

Considering the Incorporation of Birch Bay

A presentation to the Whatcom County Council
by the
Birch Bay Incorporation Association (BBIA)

Overview

- BBIA: Who We Are
- Historical Context, Changing Demographics
- The Need for a Feasibility Study
- Summary and Request



June 4, 2024

BBIA: Who We Are

- An Association of part-time and full-time Birch Bay residents and business owners
- Officially formed on November 15, 2023 at a public meeting where 110 attendees
 - voted to approve an Association Statement of Purpose and Bylaws
 - elected a 15-person Steering Committee from 22 candidates
 - approved provisional boundaries for exploration of incorporation
- BBIA has four subcommittees: Executive Subcommittee, Research and Feasibility Subcommittee, Communications Subcommittee, Finance Subcommittee
- Has a membership of 209 and a communication network (from individual sign-ups) of 788 community members

BBIA: Who We Are – Statement of Purpose

To explore and, if found feasible, advocate for incorporation to give residents of Birch Bay more direct control over the future of their community. BBIA will accomplish this by:

- a) Creating an inclusive, nonpartisan process to explore the creation, through incorporation, of a future City of Birch Bay. . . .
- b) Promoting a feasibility study and community engagement, soliciting feedback, and information sharing. . . .
- c) Serving as a liaison with County, State, and Boundary Review Board and, should a feasibility study and sense of Birch Bay residents be positive, to advocate for and advance the incorporation process through a citizen initiative.

Historical Context

In 2004, the County Council adopted the Birch Bay Community Plan, a result of extensive efforts by the Birch Bay Steering Committee.

This Council-adopted plan includes the following statement:

*“The Growth Management Act states that ‘it is appropriate that urban government services be provided by cities, and urban government services should not be provided in rural areas.’ Consistent with this goal, **it is desirable that Birch Bay will become a city or annex to a city as soon as this is economically feasible**, as cities are best suited to provide the services that are needed in an urban area.”*

(Chapter 16, Governance, Adopted Birch Bay Community Plan)

Historical Context, Changing Demographics

In 2008, the county completed an incorporation feasibility study for the Birch Bay UGA which identified the issues with and benefits of incorporating. It concluded that Birch Bay incorporation was financially feasible given the community's tax base and service needs

(Source: Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, Page 2-47)

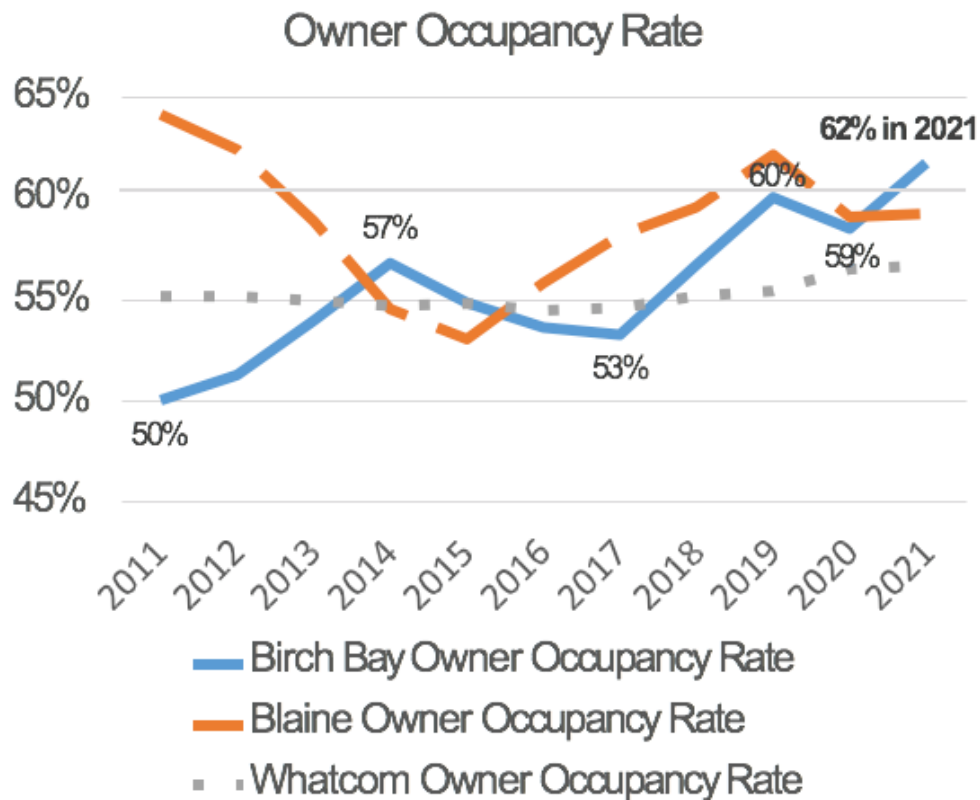
Since then:

- Birch Bay has grown to approximately 9,000 residents—the 4th-largest "city" in the County
- Birch Bay is no longer a retirement community—median age is 47; nearly 60% under age 18 in Blaine and Birch Bay live in Birch Bay
- Birch Bay is no longer only a second-home community—it's owner-occupancy rate (62%) is on par with Blaine and higher than Whatcom County as a whole (58%)
- 75% of children under 5 years old in Blaine and Birch Bay live in Birch Bay
- Birch Bay is projected to grow faster than Blaine and will continue to be significantly larger than Blaine

(Sources available on request)

Historical Context, Changing Demographics

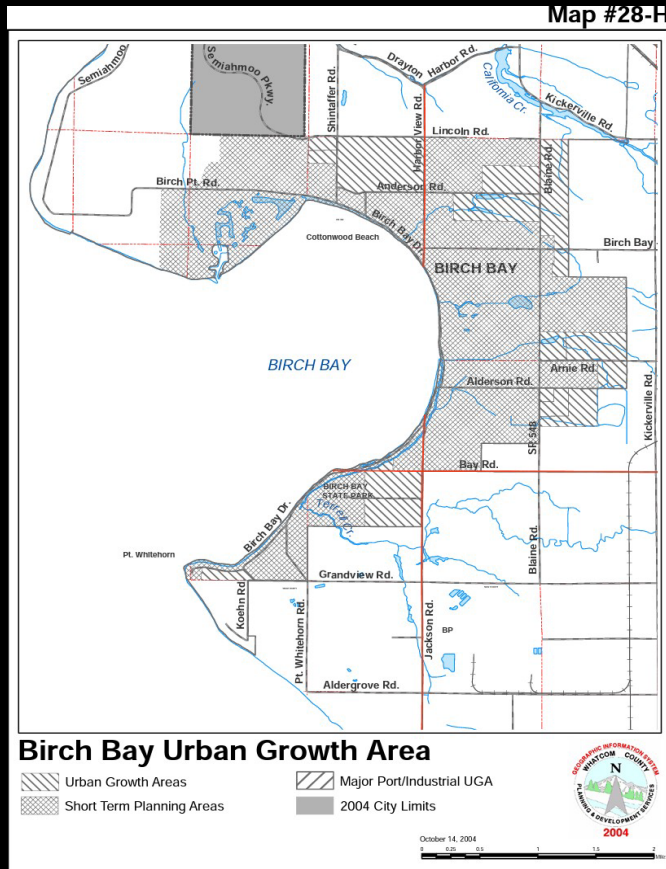
Birch Bay is no longer a purely resort or part-time residence community.



The number of full-time residents is trending upward while Canadian ownership is down to below 20%...

Source: US Census Quickfacts

Historical Context, Changing Demographics



Birch Bay is already an
Urban Growth Area

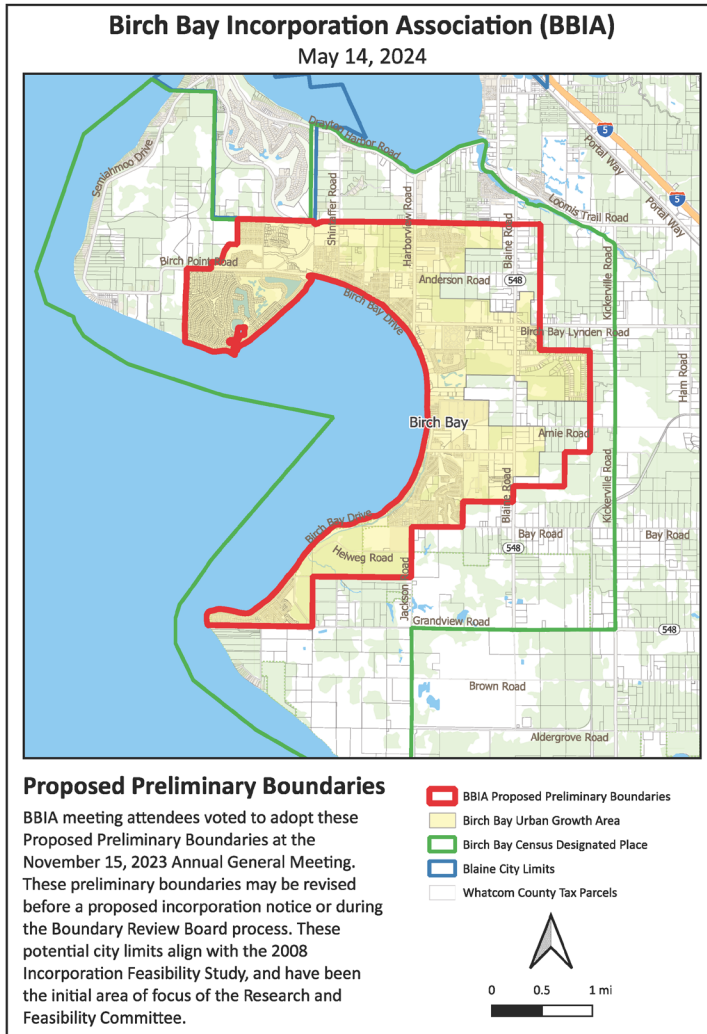
RCW 36.70A.110 Comprehensive plans —
Urban growth areas.

- (1) Each county that is required or chooses to plan under RCW 36.70A.040 shall designate an urban growth area or areas within which **urban growth shall be encouraged and which growth can occur only if it is not urban in nature. . . .**
- (4) In general, **cities are the units of local government most appropriate to provide urban governmental services.**

Birch Bay is unique. It is a standalone UGA, not centered around a city, **and with major housing developments requiring urban planning and services.**

Proposed Incorporation Boundaries

- Similar to the Urban Growth Area boundaries
- Includes areas currently designated for urban growth
- Consistent with Comprehensive Plan policies
- Consistent with the 2004 Birch Bay Community Plan
- Consistent with 2008 Feasibility Study boundaries
- Serviced by Birch Bay Water & Sewer



The Need for a Feasibility Study: Relevant Data

A survey of the Birch Bay community has received 378 responses to date, resulting in a 95% confidence interval (\pm 5% error rate) that the results reflect the overall population.

Q: How important is it to have a local City Council making decisions about both services and development, with Birch Bay voters electing local representatives?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	(N = 378)
TOTAL Important =	77.51%	293
TOTAL Not Important =	22.48%	85
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Very important to me	51.32%	194
Somewhat important to me	26.19%	99
Somewhat unimportant to me	9.52%	36
Not important to me	12.96%	49

The Need for a Feasibility Study: Relevant Data

Q: If taxes did not go up, and services stayed the same as they are now, but incorporation would allow Birch Bay to make local decisions about development, zoning, and permitting, **would you be in favor of incorporation?**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	N = 378
Yes	72.22%	273
No	27.78%	105

The Need for a Feasibility Study: Relevant Data

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According to the 2008 Feasibility Study, Page ES-2

“If Birch Bay residents pay the same level of taxes they would pay as part of unincorporated Whatcom County, a City of Birch Bay would generate enough revenues to provide a slightly higher level of service than Birch Bay residents currently receive.”

The Need for a Feasibility Study: Relevant Data

Q: At this time, here's how I feel about incorporation:

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	N = 378
I'm in favor of incorporation.	24.60%	93
I'm not in favor of incorporation.	25.13%	95
I need more information before deciding how to vote on incorporation.	50.26%	190

From the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 2 Land Use, Policy 2Q-5:

"Whatcom County will encourage and assist the citizens of Birch Bay Urban Growth Area with incorporation when appropriate."

Summary and Request

Given:

- That the last feasibility study, 16 years ago, found that incorporation was financially feasible with no increase in Birch Bay taxes if services stayed the same or slightly increased;
- That a current survey of Birch Bay's community found 72% support for incorporation under the above-noted circumstances;
- That 25% of Birch Bay's community favor incorporation and 50% request more information before making a decision;
- That the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan states the County will assist with UGA incorporation when appropriate;
- That the Council-adopted Birch Bay Community Plan encourages incorporation as soon as economically feasible; and
- That the Whatcom County Executive has stated support for a feasibility study.

Summary and Request

The Birch Bay Incorporation Association:

- Believes there is strong, demonstrated support and an appropriate need for a feasibility study regarding the incorporation of Birch Bay;
- Respectfully requests that the County act expeditiously to provide the support and resources necessary to complete an independent feasibility study with a goal of a community vote, should feasibility be found, in the 2026 election cycle;
- **Respectfully requests representation in the decision-making structure, including committees exploring the need for a feasibility study and, should a study be recommended and approved, to have input to the RFQ and RPF documents.**

Birch Bay Incorporation Association (BBIA)

Thank you for listening.

