

WHATCOM COUNTY
10-Year Urban Growth Area Review

Birch Bay
Urban Growth Area Proposal

June 9, 2009

Birch Bay UGA – Community Proposal

Introduction

Whatcom County is responsible for providing planning services in Birch Bay. Planning and Development Services is making this proposal to the joint meeting of the Planning Commission and the County Council on behalf of the Birch Bay community. This proposal is a product of the community's work over the last several years, supplemented by recent activities associated with this UGA update process. As no specific boundaries other than those currently in place were identified by the community during the public participation, new boundaries for the UGA will not be proposed here but will be identified in the County's proposal at the end of July.

Existing Conditions

Birch Bay Community Profile

Birch Bay – population 5,290 – is one of three totally unincorporated Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) in Whatcom County. Situated on the picturesque Birch Bay, the urban area of the UGA wraps around the bay from Birch Bay Village on the north to Point Whitehorn on the south. The eastern portion of the UGA contains a few urban-density communities but remains largely undeveloped or partially developed.

Existing Plans

The residents of this community have been active in planning since forming the Birch Bay Steering Committee to update the Birch Bay Community Plan which was adopted in 2004. This plan calls for preservation of the distinct neighborhoods that have formed along the bay and establishing new commercial development at Birch Bay-Lynden Road and Harborview, Birch Bay-Lynden Road and Blaine Road, and Blaine Road and Alderson Road. This commercial development is aimed at preserving the waterfront character while ensuring provision of commercial services to the growing population. At the time the plan was written, Birch Bay had a higher than average seasonal population when compared to most other urban areas in the county.

The community came together again to produce the Birch Bay Design Guidelines which were completed in 2007. The design guidelines have not yet been implemented in Birch Bay and the community continues to discuss ways to improve the plans that they have worked together to create.

2008 Population

The estimated population for the Birch Bay UGA in 2008 is 5,290 or 2.77% of the total County population. Between 1990 and 2008, the UGA's population increased by a little more than 3,000 residents accepting 4.8% of the total County's growth during that time period. Most of that increase occurred in the 1990s (2,249 new residents) and the growth rate has begun to decline in the 2000s. Anecdotally, residents said they perceive a shift from a more seasonal population to more year-round residents. Until a new census is conducted in 2010, it will be challenging to measure the true seasonality of the Birch Bay community.

2008 Employment

Job estimates for 2008 in the Birch Bay UGA are based on the Washington State Employment Security Department estimates of employment. Birch Bay has 436 jobs in commercial, retail, and industrial as follows:

- Commercial: 309
- Retail: 91
- Industrial: 37

Commercial jobs include office and professional job classifications – finance, government and services – and serve as the primary source for jobs in Birch Bay. Although Birch Bay appears to be heavily reliant on the tourism industry, the number of jobs in this classification put this category in second. This is likely due to the “services” portion of the commercial classification. Many of the jobs associated with tourism are services and not retail. Industrial jobs in Birch Bay are likely construction-related as there is no industrial zoning in the UGA.

Land Capacity Analysis Overview

According to the May iteration of the Land Capacity Analysis (LCA) for Birch Bay, the UGA had about 2,350 gross developable acres with residential capacity and 140 gross developable acres with commercial capacity. After the removal of critical areas, infrastructure, and other deductions, the UGA has 760 net developable acres for residential and 86 net developable acres for commercial development. This indicates a total population growth capacity for 6,010 more people and 1,746 jobs.¹

Much of the eastern fringe areas of the UGA remain undeveloped, due in part to the Long-Term Planning Area status of some of the areas. Development has also been limited by regulations (critical areas and provisional zoning) and by economic factors.

Public Facilities and Services

Birch Bay relies on Whatcom County to provide government services and police protection. Other services provided as follows:

Water	Birch Bay Water and Sewer District and Bell Bay Jackson Water Association
Sewer	Birch Bay Water and Sewer District
Fire	North Whatcom Fire District #21 and Whatcom County Fire District #7 (at Point Whitehorn)
Schools	Blaine School District #503
Parks	Northwest Parks and Recreation District #2

¹ This assumes the underlying zoning – URM6 and UR4 – in the provisional rezone area surrounding the intersection of Blaine and Alderson Roads.

Open Spaces and Green Belts

The Birch Bay UGA is home to Birch Bay State Park located at the south end of the UGA. The UGA has an active parks district, Northwest Parks and Recreation District #2, which is beginning its master planning process. The district spans the boundaries of the Blaine School District. In meetings with NWPRD #2, representatives have expressed a desire to build trail connections throughout the UGA and to neighboring UGAs. The district is actively working with property owners and Whatcom County Parks and Recreation to establish those connections.

UGA Update Process

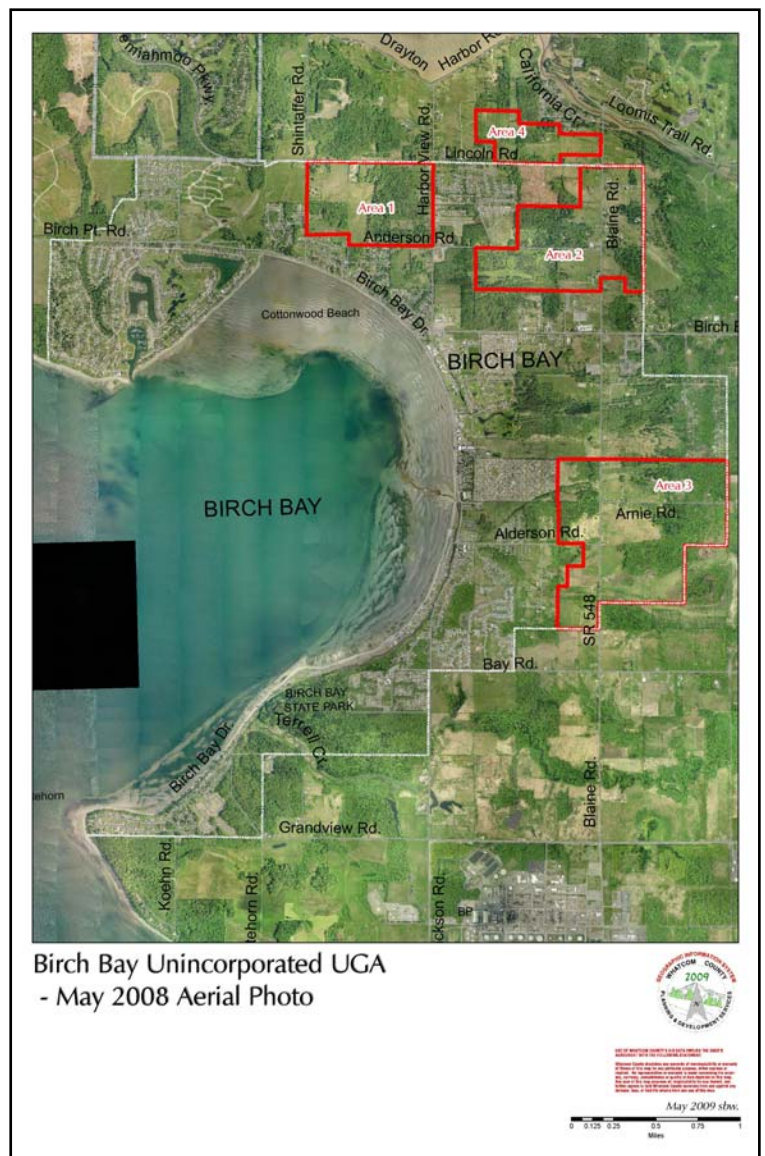
Public Participation

The Birch Bay community, through the Birch Bay Steering Committee, has been very active in the Whatcom 2031 planning process. The County conducted workshops in Birch Bay in January, March and May of 2009 about population growth rates, environmental impact statement scoping, and drafting alternatives. All these workshops were advertised through the Birch Bay listserv and were well attended. Birch Bay residents also took part in the county-wide activities associated with the Whatcom 2031 process.

In addition to public meetings, 4.5% of respondents to a questionnaire distributed during fall 2008 identified themselves as “living in or near” Birch Bay. Members of the community have also submitted written comments and testified at the EIS hearing held in February 2009.

In March, the community worked together to help the County determine an approximate number of people that the UGA could expect to receive by 2031. Generally residents said they agreed with the growth rate in Birch Bay’s Community Plan (2004) and that the growth rate established in that plan should be applied to this process as well.

In May, the community reviewed the results of the Land Capacity Analysis and worked together to analyze 4 areas (see map to the right) that were identified by staff for possible deletion from or addition to the UGA. The participants ranked the areas based on a number of criteria including existing water and sewer service, current land use pattern, existing plans, presence of wetlands, and other criteria.



Proposal

Comprehensive Plan Changes

This community proposal does not change any existing Comprehensive Plan policies or designations. It perpetuates the existing Comprehensive Plan into 2031.

2029/31 Population

In keeping with the community's adopted plan, this proposal identifies the 2029/31 population at 4,329 new residents within the planning period for a total of 9,619 residents. While this is the same growth projection as the existing plan, it should be noted that the existing plan had a planning horizon year of 2022, 9 years less than the new planning horizon year.

This population projection has drawn much criticism from neighboring Blaine and other cities in the county. They suggest that unincorporated UGAs like Birch Bay are not logical places for urban growth and that this growth should be directed first to UGAs with an incorporated city. The county intends to consider this perspective as final proposals are drafted by July 31.

2029/31 Employment

Relative to its population, Birch Bay has very low projected 2029/31 employment – 489 new jobs. This number more than doubles Birch Bay's existing job count (436) and would bring the total employment number to 925.

Blaine serves as the regional job center, providing employment for many working Birch Bay residents. As a result, Birch Bay has a poor jobs/housing balance. Due in large part to its character as a tourist/recreation community coupled with its proximity to Blaine, the ratio of housing to jobs is somewhat reasonable.

UGA Size

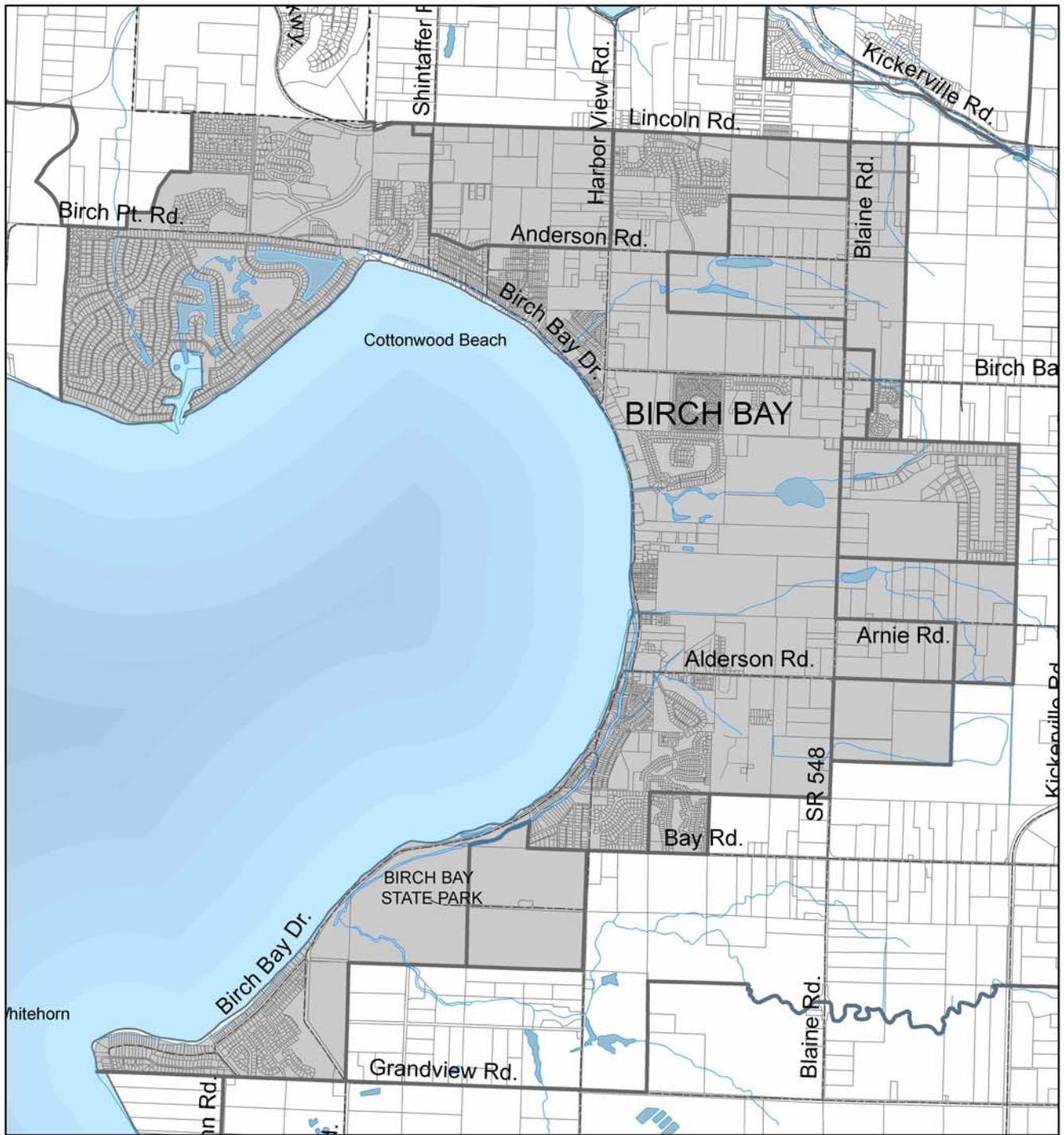
While this proposal does not indicate new geographic boundaries for the Birch Bay UGA, the community did rank four (4) areas for potential deletion from the UGA in May (see map on page 4). Areas 1 and 2 ranked highest, or most desirable to be maintained in the UGA, among the areas under consideration. Area 3 ranked last among areas already in the UGA. Area 4, not currently included in the UGA, was last among all areas. The county could use the results of this ranking exercise to prioritize deletions from the UGA in order to bring the size of the UGA closer to the projected population.

<i>UGA Additions/Subtractions</i>		
1	Existing UGA Size (Total Acres)	4,375
2	Total Acres Added (or Subtracted) to Accommodate Population	0
3	Total Acres Added (or Subtracted) to Accommodate Employment	0
4	Proposed UGA Size (Total Acres)	4,375

Land Capacity Analysis




<i>Residential Land Capacity Analysis Results</i>		
1	Gross Developable Acres	2,352
2	Net Developable Acres Available (after reductions for pending or master planned projects, critical areas, public uses, infrastructure, and market factor)	760
3	Net Developable Acres Needed to Accommodate Population Growth Request	537
4	Surplus (Deficit) in Net Acres	223
5	Population Growth Capacity of UGA request (based on GMCC adopted land supply methodology)	6,010
6	Population Growth Allocation Requested	4,329
7	Surplus (Deficit) in Population	1,681
8	Average Net Density Used in Land Capacity Analysis	5
9	Comments:	

<i>Commercial/Industrial Land Capacity Analysis Results</i>		
1	Gross Developable Acres	141
2	Net Developable Acres Available (after reductions for pending or master planned projects, critical areas, public uses, infrastructure, and market factor)	86
3	Net Developable Acres Needed to Accommodate Employment Growth Request	17
4	Surplus (Deficit) in Net Acres	69
5	Employment Growth Capacity	1,450
6	Employment Growth Allocation Requested	489
7	Surplus (Deficit) in Employment	961
8	Average Floor/Area Ratio Used in Land Capacity Analysis	0.25
9	Comments:	



June 2009

Birch Bay - Urban Growth Area Proposal

-  Proposed UGA Addition
-  Proposed UGA Removal
-  Existing Urban Growth Area

Please Note: There are no proposed changes to the existing UGA Boundary

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