAY LIBRARY EXPRESS ASSETS

Washington State Capital Grant	\$ 1,950,000
Birch Bay Friends cash-in-hand	211,000
Chuckanut Health Foundation Grant	20,000
WCLS Allocation	<u>150,000</u>
TOTAL RAISED	\$ 2,311,000

TOTAL NEED TO COMPLETE \$ 314,597

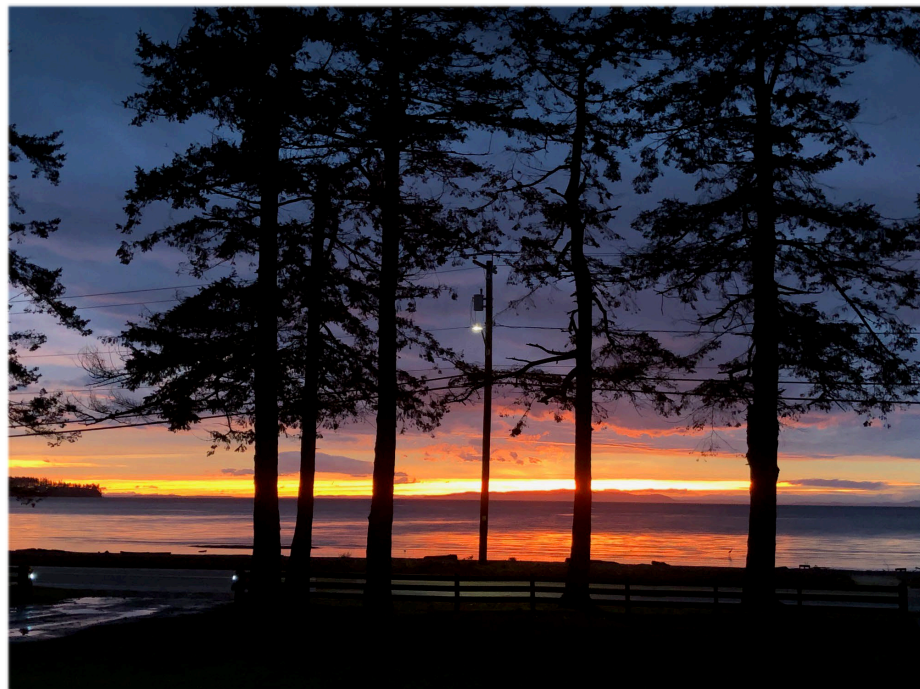
The latest Whatcom Talk article:

<https://www.whatcomtalk.com/2023/05/30/friends-of-birch-bay-library-and-wcls-to-open-birch-bay-vogt-library-express/>

Visit our website: <https://friendsofbirchbaylibrary.org>



The future home of the Birch Bay Vogt Library Express



View of Birch Bay from the library property