

December 3, 2013

To: The Whatcom County Council
Jack Louws, Whatcom County Executive

From: Kathy Berg, Chair
Birch Bay Steering Committee

RE: A Birch Bay Beach Park and Community Center

It's time to Implement another element of 1977 Shelf Art by addressing the issue of a Birch Bay Beach Park and Community Center. This essential public need must be addressed NOW before it is lost forever. The long held reasoning in such cases is: when the opportunity exists, seize it; and, as all wise men and women know, three of the most important elements are location, location, location. The one, perfect piece of land including 400' of shoreline, located in the heart of Birch Bay, is now available. Whatcom County has tried to acquire this property in the past and all involved agree that now is a chance of a lifetime to create a park that will serve not just the Birch Bay Community but all of Whatcom County and it's many visitors, for all time to come.

It's noted in the 1976 Birch Bay population forecast that the population varies with the seasons, there were:

- about 3,000 permanent residents,
- about 7,000 residents/visitors on a typical summer weekend, and
- about 10,000 residents/visitors on a peak summer weekend.

In 1987 "Average summer traffic volumes can be as high as 60% above the annual average during the summer..."

The forecast for the year 2000 suggested:

- 8,000 permanent residents,
- 32,000 seasonal residents/visitors,
- For a total of 40,000 combined residents/visitors.

The 2010 Birch Bay US Census Designated Place shows:

- 8,413 permanent residents,
- 26.1% of housing is seasonally occupied, highest in the County, and
- The high rate of significant summer population increases continues on typical and peak summer weekends and holidays, especially July 4th.

Whatcom County's Birch Bay UGA Population Allocation for 2016-2036 is:

- 7,737 residents in 2013 (the UGA is smaller than the US CDP)
- 14,511 residents in 2036 for total population growth of 6,414 - almost double

From the Birch Bay Comprehensive Plan of June 1977, mentioned in the 1987 subarea plan and repeated in the Birch Bay Community Plan as adopted in 2004:

Problems and Needs, among others

1. Bicycle paths
2. Control of signs
3. Relieving traffic congestion into and through the Birch Bay Drive area.
4. Pedestrian paths and safe street crossings
5. Public recreational facilities including rest rooms, bath houses, picnic facilities.
6. Protection of the natural beach.
7. Collection and controlled discharge of storm water drainage.
8. A community center.

Recreation Goal Objective Number One reads: Additional area or access with high value for recreation should be obtained before other development makes such action impossible.

- Numbers 5 and 8 above would be addressed by the Birch Bay Beach Park and Community Center.
- Numbers 1 and 3 above are being addressed as opportunity arises as maintenance and repair projects by the Whatcom County Road Engineer and will be further refined with the Birch Bay Drive and Pedestrian Facility Project.
- Number 2 has just been adopted for gateway/way finding signage implementation by the Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Port of Bellingham.
- Numbers 4 and 6 will be addressed by the Shoreline Restoration portion of the Birch Bay Drive and Pedestrian Facility Project which will start engineering and permitting in January 2014 by Whatcom County Public Works.
- Number 7 is being addressed by BBWARM (Birch Bay Watershed and Aquatic Resource Management flood zone district) and will be addressed by the Shoreline Restoration portion of the Birch Bay Drive and Pedestrian Facility Project.

The Conservation Futures Fund, designated for acquiring open space and park lands, as of Nov. 26, 2013 and acknowledged by the Whatcom County Council, was reported to have a balance of \$5.3 million including a \$25,000 set-aside to explore park and open space opportunities. The Conservation Futures levy approved that evening is anticipated to bring in an additional \$1 million in 2014. Simply put, the goal of a Beach Park and Community Center in Birch Bay can be achieved by using a relatively small portion of these funds.

Finally, by 68%, the voters of Birch Bay and Blaine showed their overwhelming support for parks and recreational opportunities by passage of the Northwest Park and Rec District 2 levy over 4 years on November 5, 2013.

The first step is for County Council to order an \$8,000 to \$10,000 feasibility appraisal.

We must strike while the iron is hot or lose out forever.

Special thanks to ZervasGroup for providing the files of founding principal Jim Zervas who served on the 1977 Planning Team

The property in question may be found at

<http://www.century21.com/property/7954-birch-bay-drive-blaine-wa-98230-C2120607154>