



News from the *Salish Current* for the week ending May 16, 2020:

[Whale watch industry sits dockside during COVID-19 pandemic](#)

By Kimberly Cauvel

With the turn of the season, locals and visitors alike are usually drawn to the docks to pursue a glimpse of the region's whales. Over the past decade, upwards of 500,000 people have boarded whale watching boats in the Salish Sea each year. Not this year. [Read more.](#)

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[Government for the people: Bellingham, Whatcom and Port of Bellingham news](#)

By Mike Sato

This week's selection of actions taken and coming up at the meetings of the Bellingham City Council, the Whatcom County Council, and the Port of Bellingham. [Read here.](#)

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News from around the region...

EDITOR'S NOTE: Coronavirus news coverage in the [Bellingham Herald](#) can be accessed online without a subscription. The *Lynden Tribune*, the *Skagit Valley Herald* and the *Anacortes American* have paywalls.

[Health & Safety](#)

[San Juan becomes first county in Pacific Northwest to mandate face masks in public](#)

San Juan County in the northwest corner of Washington state is about to become the first in the Pacific Northwest to require wearing a face covering in public places. (KUOW) And:

[Remote and Ready to Fight Coronavirus's Next Wave](#) An island community in Washington State has developed a testing and tracing strategy it hopes will be a model for rural and tribal communities. (NY Times)

[Border not expected to re-open until at least the end of June](#) (All Point Bulletin) [Canada, U.S. appear likely to extend travel restrictions until June 21: Sources](#) (Canadian Press) [B.C. health officials adamant Canada-U.S. border should remain closed to visitors](#) (CBC)

[As unemployment surges in Whatcom, so does rate of residents without health insurance](#)

In Whatcom County, the uninsured rates nearly doubled in the period from March 15 to April 25, increasing from 6.3% pre-coronavirus to an estimated 11.1%, making the county sixth highest in the state for such losses. (Bellingham Herald)

[Mount Vernon choir outbreak was 'superspreader event,' says CDC report on how easily virus spreads](#)

Disease trackers are calling [a choir practice in Mount Vernon, Skagit County](#), a superspreader event that illustrates how easily the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 can pass from person to person. (Associated Press)

[Bellingham International Airport now requiring face masks during coronavirus pandemic](#)

Before Tuesday, the Port of Bellingham was only recommending that face coverings be worn. (Bellingham Herald)

[Rules put in place for farmworker housing](#)

Emergency rules adopted by the state Wednesday will require farms to implement physical distancing in temporary farmworker housing, increase sanitation and isolate workers who have COVID-19 or are suspected to have it. (Skagit Valley Herald)

Education

[Small classes. Masks. Limits on visitors as Western plans for students' return in fall](#)

Western Washington University plans to bring students back to Bellingham for the fall quarter but classes and campus life will look different because of safety measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. (Bellingham Herald)

[Educators adjust during pandemic](#)

Throughout Skagit County, educators have had to change the way they teach with the challenge of reaching and connecting with students no longer in a classroom. (Skagit Valley Herald)

[Bellingham teachers still adapting to online ed, trying hard to keep kids involved](#)

Teachers who were midway through the school year were suddenly forced to switch to an all-digital format, forcing some who have never taught online to learn on the fly. Some teachers have described the process as emergency learning rather than regular online teaching. (Bellingham Herald)

Government

[Here's who's running in the August primary election](#)

Local races feature Whatcom County Superior Court judges, both seats in U.S. Congress that represent Whatcom County, both state House seats in the 42nd District covering part of Bellingham and northern Whatcom County, and both state House seats and the state Senate seat in the 40th District covering part of Bellingham and southern Whatcom County — along with San Juan County and part of Skagit County. Both the Republican and Democratic parties also select precinct committee officers, or PCOs. (Bellingham Herald) See also: [Election filing period closes](#) (Skagit Valley Herald)

[Local governments poised to receive nearly \\$300 million in coronavirus relief](#)

The Washington State Department of Commerce announced local governments will soon receive their portion of nearly \$300 million in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funds awarded to the state to address COVID-19-related costs. (WA Dept of Commerce)

[Whatcom County Council tables an emergency ordinance](#)

The Whatcom County Council on May 5 voted on an ordinance establishing a COVID-19 interim economic recovery plan to respond to the economic crisis within the county. The ordinance was ultimately withdrawn from the agenda after a 5-2 vote, with councilmembers Byrd and Elenbaas opposed. The

ordinance was tabled as an emergency ordinance and will be reintroduced in two weeks as a regular agenda item. (Western Front)

Nature

[Local researchers discover harbor porpoises may eat salmon](#)

The ongoing study of harbor porpoises from bluffs overlooking Burrows Bay in Anacortes contributed recently to new findings documenting harbor porpoises interacting with and likely eating salmon and a fish called American shad. (Skagit Valley Herald)

Commentary

[The States and Reopening Under COVID-19: Why We Need North American Cooperation](#)

...There is a real danger that the western U.S. states will go one way on the speed and rules for reopening while western Canada goes another. This would drive a wedge into a vital component of economic growth in our region, which rests on building a more prosperous, cross-border Cascadia corridor extending from British Columbia to Oregon. (Council on Foreign Relations)

Business

[Shewmake convenes group on Intalco's future](#)

State Rep. Sharon Shewmake (D-Bellingham), by virtual connections, recently convened various stakeholders in the announced Intalco Works closure to discuss potential solutions to the loss of the approximate 700 jobs there. (Lynden Tribune) [Intalco facility faces bleak outlook as workers try to save it](#) (Bellingham Herald)

[Face Covering Signage For Businesses And Other Organizations](#)

In order to help San Juan County businesses and other organizations protect their employees and customers, the County COVID response team has produced printable posters to support their effort. (San Juan Update)

[Lynden Farmers Market canceled](#)

The market's board of directors unanimously decided so, but will work to upgrade the website and social media platforms to enable online opportunities for people to buy directly from vendors. (Lynden Tribune)

[Mailbox stores lose customers due to border restrictions](#)

Mail Boxes International is one of over 20 mailbox stores in Blaine no longer having Canadian customers taking advantage of lower U.S. shipping prices after the border closing in March. (The Northern Light)

Community

[More Skagit summer events canceled](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the cancellation of more local events, including Burlington's Berry Dairy Days, which had recently been moved from June to August. (Skagit Valley Herald)

[July 4 parade, summer events canceled](#)

The Anacortes traditional annual Fourth of July celebration has joined a growing list of canceled summer events in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and following guidance from Skagit County Public Health. (Anacortes American)

[500-vehicle parade protests gov's shutdown](#)

A "liberate Lynden" parade — in protest of ongoing COVID-19 restrictions — drew hundreds of participant vehicles creating plenty of noise on a long rolling route on Saturday...A face-covering mask — a staple of the coronavirus fight — could not be seen among the Saturday paraders, nor was six-foot social distancing much in evidence. (Lynden Tribune)

[Local Nonprofits to Share \\$340K in Grant Funding From First Federal Community Foundation](#) (Whatcom Talk)

[Emergency Fund and Grant Updates from SJICF](#)

San Juan County is experiencing a 27% unemployment rate and is expected to reach 30% very soon...To date, more than \$57k has been granted from the SJICF Emergency Response Fund to nonprofits for COVID-19 needs. (San Juan Update)

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Salish Current is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, online local news organization serving Whatcom, San Juan and Skagit Counties. Salish Current exists to strengthen democratic governance by reporting and curating local news with independence and strict journalistic integrity.

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