

CASCADIA **DAILY** NEWS

By [Julia Tellman](#) Local News Reporter

What's holding up the East Blaine de-annexation?

City, county at odds over H Street Road maintenance

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Even though Blaine voters approved the de-annexation of roughly 573 acres in the northeast corner of the city last year, the reduction still isn't official, as the city and Whatcom County try to resolve lingering issues to complete the unprecedented action.

Blaine's incorporated area is shaped like a pan, with a long handle stretching away from downtown between the Canadian border and H Street Road. Blaine has struggled for decades to extend costly utility infrastructure to the area, which was annexed into the city in 1996, and an enormous East Blaine housing development proposal, Grandis Pond, never came to fruition. The Grandis Pond development rights expired in 2025, and the new owners of the property have said they don't intend to bring the project back to life.

The city proposed carving the land off and returning it to the unincorporated county. In November 2025, the required supermajority of Blaine voters [gave de-annexation the nod](#). According to the state nonprofit Municipal Research and Services Center, it was likely the first de-annexation of its size to be initiated by a city in Washington.

The matter is now before the Whatcom County Boundary Review Board, a body overseen by the Whatcom Council of Governments. Before July 2025, the board hadn't met since 2021.

Of the five-member board, two are appointed by the state governor, one by the county executive, one by the mayors of the small cities (excluding Bellingham) and one by the county's special purpose districts, a seat that is currently vacant.

If the portion of East Blaine is de-annexed, the properties therein will no longer be a part of the city taxing district; owners will instead see the county road levy added to their tax bill. The area has 36 parcels, seven of which are developed with single-family homes.

Whatcom County lawyers said in a January letter to the boundary review board that the county is not opposed to de-annexation, but is not obligated to accept responsibility for road maintenance.

The county called the portion of H Street Road inside city limits “long-neglected” and estimated it would cost \$1.5 million to bring the mile or so of road up to county standards. The county argues Blaine is trying to “foist” the burden onto unincorporated taxpayers, a claim Blaine lawyers called “absurd.”

Further complicating the matter is the presence of Blaine resident Gurdeep Bains on the boundary review board. Bains was appointed to the board by the small cities this spring, but his wife, Sarbie, has been a Blaine City Council member since July 2025. Whatcom County has demanded that Bains recuse himself from the de-annexation decision to ensure the appearance of fairness, because of his wife’s role in city government.

At the board’s July 16 meeting, Blaine attorney Peter Ruffatto said that if Bains were to recuse himself, the small cities would have no voice on the board.

“The city will object to any decision on this matter being made ... unless there is someone appointed per the county code, nominated by the small cities,” Ruffatto said.

Bains indicated he would potentially be willing to resign so that the mayors of the small cities could appoint a new representative who doesn’t have any perceived conflicts of interest.

City and county legal counsel are still working to resolve the disagreement over road maintenance, and received a second deadline extension on July 16. The board will hold a special meeting on Sept. 10 to continue the discussion, and a final decision is now expected to come by mid-December.

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