

BIRCH BAY INCORPORATION FEASIBILITY STUDY

Survey and Community Meeting Summary: October 12, 2007

In September 2007, Whatcom County and the Birch Bay Incorporation Feasibility Study Committee initiated an assessment of the financial feasibility of incorporation. Whatcom County contracted with Berk & Associates to perform the feasibility study. One component of the Feasibility Study was public outreach, a process that includes community meetings and a general survey of community perspectives.

The goal of an Incorporation Feasibility Study is to provide reliable information—to provide data that will inform the public debate as residents and other stakeholders weigh the relative merits of incorporation. To achieve this goal, it is helpful if the study's authors have a clear understanding of the questions that are on people's minds. The purpose of the first community meeting and survey were to hear what questions the community had about incorporation and what issues related to incorporation were important to the Birch Bay Community. As part of the Incorporation Feasibility Study public outreach process, a second community meeting is scheduled in December to present draft findings.

To advertise the meeting and survey, Whatcom County mailed postcard notices to the owners of all properties within the study area, the Birch Bay UGA—a total of about 5,600 addressees. The community meeting and survey were also advertised in local papers and through the Birch Bay Steering Committee's email listserv.

This document summarizes the information gathered at the first community meeting and through the survey.

COMMUNITY FORUM

On September 24, 2007, over 80 people participated in the first of two public meetings in the Incorporation Feasibility Study process. The meeting was held at the Birch Bay Bible Community Church (7039 Jackson Road). See Attachment A for the community meeting agenda and other materials.

The meeting opened with a brief open house. Participants were asked to review materials that described incorporation, the incorporation process, and the scope and schedule of the Incorporation Feasibility Study. After 30 minutes, Kathy Berg, Chair of the Birch Bay Incorporation Feasibility Study Committee, and Gary Davis, Whatcom County Planning & Development Services Long Range Division Manager, welcomed participants and thanked them for their participation. Meghann Glavin of Berk & Associates, the consultants hired to conduct the Incorporation Feasibility Study, overviewed the agenda and discussed the purposes of the meeting: (1) to share the objectives of the Feasibility Study and (2) to hear the community's questions. Brett Sheckler, also of Berk & Associates, described the analytic approach to the Study. The remainder of the meeting was a community question and answer period.

Participant's questions focused on the implications of incorporation on property and other taxes; possible changes in service providers and levels of service; whether or not a City of Birch Bay would have a large enough tax base to support services; timing of the incorporation and where the community is currently in the process; and concern that part-time residents, property owners, business owners, and full-time Canadian residents would not be able to vote in an incorporation election.

SURVEY RESULTS

The survey was available online at www.berkandassociates.com/survey.html from September 1, 2007 through September 30, 2007. Paper copies were also available upon request and at the September 24 community meeting. See Attachment B for the survey instrument.

402 community members responded to the survey. Of that number 386 (96%) completed the survey.

The community survey was *not* meant to gauge whether the community was for or against incorporation. The goal of the Incorporation Feasibility Study is to provide objective information about the *fiscal viability* of a city. With this information in hand, it will be up to the community to debate whether incorporation is a good idea or not. The purpose of the survey was to learn more about the questions that are on community members' minds and to get a general understanding of where community members stand in terms of what services and issues are most important (and therefore need to be discussed in greater depth in the Feasibility Study report).

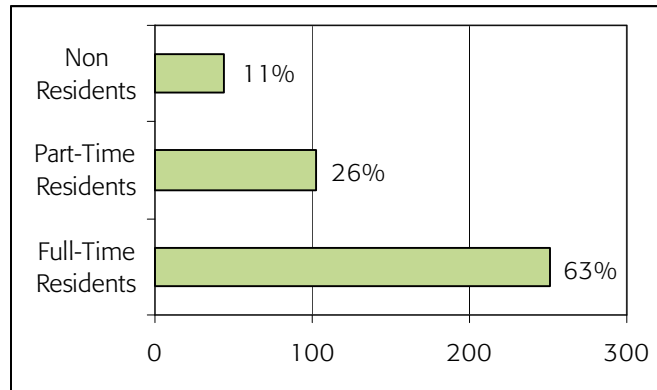
Generally, the majority of survey respondents are not highly engaged in the incorporation debate. However, respondents report that control over setting taxes and control over how local dollars are spent are the most important issues facing Birch Bay. Respondents also feel local control over land use decisions is important. Respondents are more focused on public utilities like water and sewer services, and on life-and-safety services like police and fire and emergency medical services than on community services like recreation, community and economic development, and neighborhood programs.

The following pages describe the survey results in more detail.

Respondents' Resident Status

- 354 (89%) respondents live full- or part-time in Birch Bay.
- When not in Birch Bay, part-time residents live mostly in the Seattle area, in Vancouver and throughout British Columbia, and in Bellingham.
 - Of 114 respondents that are part-time residents, 7 live outside of Washington or British Columbia the rest of the year.

**Exhibit 1
Respondent Resident Status (398 Respondents)**

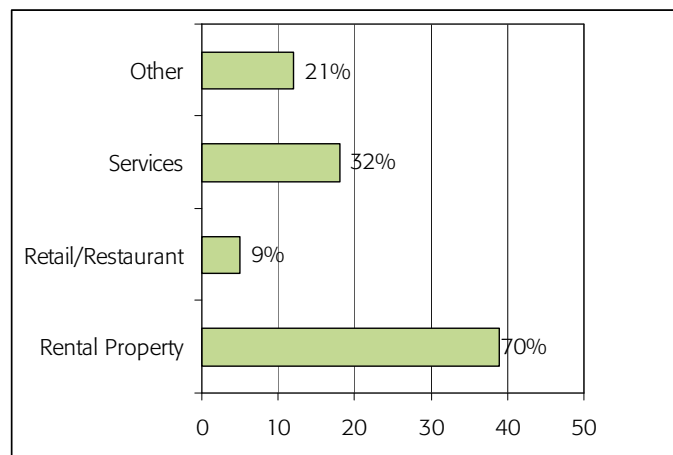


- More than 97% of respondents who live in Birch Bay own their home in Birch Bay.
- Nearly 76% live in single-family homes; 15% live in mobile homes.
- 32% have lived in Birch Bay (including part-time) for more than 11 years; 30% have lived in Birch Bay for 3 to 5 years.
 - Only 4% have lived in Birch Bay less than 1 year.

Respondents' Businesses

- 67 (17%) respondents own a business in Birch Bay.
- 50% of respondents who own a business in Birch Bay have owned that business for 3 to 5 years; 26% have owned their business for over 11 years.
- Nearly 70% of respondents who own a business own rental properties in Birch Bay.

**Exhibit 2
Types of Businesses Owned by Respondents (56 Respondents)**

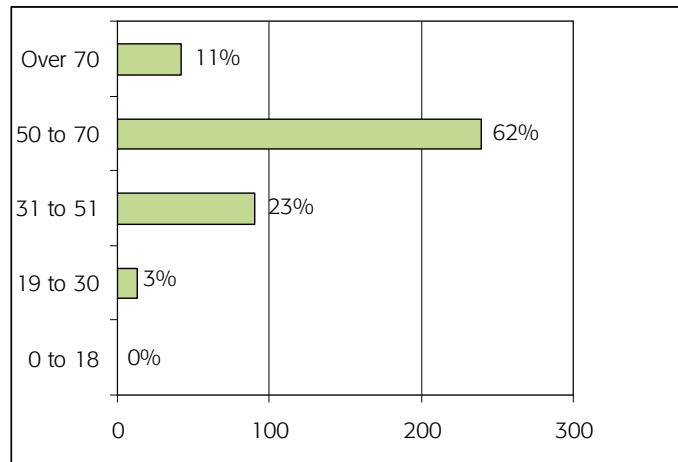


Note: Each respondent was allowed multiple responses

Demographics of Respondents

- 86% of respondents are United States Citizens.
- The majority of survey respondents were between 50 and 70 (62%); no survey respondents were under 18.

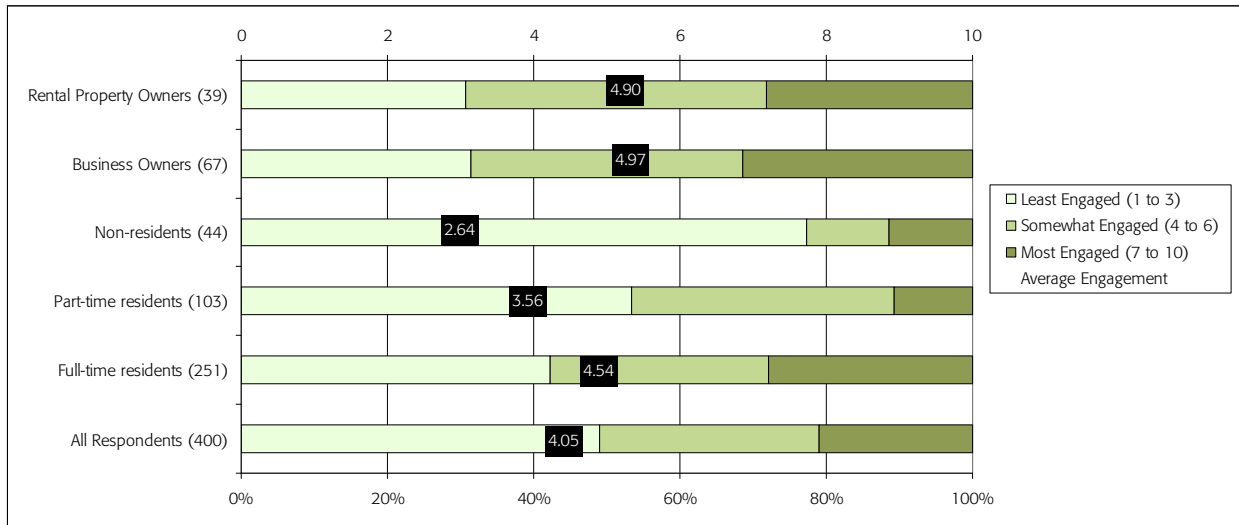
**Exhibit 3
Age Range of Survey Respondents, (384 Respondents)**



Engagement in the Incorporation Debate

- 105 (26%) respondents reported they were not engaged at all in the incorporation debate (1 on a scale of 1 to 10).
 - 25 (6%) said they were very engaged.
- Business owners and full-time residents are, on average, the most engaged in the incorporation debate; Non-residents are the least engaged.

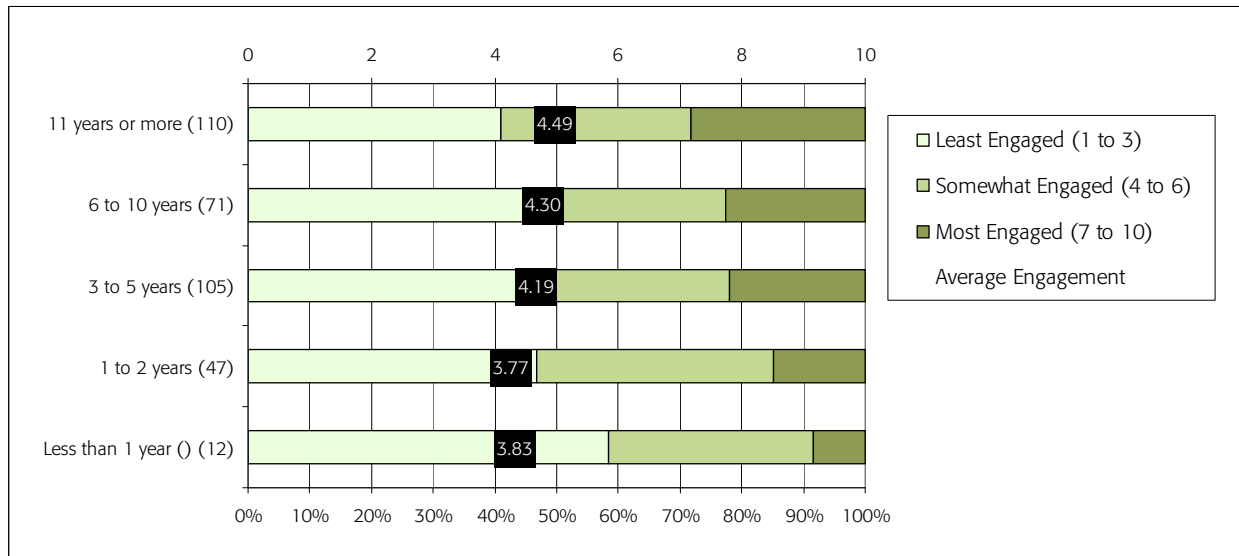
Exhibit 4
Engagement in the Incorporation Debate (402 Respondents)



Note: Numbers in parenthesis indicate how many people responded in each of these categories

- Respondents who have lived in Birch Bay 11 years or more are the most engaged in the incorporation debate.

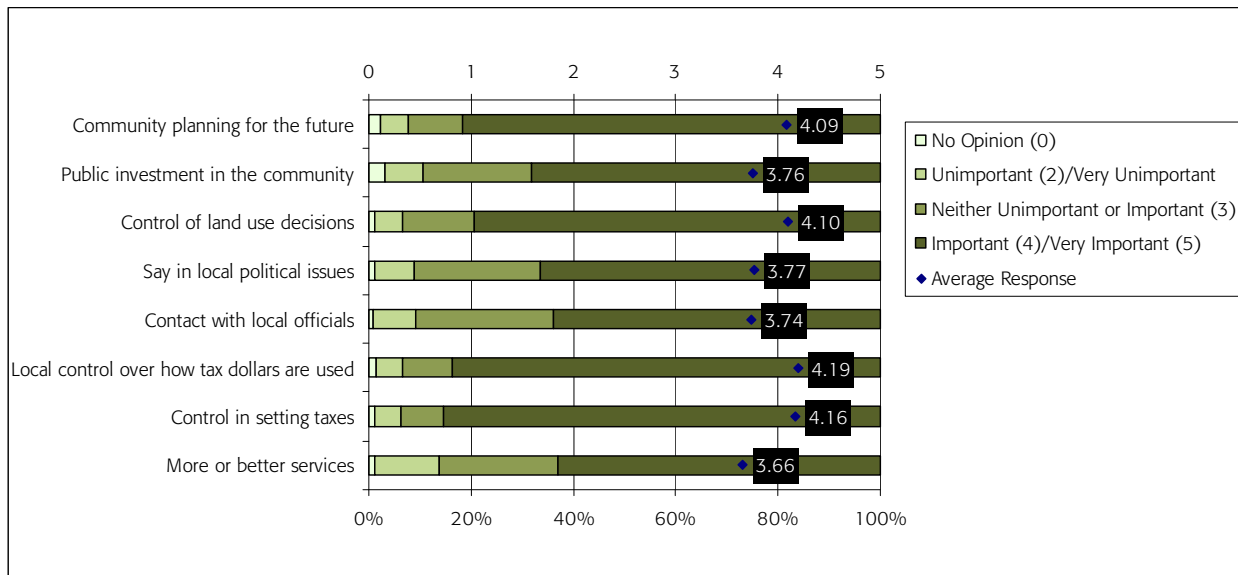
Exhibit 5
Engagement by Length of Residency in Birch Bay (345 Respondents)



Importance of Issues Related to Incorporation

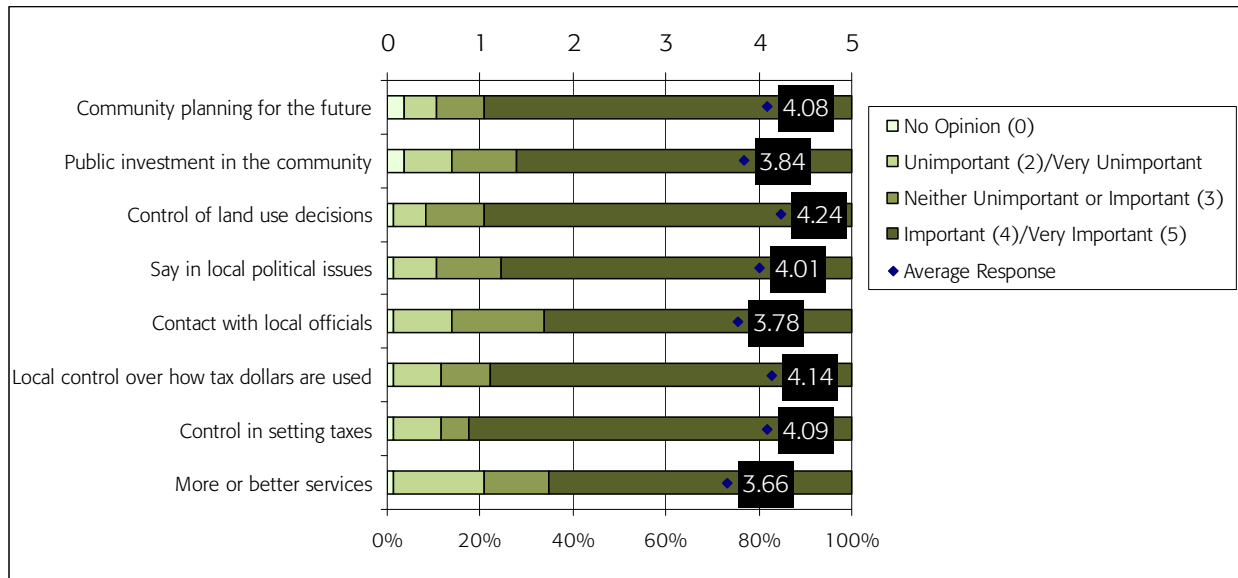
- The most important issues for survey respondents are control over setting taxes and local control over how tax dollars are used.
 - 187 respondents (47%) felt that local control over how tax dollars are used is “very important.”
 - The importance of this issue is also reflected in qualitative feedback provided by many survey respondents. Many respondents asked questions about how incorporation would impact property and other taxes.
- Generally, full-time residents, part-time residents, and business owners rank the importance of issues related to incorporation similarly.
- However, control over land use decisions is a more important issue for part-time residents than for full-time residents.
 - 86% of part-time residents said control over land use decisions was very important or important.

**Exhibit 6
Importance of Issues Related to Incorporation (402 Respondents)**



- Control over land use decisions is also an important issue for respondents who are highly engaged in the incorporation debate.
 - 58% (50) of highly engaged respondents said it was “very important.”

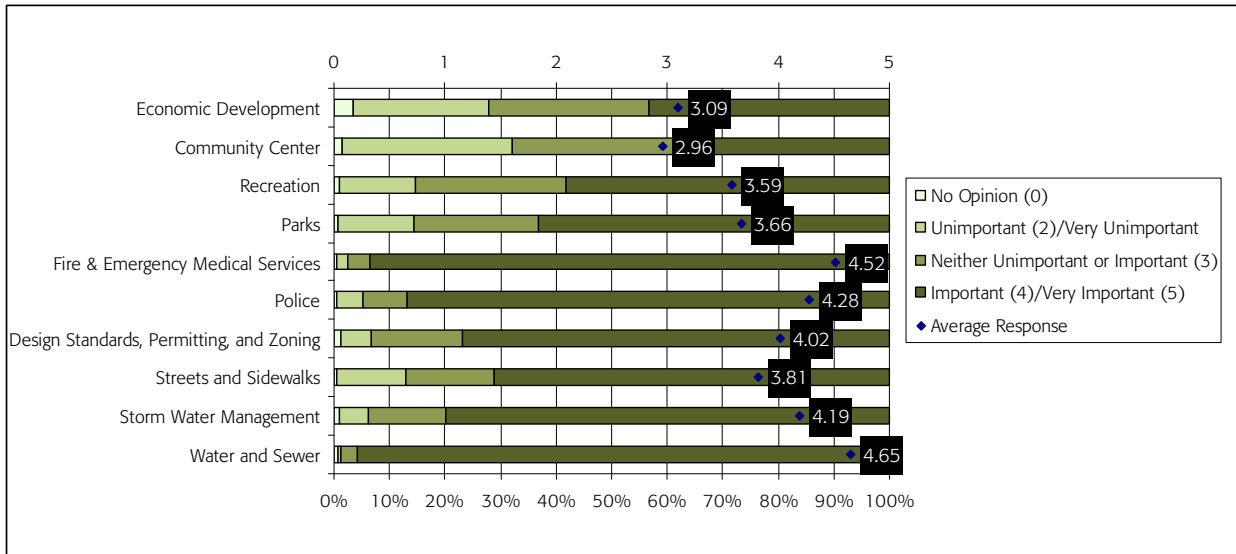
**Exhibit 7
Importance of Issues for Respondents
who are Highly Engaged in the Incorporation Debate (86 Respondents)**



Public Services and Satisfaction

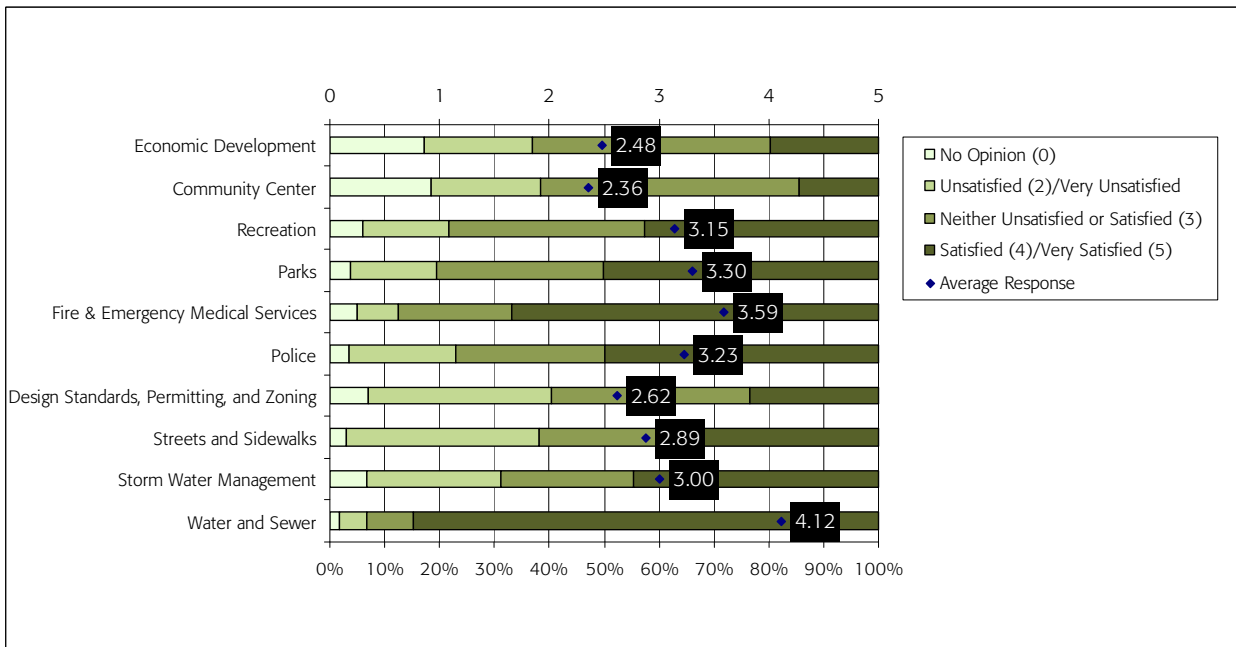
- Water and Sewer, Fire and Emergency Medical Services, and Police are the most universally important public services to respondents.
- A Community Center and Community and Economic Development and Neighborhood Programs were very important to a smaller share of respondents.
 - However, part-time residents feel that a community center is more important than full time residents; 41% of part-time residents feel that a community center is important or very important compared with 16% of full-time residents.
- Other public services that respondents considered important were: post office, library, and schools.
- Respondents also noted that Birch Bay needs more retail, especially a grocery store.

**Exhibit 8
Importance of Services (402 Respondents)**



- Generally, the public services that are most important to residents are the public services they are the most satisfied with.
 - Respondents were most satisfied with water and sewer service and least satisfied with community center.
- Nearly 50% of respondents who are highly engaged in the incorporation debate were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the current levels of service for Design Standards, Permitting, and Zoning.

**Exhibit 9
Satisfaction with Current Levels of Service (402 Respondents)**



Questions and Feedback for the Birch Bay Incorporation Feasibility Study Committee

The following summarizes qualitative feedback to questions 22 and 23, "What questions do you have about incorporation and please share anything else you would like the Birch Bay Incorporation Study Committee to know?" Comments in italics are quotes from survey respondents that are representative of many comments.

- Respondents were curious about the implications of incorporation on taxes. They were also concerned that a city of Birch Bay may not have a large enough tax base to support local service needs.
 - *"What will be the effect on our taxation rate?"*
 - *"Would [incorporation] mean an increase in taxes?"*
 - *"I am concerned about cost and if we can afford a quality city"*
- Respondents would also like understand the potential benefits of incorporating versus the potential costs.
 - *"What are the benefits of Incorporation? What are the drawbacks of Incorporation?"*
 - *"What is [incorporation] going to cost me and what will it gain for me?"*
 - *"How will incorporation benefit Birch Bay?"*
- Some respondents were appreciative of the opportunity to provide feedback; others felt the survey and community meeting were unfair.
 - *"Thank you for the opportunity to respond!"*
 - *"My husband and I wish you good luck with this very important project."*
 - *"This survey appears to be 100% slanted to incorporation and is not objective."*
 - *"There are still a number of Canadian residents that own property in Birch Bay...holding a meeting at 7PM on a work night, with a potential one to two hour line-up at the border...will preclude many of them participating in any such discussions even though the decisions made will definitely have an impact on them."*
- Some survey respondents were concerned that not everyone who should have a voice would be able to vote on incorporation, specifically part-time residents and business owners.
 - *"Unfortunately a number of people living here, whether it be full or part time, can not vote on this issue."*
- Some survey respondents elected to share their current perspectives on incorporation with the Study Committee. Some respondents are pro-incorporation, others are against incorporation.

Attachment A

Community Meeting Materials

BIRCH BAY INCORPORATION FEASIBILITY STUDY

Community Forum

Sponsored by the Birch Bay Incorporation Study Committee

Birch Bay Bible Community Church

September 24, 2007: 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm

A G E N D A

7:00 Open House

7:30 Welcome and Introductions

Kathy Berg, Chair

7:35 Overview of Tonight's Agenda

Meghann Glavin, Berk & Associates

7:40 About the Incorporation Feasibility Study

Brett Sheckler,

- Elements, process, and timeline

Berk & Associates

- Question and Answer

8:15 (*Optional*) Small Groups: Current Services & Community Needs

- Discussion of current levels of services
- Community needs assessment

8:45 Summary and Next Steps

M. Glavin

9:00 Adjourn

Attachment B

Survey Instrument

1. Birch Bay Incorporation Feasibility Study Survey

1. In general, how important are the following public services to you in the Birch Bay area?

	Very Important	Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	No opinion
Water and Sewer	100	100	100	100	100	100
Storm Water Management	100	100	100	100	100	100
Streets and Sidewalks	100	100	100	100	100	100
Design Standards, Permitting, and Zoning	100	100	100	100	100	100
Police	100	100	100	100	100	100
Fire & Emergency Medical Services	100	100	100	100	100	100
Parks	100	100	100	100	100	100
Recreation	100	100	100	100	100	100
Community Center	100	100	100	100	100	100
Economic and Community Development, Neighborhood Programs	100	100	100	100	100	100

2. What other public services are important to you?

3. How satisfied are you with the following services currently provided in Birch Bay?

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied or Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied	No opinion
Water and Sewer	100	100	100	100	100	100
Storm Water Management	100	100	100	100	100	100
Streets and Sidewalks	100	100	100	100	100	100
Design Standards, Permitting, and Zoning	100	100	100	100	100	100
Police	100	100	100	100	100	100
Fire & Emergency Medical Services	100	100	100	100	100	100
Parks	100	100	100	100	100	100
Recreation	100	100	100	100	100	100

Birch Bay Incorporation Feasibility Study

Community Center	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Economic and Community Development, Neighborhood Programs	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

4. What other services, government functions, or public investments are needed in the Birch Bay community?

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how engaged are you in the Birch Bay incorporation debate?

	Not engaged at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very Engaged 10
Incorporation Issue	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

6. How important are the following issues to you?

	Very Important	Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	No opinion
More or better services	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Control in setting taxes	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Local control over how tax dollars are used	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Contact with local officials	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Say in local political issues	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Control of land use decisions	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Public investment in the community	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Community planning for the future	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

7. What other issues do you consider important in the debate about incorporation?

2. About You

1. Do you live in Birch Bay?

I live in Birch Bay year round.

I live in Birch Bay part of the year.

I do not live in Birch Bay.

Other (please specify)

3. About You (continued)

1. What is the address of your residence in Birch Bay?

(If you provide an address, that information will only be used to assign your responses to a neighborhood in the Birch Bay community. After the analyst assigns your responses to a neighborhood, the address information will not be used or shared.)

2. If Birch Bay is not your permanent year-round address, where else do you live?

3. Do you rent or own your residence in Birch Bay?

Own

Rent

Other (please specify)

4. Please select the type of home in which you live in Birch Bay...

Single-family house (unattached to other houses)

Duplex

Townhome

Condominium

Apartment

Mobile Home

Other (please specify)

5. How long have you lived (including part time) in Birch Bay?

4. About You (continued)

1. Do you own a business in Birch Bay (including rental property)?

Yes

No

Other (please specify)

5. About your business

1. What is the address of your business in Birch Bay?

(If you provide an address, that information will only be used to assign your responses to a neighborhood in the Birch Bay community. After the analyst assigns your responses to a neighborhood, the address information will not be used or shared. Your responses will not be associated with your business.)

2. What type of business or businesses do you own? (Check all that apply)

- Rental properties
- Retail/restaurant
- Services (i.e. Legal, Salon, Auto, etc.)

Other (please specify)

3. How long have you owned a business in Birch Bay?

6. About You (continued)

1. Are you a United States Citizen?

Yes

No

2. What age group are you in?

3. How did you hear about this survey?

Newspaper article

Postcard mailing

Poster in the community

Friend/Family/Neighbor

Other (please specify)

4. If you would like to receive email updates on the Birch Bay Incorporation Study, please enter your email below. Your email address will not be associated with your responses to this survey.

7. Questions for the Birch Bay Incorporation Feasibility Committee

1. What questions do you have about incorporation?

2. Please share anything else you would like the Birch Bay Incorporation Study Committee to know.

Thank you for participating in the Birch Bay Incorporation Feasibility Survey. We hope to see you at the first public meeting on September 4 at 7 pm at the Birch Bay Bible Community Church. If you have any questions about the study, survey, or public meeting email birchbay@berkandassociates.com or call (360) 676-6707 ext. 50686.