

# CITY OF FAIRWOOD INCORPORATION QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

## 1. Where is Fairwood?

This suburban community of 7 square miles is located in King County, Washington, on the south ridge of the Cedar River. It is southeast of the City of Renton, northeast of the City of Kent and west of the City of Maple Valley. The main intersection for the new city would be 140th Ave SE and SE Petrovitsky Road.

## 2. What is the population of the area that can be incorporated into a City of Fairwood?

The June 2006 population was 23,600. Since 2000, the population in the area has increased by an average of 540 residents per year. Annual population growth is expected to slow to an increase of 275 residents per year, as the area approaches residential build-out. Median income for the residents of the area is higher than that of King County as a whole, according to a study for the Fairwood Library.

## 3. What school districts would be served by the City of Fairwood?

The Fairwood community is served by two school districts: Kent and Renton. The incorporation of the City of Fairwood will bring no changes to the services provided by these school districts.

## 4. What type of neighborhoods would be in the City of Fairwood?

There is a wide variety of housing available in the Fairwood community, including single family, condominiums, apartments and mobile homes. In 2005, the average price for a home sold in the Fairwood area is around \$256,000 for existing homes. New homes are priced higher. In 2006 the average price of homes increased by 8% to 9%.

## 5. What Parks would be within or near to the City of Fairwood?

Residents are blessed by easy access to regional parks and open space within or adjacent to the Fairwood community. These regional parks remain under the control of King County:

- Boulevard Lane Park
- Cedar River Regional Park
- Cedar River Trail
- Cavanaugh Pond Natural Area
- Lake Youngs Trail
- McGarvey Park Open Space
- Petrovitsky Park
- Soos Creek Trail
- Soos Creek Park
- Spring Lake / Lake Desire Park

Only one smaller park will be transferred from King County to become the responsibility of the city to maintain.

- Lake Youngs Park

A number of neighborhood parks are maintained by home owner associations, for the benefit of their residents.

## 6. How is Fairwood served by transportation?

Petrovitsky Road is the main east-west route. It provides easterly access to State Highway 18 and the City of Maple Valley. Traveling westbound, it provides access to the Fred Meyer shopping center at Benson (SR518), Valley Medical Center, SR 167, to the Green River Valley (cities of Kent, Renton and Tukwila).

140th Avenue SE is the main north-south route. It provides northerly access to Renton - Maple Valley Highway (SR169), Interstate 405 and the City of Renton. Traveling southbound, it provides access to the City of Kent.

King County Metro provides three bus routes (101, 148 and 155) to and from the Fairwood community.

## INCORPORATION DETAILS

### 7. Can you provide a brief history of Fairwood?

The Fairwood area was first settled in the late 1880s. Early occupations were farming, ranching and coal mining.

Coal mining began on the Black River, near Tukwila and Renton, as early as 1853. By the 1870s large amounts of coal were being produced from mines in Newcastle, Renton and Talbot (near the present day Valley General Hospital). As early as 1870, Martin Cavanaugh discovered coal in the area now bordered by 196th Avenue SE and the Maple Valley Highway just below Cedar Mountain. A railroad was built up the Cedar River Valley and by 1884 James M. Colman began to mine the Cedar Mountain area. The Lake Youngs coal mine was located where Petrovitsky Park and Woodside is today. The Fire King Mine was located near what is known today as the Candlewood Ridge and Fairwood Greens.

The first school in the area was opened on November 8, 1885, near the Elliott farm. From 1906 to 1968, the Elliott Dairy Farm was in operation. Near the farm, "Elliott Station" was the name of a stop on the railway owned by the Pacific Coast Coal Company.

The Fairwood Golf course was completed in 1967. Residential housing projects at Fairwood Greens, Fairwood West and Fairwood Crest began in 1968. Lindbergh High School opened in 1973.

For more reading on the history of the area, visit the Fairwood Library and read the Chapter 13 (Coal) in the [History of King County](#).

### 8. Where would a City of Fairwood rank among cities in the State of Washington?

The June 2006 population was 23,600. The state website for cities shows there are 281 cities in Washington, and Fairwood would be the 38th largest city in the state, between the City of Sea-Tac and the City of Bainbridge. Fairwood's population would be in the top 14% of the cities in the State of Washington.

Median income for the residents of the area is higher than that of King County as a whole, according to a study for the Fairwood Library.

### 1. Why does Fairwood have to change from a urban unincorporated area with governance by King County?

In 1990, the Growth Management Act was passed by the State Legislature. In response, King County developed a Comprehensive Plan. These plans encourage all unincorporated areas within King County's Urban Growth Boundary to pursue incorporated status through either incorporation or annexation, with the rationale that cities are the most appropriate local government for providing services. (See RCW 36.70A.110)

### 2. How soon must the area be incorporated or annexed?

King County's objective is to change the status of Fairwood in the 2005-2007 time frame. Fairwood is the largest unincorporated area in the county to incorporate or annex.

### 3. Why incorporate?

We can't stay unincorporated in King County, and we believe that incorporating into a City of Fairwood is the best way to govern our area. This election will be our one chance to vote on having a governing structure that will have local government making, local policy making, and local spending control. Fairwood would be the 38th largest city (out of 281) in the State - between Sea-Tac and Bainbridge. Also, Fairwood's population would be in the top 14% of all Washington cities. Not to mention - we have the opportunity to change the maps! - to add our 'dot' as the City of Fairwood to all future maps of Washington. We would be making history!

### 4. What happens if incorporation is voted down?

An opposition group is for annexation. At a Renton Council meeting on May 15, 2006, Mr. J. Paul Blake spoke of plans to petition the city of Renton for annexation. There will not be another vote to incorporate. This is our only chance to build our future city.

### 5. Why can't we stay part of unincorporated King County?

King County has announced they will decrease our services substantially and will increase our taxes. King County was set up to service rural areas, not urban incorporated areas like where we live. King County has no plans for any road improvements in our area for the next five years.

## **6. What is wrong with annexation to Renton?**

We believe that our tax revenue would be siphoned off to fund other Renton projects and liabilities. The City of Renton is currently burdened with an estimated \$25 million liability for unfunded retirement medical benefits for more than 100 public service employees. The City of Renton is currently burdened with \$28.3 million in General Obligation bonds. If the city of Renton proceeds with its intention to annex the Skyway area, an additional \$2.5 million expense will be incurred. The city of Renton is saddled with enormous debt, and is operating with a seven-figure budget deficit. It should be noted that Renton currently assesses a 6% utility tax which they would charge Fairwood residents upon annexation. Small businesses will pay a tax to the City of Renton for each employee at a rate of \$55.00 per employee, per year. The budget for the proposed City of Fairwood has no such tax.

## **7. Would a new City of Fairwood be financially sound?**

Yes. A six year Financial Feasibility Study by Berk and Associates of Bellevue shows that a City of Fairwood is financially feasible. Existing taxes can pay what it would cost to run a city, and there would be a surplus each year. These surpluses amount to \$500,000 per year, and could be used for infrastructure improvements.

## **8. How did Berk & Associates come to that conclusion?**

The Berk Study and Finance Committee analysis was conducted by teams of experts in municipal and corporate finance. <http://virtual-fairwood.com/Documents/FairwoodReport011706final.pdf>

Berk used the basic city tax rate of \$1.60 per \$1000 of assessed valuation, combined with a 1.1% utility tax to equal the revenue of King County road tax of \$1.83 of \$1000 of assessed valuation.

Basically, the Berk study substituted city taxes for King County taxes. All of our tax money would stay in the new city of Fairwood, not exported to some other area of the county or to other areas of Renton if we were to be annexed.

## **9. How would a City of Fairwood be governed?**

The city would be a Council/City Manager type of government. There would be seven elected, at-large, council members who would elect a mayor from their own ranks. The city manager would have a staff of 8-10 people at start up. They would provide legislative, administrative, engineering, and other public staff functions. Based on present population representation would be one council member per 3,238 residents.

## **10. How does the City of Renton provide governance?**

Renton has seven city council members, that are elected at-large, and an elected Mayor. Based on present population, Renton's representation would be about one councilman per 14,200 residents. Fairwood's interests may not be as well represented on their Renton city council.

The population of the community of Fairwood is about half of the size of the existing City of Renton. However, if Renton annexes all of its potential annexation area, the Fairwood community population will represent only 21.5% of Renton (based on current population statistics).

Downtown business and industrial interests also exercise substantial political force within the city of Renton, to the detriment of the residential neighborhoods.

## **11. Who would provide police and fire protection of a City of Fairwood?**

Fire protection would continue from Fire District 40. Station 41 is within the city boundary. The city of Fairwood would most likely contract initially with the King County Sheriff's office for police protection.

We would have a higher level of police service for the same tax level, which would include a chief of police, and officers assigned to our city. A portion of the fire safety would be provided by Fire District 37.

## **12. How would a City of Fairwood handle land use?**

The City of Fairwood will become responsible for building and other land use permitting. The city may initially contract for some services in this area, but it is likely that the city will very quickly establish a building permit and land use desk. Cities typically fully recoup the cost of this operation through permitting fees.

### **13. We have heard that if Fairwood would be annexed to Renton there would be less financial risk. Is that true?**

No. The City of Fairwood would start debt free, with a clear understanding of the municipal financial realities, post I-747. Taxpayers of a City of Fairwood would see no additional risk or burden.

However, a community annexing into the city of Renton would inherit substantial debt.

- \$28.3 million principal outstanding general obligation debt (2005). Renton has a total long-term debt of \$76.5 million. [http://rentonnet.org/internetapps/files/2006/budget\\_final/04debtsserv.pdf](http://rentonnet.org/internetapps/files/2006/budget_final/04debtsserv.pdf) table 4-2
- Unfunded benefits for 114 retired personnel subject to Law Enforcement Officers and Firefighters (LEOFF level 1) retirement system. In 2005, the city of Renton projected the cost to exceed \$1,000,000 annually at the peak years of their retirement.

In addition, residents of the community of Fairwood, annexing into the City of Renton would still be responsible to pay off bonded indebtedness of special districts, even though the services previously provided by the special district are subsequently provided by the city of Renton. Residents would continue to pay for the following bonds, until the debt is paid off, even though they would also be paying taxes to the city of Renton for fire and library services.

- Library Bonds (authorized by election in September, 2004)
- Fire District 40 bonds (authorized by election in November, 2005)

### **14. What money would be available to help with startup costs for a new City of Fairwood?**

King County will provide \$500,000 for city start-up.

King County will provide \$725,000 for road overlays

### **15. How would medical emergencies be handled in a City of Fairwood?**

Advanced life support services are provided by King County Medic One, which is a regional service that will continue to be provided after Fairwood becomes a city.

Because taxes collected in Fairwood would stay in the city, \$500,000 would be available from Valley Medical Center to pay for basic emergency services provided by Fire District 40. Valley Medical Center will provide \$500,000 through 2014 if we incorporate as the City of Fairwood.

If we annex, these funds will be diverted to other fire districts. In addition, we would still have to pay for the Fire District 40 obligation bonds which fund basic emergency services.

### **16. What happens to the King County Library?**

In a City of Fairwood the King County Library would stay the same. Our Fairwood King County Branch is one of the busiest branches in the county, and it is a neighborhood center.

That is not as clear if annexation happens. Renton may decide not to maintain the library, and it would close. Renton may keep the library as its third library site. But the staff at our Fairwood Library probably would be reduced because Renton presently spends only \$22 per resident on library services while we currently pay King County \$62 per resident for library services.

### **17. What is the bottom line for incorporation?**

Simply, it is local zoning, local policy making, local public safety and local fire district control. We would retain our library. We would gain more police protection, and have better fire protection. Citizens of the existing community have already voted to increase our fire benefit charge to improve fire protection at Fire District 40. We would lose that with annexation.

Now is the time to vote YES to protect our future by forming a new City of Fairwood