



## Permit Center

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## **ANSWERS TO THE MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ANNEXATION**

### **1. What is annexation?**

Washington State law governs annexation procedures. Annexation is a procedure for bringing unincorporated areas of a county into an adjacent incorporated city. The most common form of annexation is the "direct 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.

### **2. Who is eligible for annexation?**

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

### **3. What is the procedure for annexation?**

#### **60% Direct Annexation Petition Method:**

The most common procedure for annexation is the 60% direct petition method, whereby signatures of residents representing not less than 10% of the residents of the area **or** property owners of not less than 10% of the total assessed valuation of the area are filed for annexation. If the City Council initiate the public review process, the proponents are then responsible for acquiring property owner signatures representing 60% of the assessed valuation of the area proposed for annexation.

#### **Alternative Direct Annexation Petition Method:**

A second option available for annexation is the alternative direct petition method. Under this process for annexation signatures of residents representing not less than 10% of the residents of the area **or** property owners of not less than 10% of the acreage of the area are filed for annexation. If the City Council initiates the public review under this method for annexation, the petitioners are then responsible to acquire signatures that represent a majority (50+%) of the property owners acreage and registered voters residing in the area proposed for annexation. If no residents are within the area proposed for annexation, the petition must be signed by property owners of a majority of the acreage.

There is no guarantee that the City Council will initiate the public review process for filing a petition for annexation to the City. Additionally, there is no guarantee that the City Council will approve an annexation proposal based on initiating the review of an annexation proposal. At the conclusion of the public review process, the City Council votes to approve or deny the annexation.

### **4. 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

## **5. What services does the City provide to an area that is annexed?**

In Bellingham, municipal government services include:

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| ◆ Full-time (24-hour) fire protection and emergency medical service; | ◆ City historic and art museum exhibits;                       |
| ◆ City police service, including animal control;                     | ◆ Government and educational community television programming; |
| ◆ City sewer and water utilities;                                    | ◆ Urban land use planning;                                     |
| ◆ City street maintenance and improvement;                           | ◆ Urban building regulation and inspection;                    |
| ◆ City parks, recreational facilities, and recreation programs;      | ◆ Neighborhood representation; and                             |
| ◆ City library system and educational programs;                      | ◆ 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.

## **6. 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.

## **7. 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.

## **8. 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.

## **9. 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](http://www.cob.org/planning), or by visiting the Permit Center in City Hall, located at 210 Lottie Street.