

## Council Corner: Somerset Community Association Newsletter

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By Jennifer Robertson

One question I often get from people who live in and around South Bellevue is about whether or when Bellevue plans to annex the Eastgate area. This comes from the people who live in that neighborhood who would like Bellevue services (and our lower property taxes) and from Bellevue residents who would like to see a sidewalk built so that pedestrians can safely walk from Tyee Middle School to the Newport Way Library or South Bellevue Community Center.

The Eastgate area, along with the neighborhoods of Hilltop/Horizon View and Tamara Hills are all located outside Bellevue City limits in unincorporated King County but are within Bellevue's "Potential Annexation Area" or PAA. These unincorporated communities are surrounded by Bellevue and have been within the City's PAA for decades. King County has difficulty servicing these areas and would like Bellevue to annex them.

It has been the City's annexation policy since 1979 to "expeditiously" annex the balance of the PAA as residents or property owners make annexation requests. The policy question has always been *when*, not if, annexation should take place.

Bellevue will annex these areas when the residents present the requisite petitions to the City. The Direct Petition Annexation method is only one way in which the city can commence annexation of an unincorporated area, but in this case it is the method that the City prefers. At Council direction, city staff will be available to work with the PAA residents in each of the three areas on the Petition process.

One reason to assist in annexation efforts now is that there is a state statute that will allow the City to make up operating budget gaps that result from annexations. This works by crediting a share of state sales tax revenue to those costs for a period of ten years. This is not a new or added tax. It reduces the state's share of the revenue, credits it to the City instead, and is annexation-specific. This is important because these PAAs will create a deficit to the City's budget upon annexation. This means that the revenues generated in these areas are less than the costs to provide services. This deficit is estimated to be \$1.11 million per year. Thus the ten-year state sales tax credit becomes an integral part of the annexation financial plan because it potentially makes the City "whole" with respect to operating costs for the ten-year period following annexation. The state statute that provided this benefit is scheduled to expire at the end of 2014, making it very timely to work towards annexation now.

Bellevue is also concerned about King County budget cuts affecting our community. As King County continues to cut services, including law enforcement, the unincorporated areas lack of services may begin to erode the quality of life we experience as Bellevue citizens. The county parks we visit will not be as well maintained, police and fire services will be reduced and regional infrastructure (like the Newport Way sidewalk) will not be funded. Bellevue's assuming

the governance of these areas will ensure that our current neighboring communities don't bear the brunt of these budget difficulties thus maintaining quality of life for all of us in South Bellevue.

There are many steps in this complex process; however, I believe the time is right to do this now. If the residents of these areas are ready and willing to annex to Bellevue, then I will welcome them. I look forward to the time when all residents of the South Bellevue area will truly be Bellevue residents. And I also look forward to promoting a Newport Way sidewalk project as one of the first neighborhood projects for this area once annexation is complete.

If you have an opinion about the budget or any other city issue, I would like to hear from you. Please email me at [j.robertson@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:j.robertson@bellevuewa.gov) or call me at 425-516-5877.

*Jennifer is a member of the Bellevue City Council. She is the Council Liaison to the Parks Board, Library Board, Bellevue School Board and to the I-90/Eastgate Citizen's Advisory Committee. She also serves on the Puget Sound Regional Council Growth Management Planning Board and the King County Growth Management Planning Council Executive Committee and Board.*