

Annexation progress for residents in White Center and broader North Highline

Proposed annexation boundaries have been set for the cities of Seattle and Burien. On December 4, 2008, King County, the cities of Burien and Seattle, and Fire Districts 2 and 11 in King County agreed on a memorandum of understanding (Memorandum of Understanding) between their service delivery jurisdictions in North Highline.

Annexation is how an unincorporated area becomes part of a city. The Memorandum of Understanding lays out agreed upon policy principles and specific activities to help with North Highline's transition from unincorporated to city status, and to ensure that fire and safety services are not jeopardized by any annexation proposals.

The Memorandum of Understanding is not an Interlocal Agreement for Annexation and does not allow for "annexation by interlocal agreement." The Memorandum establishes the framework for how the cities of Burien and Seattle, King County and the fire districts will work together to ensure a timely annexation process for North Highline. The mediated agreement presumes that North Highline voters will make the final decision on whether or not to annex.

As outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding, Burien and Seattle must each file an annexation proposal with the Washington State Boundary Review Board, which also takes public testimony. If the proposal is approved by the Boundary Review Board, the voters of North Highline would vote on annexation.

The proposed memorandum of understanding had two goals: To remove the obstacles that stop both Burien and Seattle from making annexation proposals to the voters of North Highline, and to resolve the issues that were identified through the boundary review board process initiated by the City of Burien this past summer. Issues included:

- Fire and Life Safety Services Protected — In the event of annexation, Burien, Seattle, King County and the Fire Districts all agree to work collaboratively to maintain the level of fire and life safety services to North Highline communities and neighborhoods of North Burien, Arbor Heights and urban unincorporated areas of South Park.
- Agreement to Burien's Proposed Annexation Boundary through minor adjustment — Many of the stated concerns with Burien's proposed annexation boundary are resolved with a small adjustment that maintains Fire District 11 Headquarters outside of the area to be proposed for annexation by the City of Burien.
- Agreement to coordinated phasing of Annexation Election Proposals for consideration by North Highline residents — The Memorandum of Understanding recognizes that there is broad diversity of opinions and preferences in the North Highline communities regarding annexation and acknowledges both cities represent reasonable governance alternatives. The Memorandum of Understanding supports Burien's proposal for annexation election for the southern portion of North Highline and Seattle's proposal for an annexation election for the northern portion of North Highline.

- Agreement that both Seattle and Burien should have access to the same level of state funding if either city is able to move forward with annexation of White Center and the northern portion of Boulevard Park — Both cities acknowledge that the cost of serving this area (“Area Y”) is greater than the cost of serving the southern area proposed for annexation to Burien (“Area X”). The Memorandum of Understanding acknowledges this through the agreement to have all parties work collaboratively to amend the annexation state sales tax credit law so that both Burien and Seattle would have access to up to \$5 million if either annex Area Y.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding, all parties agree not to interfere with any annexation election attempt. This is intended to underscore both Burien and Seattle’s commitment to having a decision to annex based on a voters’ wishes.

The Memorandum of Understanding supports legislation that provides funding parity to either Burien or Seattle if one of them annexes the northern portion of the North Highline area (White Center, Top Hat, Arbor Heights, and unincorporated South Park). The \$5 million limit means Burien or Seattle will get up to \$5 million to provide municipal services to the residents in the area.