

# **North Highline Annexation Initiative Public Involvement Report Spring, 2006**

## **Summary**

In the spring of 2006, King County solicited public comments regarding the proposed annexation of the unincorporated area of North Highline into the adjacent cities of Seattle and/or Burien.

This public involvement report describes components of King County's public outreach, which included a direct mailing to area households, meetings with community groups, media releases, and four public meetings. The report also summarizes feedback from the public.

Here are the key findings for each option presented to the public during the outreach effort:

### **Option A (All of North Highline annexed to Seattle)**

People who favored this option said they believed that Seattle, with its much larger tax base and experience in social services, would be able to provide superior fire, police, emergency, and social services. Those who favored annexation to Seattle spoke favorably of the City of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods, and saw advantages in being associated with a larger, more mature city. In their view, Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods would be especially helpful in maintaining North Highline's identity, as it has helped 39 Seattle neighborhoods to maintain theirs. In the area of taxes and property values, those favoring annexation Option A say that Seattle's larger tax base means that North Highline residents will pay similar or lower taxes than currently being assessed by King County. Many felt that incorporation into Seattle would increase their property values, which one respondent expressed by saying, "Seattle is a prestige address."

Respondents opposed to Option A generally expressed fear that North Highline would be "swallowed up" by Seattle and lose its identity. They expressed concerns that tax revenues would not be used wisely, citing recent news stories about the Seattle monorail and the Seattle library system. They wondered whether Seattle is too large to be managed properly. Although school district boundaries are not contiguous with city boundaries, numerous respondents stated that annexation might mean that North Highline School District schools would be annexed into the Seattle School District if the North Highline area is annexed to Seattle. These respondents worry about losing control of local schools, and therefore expressed an interest in annexing to Burien, where the Highline School District administrative offices are located.

### **Option B (All of North Highline annexed to Burien)**

People who favored this option repeatedly emphasized the “suburban” and even “rural” nature of the North Highline area, and expressed a desire to continue that status. Those who favored annexation to Burien expressed the common sentiment that the North Highline area would “have a voice” in its own future if this option were chosen. They feel that Burien understands the North Highline area better because it is a smaller city and has similar demographics. For example, one respondent said that residents of North Highline could be elected to the Burien city council, while doubting that the same opportunity would be available if the area is annexed to Seattle. In addition, those favoring annexation to Burien, which contracts for fire and police services with local fire districts and the King County Sheriff’s office, expressed strong satisfaction with those services and want them to continue. Respondents specifically praised the Sheriff’s efforts to combat drug activities in the area, and want that effort to continue. In the area of taxes, those favoring annexation to Burien often stated that money would be better managed by a smaller city.

Those who opposed Option B questioned the City of Burien’s ability to annex “an area its same size” while also developing its own Town Center plan. They fear that the White Center business district and the North Highline residential area might be forgotten by Burien planners. They expressed concerns about Burien being a “younger” city, and questioned whether the City of Burien is financially stable.

### **Option C (North Highline split between Seattle and Burien along 116<sup>th</sup>)**

People who favored this option cited many of the reasons given for and against both options A and B, but did feel that this was an acceptable compromise. People who opposed this option felt strongly that the North Highline area should not be divided.

### **Option D (North Highline between Seattle and Burien, with Shorewood, Salmon Creek and Boulevard Park being annexed to Burien)**

Again, people who favored this option felt that it was an acceptable compromise while expressing many of the sentiments expressed by those favoring or opposing Options A and B. People who opposed this option felt strongly that the North Highline area should not be divided and, in addition, opposed annexing Shorewood to Burien.

### **Option E (Respondents were asked to draw their own dividing line)**

While this option drew a number of interesting responses, the most common was a dividing line drawn along the north-south SR509 corridor. Under this scenario, areas to the west would be incorporated into Seattle and areas to the east would be annexed into Burien.

**No selection**

Many respondents did not declare a choice when submitting their comment sheet. These respondents said they came to the meetings to learn more about annexation and to comment about their concerns, but said they were not yet ready to decide between the options or about annexation itself.

## **Outreach Activities**

On May 1, 2006 King County mailed approximately 9,000 copies of a four-page newsletter to all households and property owners in the North Highline area. The newsletter featured an invitation to four public open houses scheduled for May 13, May 16, May 17 and May 23. The newsletter also provided readers with a history of previous actions related to annexation, a timeline for the annexation process, and general information about the annexation process. In addition to the direct mailing, copies were placed at local libraries and distributed through community organizations.

All newsletters provided contact information for Spanish and Vietnamese speakers in those languages. In addition, King County printed 300 copies of the newsletter in Spanish and 300 copies in Vietnamese and these were distributed through community organizations.

News releases to all regional, local and special language newspapers in the area provided additional information to the public. King County established a web site for this project.

On Saturday, May 13, over 120 community members attended the first of four public meetings regarding annexation. On May 16, 65 community members attended the meeting; on May 17, 55 attended; and on May 23, over 70 attended the meeting, for a total of at least 320 attendees at the four meetings. Attendees identified their home location by putting a star on a map of the area. This map demonstrated that residents from the entire area, and Burien, attended each of the four meetings.

At the meetings, community members gave comments by speaking to a court reporter, by writing comments on post-it-notes for placement on a large plot line map, by filling out a comment sheet, or by speaking to any of the numerous County, city, utility, service and community organization staff members available. Attendees were provided with additional comment sheets for distribution to neighbors who could not attend. King County also received comments by phone and by e-mail.

## **Feedback**

By March 25, 2006 King County had received 182 comment sheets from individuals. In addition, residents of the Boulevard Park area submitted a petition asking that Boulevard Park be kept together as a neighborhood and annexed to Burien. Six comments were given to the court reporter, fourteen comments were posted on the map, one comment was received by phone and four comments were received by e-mail.

**APPENDICES** (For copies of appendices, email [annexation@metrokc.gov](mailto:annexation@metrokc.gov))

- Comment Sheet Report
- E-Mails
- Phone Log
- Post-It-Notes Comments
- Testimony to Court Reporter
- Boulevard Park Petition
- Newsletter