

Birch Bay Incorporation Committee Meeting Minutes

9/20/23

1) Call to order at 5:31pm

- Attendee self-introductions
- 20 attendees: Matt Berry – Realtor, Director with Chamber of Commerce; Carson Cortez – City Planner in Sumas, former resident, Jim Shaver – Birch Point resident, Sharman Burnam – Resident, Michael Stringam – Birch Bay Village resident, Brian Bell – Sea Links resident, Carol Donovan – resident, Emily Stewart – property owner and newer resident, Patricia Alesse – resident part of original attempt 30 years ago, Lisa Guthrie – Bay Crest development, Saara Kuure – part owner C-Shop, Patrick Alesse – C-Shop, BBWARM, Keith Alesse– Skagit County Resident, Dave Wilbrecht – retired City Manager-Blaine, Rob – Resident seeking more info and clarification., Grace McCarthy – Northern Light, ? – Sealinks Community, Dave Berry – resident, Doralee Booth – Director with Chamber of Commerce, Birch Bay Advisory Formation Group, worked on Community Plan, Lisa Fisher– Newer resident and recording secretary, GM Birch Bay Leisure Park

2) Public Comment

- Lisa G: Need to look at this with a zero baseline of knowledge for those who are not familiar with the plan. Whatcom County designated Birch Bay as an Urban growth area, knowing that this would eventually be incorporated. County recently amended Zoning Codes for Birch Bay. Hopefully incorporation will provide better discretionary use of tax dollars.

3) Update on Incorporation Boundaries

- Matt: Christina was unable to make it but sent the most updated version of the map with the different Boundaries and possible boundaries outlined. Red Boundary is the area suggested in the 2008 Study that was done by the County. Green shows wetlands areas. At the last meeting a straw vote was taken regarding boundaries, and it was decided to use the 2008 boundaries as a starting point- baseline. There will be a lot more work to figure out what if any other areas want to be part of the incorporation.
- Jim: spoke to about 30 members of the Birch Point Community with mixed reviews on wanting to be part of the incorporation. Pretty evenly divided but many that said they were not for incorporation said if it was going to go through, they wished to be part of it. If you look at the tax base, they pay a lot in but there is not much return for it. Birch Point is also one of the most obvious places for future development, and they have a lot in common with Birch Bay.
- This area basically covers Birch Point Rd to Semiahmoo Drive. There did not seem to be any attitude shifts based on distance from Birch Bay, but this was a small sampling of residents. Birch Point had a water Association with wells that began to go dry when Semiahmoo went in. they then joined the BBSW district, for water but not sewer.
- Birch Bay Water and Sewer took 2 tries to get put through. Developers are responsible for installation of sewer and water hook-ups and should be leaving stubs available for future hook ups.

- Main Goal is that Birch Point does not become another Point Roberts. Matt, Jim and one other will discuss having informational meeting(s) for Birch Point residents.
- Any interest from Point White Horn? Matt: The survey is still open but not one has added anything since the last meeting.

4) Update on Bylaws

- Michael: This is the 5th version. Committee made decision to keep it simple and give clarity to the previous versions. This is still open to comments and suggestions. It is the hope that this document will not be needed in 2 to 3 years as incorporation will have begun or been completed. And this committee will no longer be needed.
- Carol: I encourage everyone to go home and read this through to provide feedback at the next meeting.
- Michael: the name has been changed a bit to clarify, no change to statement of purpose, no change to definition of membership. Steering committee will be elected by membership to move the process forward and bring information back to members and get approval. Members will meet a minimum of 4 times per year (more as needed). The Steering committee will meet monthly. A 2-week notice will be provided to members in advance of a meeting for amendments and will need a 2/3's approval from the membership.
- By-Laws committee to meet next Wednesday the 27th.
- Stakeholders, such as developers and businesses, may wish to be part of the committee. Needs further discussion as this could cause concern about special interests driving the incorporation process. Would like to try to get at least one person from each community or neighborhood as part of the group so that there is input from all areas concerned.
- Candidate election forms were found on the back table and an email link will be going out to everyone on the email list. Fill out and return to Matt at the October Meeting.
- October meeting will put together the notice of vote to ratify the bylaws and vote for the steering committee members at the November 15th meeting.
- Set final boundaries at the November meeting at the same time as the election of the steering committee.
- Take nominations and see who is interested. Possibly reach out to other communities/neighborhoods to make sure there is a representation of all.
- Even if people outside the immediate area do not want to be part of incorporation, need to keep them informed as they will be affected by any changes.

5) Question asked by Rob: What is the end state trying to prevent or control?

- Matt: The reason to support incorporation is to have greater representation by electing local officials making choices for Birch Bay. Better use of tax dollars. Birch pays the same or more than many other nearby cities, but without the same benefits. It is also about heightening community identity and the ability to chart Birch Bay's own path. Will government controls be in Birch Bay or remain in Bellingham? Unincorporated Birch Bay pays more in taxes currently than the City of Blaine. 15 years ago, with ½ the population that currently exists a feasibility study was called for by the County at the cost of approx. \$50,000.00 paid for by the County.

6) Feasibility Study Update

- Dave: Spoke to a County official to inquire about an update to the Feasibility Study. The official seemed receptive to the idea.
 - Carson: The Department of Commerce Planner of the Northwest region was questioned about whether the state would be interested in funding any part of the new study. This will be passed on to the necessary people to determine if that is possible.
 - Matt: There will be a need to adopt bylaws that will be similar to any city and then elect officials to provide legitimacy to the incorporation effort. There seems to be some feeling that County officials would support such a plan though may need to invite officials to meetings for informational proposals to the County and to The Committee. Roland Middleton seems to be a strong resource for Birch Bay. Satpal has stated he would like to come to a meeting.
 - Doralee: spoke of the Advisory Committee that has been proposed by Whatcom County. This would give a local voice to the Whatcom County City Hall via an appointed council. The council would determine and prioritize the needs of the community. After the second letter Satpal responded with wanting to move the Advisory Committee forward. For this to happen we must present an ordinance to the Whatcom County Council. For approval it needs a purpose structure formation with 7 points. If an Advisory Committee is in place the County must provide quarterly reports/ information to the advisory committee as opposed to simply putting it in a Bellingham newspaper. There would be 4 positions to civic organizations and 3 members from the private sector. Resumes would be sent to the County Council for consideration for appointment.
 - It is felt that running this in conjunction with the incorporation efforts would be a great choice as it would provide greater information to the citizens of Birch Bay.
- 7) Proposed BBIC website: Work on the proposed website is ongoing and will be brought up for approval in the next month.
- 8) Next Meetings
- Wednesday, October 18 at 5:30 PM
 - i. Notice to adopt Bylaws at November meeting
 - ii. Last call for nominees for Steering Committee
 - Annual General (Election) Meeting Wednesday, November 15 at 5:30 PM
 - i. Ratify Bylaws
 - ii. Elect Steering Committee
 - Consideration of an Open house for Birch Point Residents
 - Meetings notes will go out to any who expresses an interest in knowing more about incorporation.
 - A side note: to create a budget we would need to know the tax base. To get the information the feasibility study needs to happen.
 - Sharman will create a Mailer that can go out.
- 9) Meeting adjourned at 6:45pm