



ANSWERS TO THE MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ANNEXATION

What is annexation?

Annexation is a procedure for bringing unincorporated areas of a county into an adjacent incorporated city. The most common form of annexation is the “petition method,” whereby property owners or residents initiate and sign a petition asking to become part of the City. After an area is annexed, the City becomes the primary provider of local government services.

Who is eligible for annexation?

Property must be located within the Bellingham Urban Growth Area (UGA) in order to be eligible for annexation. (See attached map)

What is the procedure for annexation?

Washington State law governs annexation procedures. The most common procedure for annexation is the 60% petition method, whereby signatures of property owners representing 10% of the acreage within an area are submitted to the City Council in favor of annexation. If the City Council determines that the proposed annexation is in the public interest, it may “initiate” a public process to analyze the area and coordinate with the County and special purpose districts for potential transfer of jurisdiction. The City Council may also choose not to initiate the process or pursue annexation. If the City Council does initiate the process, then proponents are responsible for acquiring additional signatures to represent a majority (50+%) of the acreage **AND** registered voters in order to proceed with the required procedures for annexation. At the conclusion of the public process, the City Council votes to approve or deny the annexation. There is no guarantee of success for simply filing a petition and application for annexation to the City (See PROCEDURES FOR FILING A PETITION FOR ANNEXATION).

Will it cost more or less to be in the City?

While each property owner’s situation is unique and each annexation can be a little different, there is usually a slight decrease in property taxes and some living expenses for property owners upon annexation. The reasons for this may vary, but generally, property owners may save money on the following:

- ◆ Lower fire insurance rates due to a higher level of fire protection available in the City;
- ◆ Elimination of a 50% surcharge for sewer and water existing beyond the City limits;
- ◆ Elimination of a County Road District Levy;
- ◆ Elimination of a County Library District Levy

What services does the City provide to an area that is annexed?

In Bellingham, municipal government services include:

- ◆ Full-time (24-hour) fire protection and emergency medical service;
- ◆ City police service, including animal control;
- ◆ City sewer and water utilities;
- ◆ City street maintenance and improvement;
- ◆ City parks, recreational facilities, and recreation programs;

- ◆ City library system and educational programs;
- ◆ City historic and art museum exhibits;
- ◆ Government and educational community television programming;
- ◆ Urban land use planning;
- ◆ Urban building regulation and inspection;
- ◆ Neighborhood representation; and
- ◆ City Council representation;

City residents are also eligible to vote in all municipal elections, be elected City offices, and to serve on a variety of appointed City boards and commissions.

Garbage collection, recycling, natural gas, electricity, cable television, and telephone are private services and are not affected by annexation. In some Urban Growth Areas, such as Geneva, special purpose districts provide water and sewer and may continue to do so after annexation.

Will I be forced to hook up to City sewer or water upon annexation?

Pre-existing septic systems and wells are allowed in the city unless they are found to be a public health hazard. If septic or well systems are found to be unsafe, the Whatcom County Department of Health or Washington State Department of Ecology will require the owners of failing systems to hook up to City sewer and water.

Will annexation change my zoning and land use?

Whatcom County zoning is applied to the Bellingham Urban Growth Area and usually, upon annexation, the closest City-equivalent zoning is applied and annexed property becomes subject to City development standards. Zoning is not static, however, and it is possible for zoning to change over time.

How will annexation effect growth in my area?

Annexation alone will not effect the rate of future growth in your neighborhood. It is important to understand, however, that the City is an urban setting and urban land uses will continue to develop at urban densities. City development standards are intended to accommodate growth while retaining the quality of life community residents enjoy.

How will annexation affect where my child attends school?

Annexation has no effect school district boundaries, nor does it have any effect on where your child attends school.

Still have more questions?

Please contact a long-range planner at the City Planning Division by calling 360.778.8300, by using our web site www.cob.org/planning, or by visiting our office in City Hall, located at 210 Lottie Street.

*Specific requirements and procedures are explained in the **PROCEDURES FOR FILING A PETITION FOR ANNEXATION** packet, available from the Bellingham Planning Department. Please consult a long-range planner before beginning any work related to annexation.*