



## News from the *Salish Current* for the week ending Jan. 8, 2021:

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## [San Juan school districts face big budget shortfalls due to levy cap](#)



Public schools on Lopez (above), Orcas and San Juan islands are facing large budget shortfalls as a cap on local levy collections takes effect. The cap is part of a strategy aimed at making school funding more equitable across the state, but is impacting smaller districts with “serious, unintended consequences.” (Amy Nelson photo © 2020)

*By Hayley Day* — A law to make state education funding more equitable has had the opposite effect in the San Juan Islands. While San Juan property owners are paying more in state education taxes, less funding is going towards local schools. A new cap on local enrichment levies limits some districts from collecting the entire amount of local education taxes that voters have previously approved. These changes have left the islands’ smaller, rural districts — which already have higher expenses per student than more populated areas — hundreds of thousands of dollars in the red. ([Read more here.](#))

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## Economy, environment, social justice, COVID recovery, housing: legislators anticipate the 2021 session



Education-related concerns — including COVID impacts, systemic injustice, revenue equity and more — are among issues on the minds of legislators from the 40th and 42nd districts as they prepare for the 2021 session opening on Monday, Jan. 11. Above, Bellingham's Sehome High School awaits a return to normal activity while pandemic safety practices remain in place. (Amy Nelson photo © 2020)

By Salish Current staff— *Salish Current* asked 40th and 42nd District legislators a few questions about how they see the legislative session that convenes on Monday, Jan. 11; their answers follow. We'll keep an eye on how well they do the people's business this session and report back. ([Read more here.](#))

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*Salish Current affirms its commitment to work for truth, justice, equality and healing for all people.*  
*#SayTheirNames #BlackLivesMatter #NoJusticeNoPeace*

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### News from around the region:

#### Health & Safety

- Investigators say they still haven't found an explanation for the Custer derailment that caused fires after 10 train cars carrying highly flammable crude oil overturned from tracks on Dec. 22. ([The Northern Light](#))
- The Navy reported completing its first week of real-time sound monitoring at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island at 11 sites in proximity to Ault Field and Outlying Landing Field Coupeville, and in the Olympic National Park at a 12th site. ([Whidbey NAS/San Juan Journal](#))
- An agreement struck by the state Department of Ecology in partnership with Seattle City Light, the Washington Water Trust and Skagit County will allow 338 properties along the Skagit River with existing structures or building permits and about 900 additional properties to use a combined 362 acre-feet of water per year. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

#### Education

- [Bellingham School District](#) - Second grade will be returning to in-person instruction Thursday, Jan. 14.
- [Blaine School District](#) - First group of middle and high school students returned to school on Jan. 6
- [Lynden School District](#) - Secondary students return to campus Jan. 11

- [Anacortes School District](#) - Pre-K-5th-grade students return to in-person learning Jan. 11; 6th-12th grade students on Feb. 8.

## Government

- City of Bellingham

- The Bellingham City Council by unanimous vote elected its 2021 officers [on Jan. 4](#): Hannah Stone (president), Michael Lilliquist (president pro tempore) and Pinky Vargas (mayor pro tempore). The council also made the following committee chair assignments: Holly Huthman (Economic & Community Development), Michael Lilliquist (Public Works & Natural Resources), Gene Knutson (Parks & Recreation), Lisa Anderson (Planning & Community Development), Dan Hammill (Public Health, Safety, and Justice), and Pinky Vargas (Climate Action).

- The next meeting of the City Council is scheduled for Jan. 11 at 7 p.m.

- Whatcom County

- The next meeting of the County Council is scheduled for Jan. 12 at 6 p.m. Items [on the agenda](#) include:
- Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce for the purposes of tourism marketing and operations, in the amount of \$100,000 [AB2020-600]; a contract between Whatcom County and Mount Baker Foothills Chamber of Commerce for tourism marketing and operations, in the amount of \$100,000 [AB2020-601]; and a contract between Whatcom County and Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism for tourism marketing and operations in the amount of \$290,000 [AB2020-599].
- Council appointment to fill vacancies on the Climate Impact Advisory Committee - Applicant(s): Ellen Murphy, Katherine Kissinger, Licia Sahagun, Tracy Petroske, William Bethel, Eddy Ury, Imran Sheikh, Amanda Monthei, Fletcher Wilkinson, Ginny Broadhurst [AB2021-032]; fill vacancies on the Planning Commission - Applicant(s): Kimberley Lund, Atul Deshmane, Stephen Jackson, and Candice Leonard [AB2021-037]
- The next meeting of the Whatcom County Council is scheduled for Jan. 26.

- Port of Bellingham

- At the [Jan. 5 meeting](#) of the Port of Bellingham commissioners, staff Brian Gouran reported on the \$200,000 Healthy Housing Integrated Planning Grant for cleanup, remediation and redevelopment of the Port's waterfront Lignin Parcel on the corner of Cornwall Avenue and Laurel Street. The Port in partnership with Millworks and the Whatcom Community Foundation has determined that environmental cleanup of the site is feasible, that no geotechnical issues are problems and that a preliminary site plan can accommodate 80 units of affordable and workforce housing, possible affordable housing ownership, an early learning center, commercial space and a food campus.
- The next meeting of the Port Commission is scheduled for Jan. 19 at 4 p.m.

## Nature

- A report from the Endangered Species Coalition identifies the pinto abalone, the only abalone species native to the Salish Sea and a species undergoing restoration efforts in Skagit and San Juan counties, as one of 10 species at risk of extinction due both to legal harvesting at unsustainable levels and illegal harvesting — or poaching. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- 93 people participated in San Juan Islands Audubon Society Christmas bird count, the highest number of people we have had on a count. The effort involved 82 miles on foot, 160 miles by vehicle and 11 by boat. Time-wise this was 106.25 hours on foot, 43.25 hours by vehicle, 3.5 hours by boat and 22.75 hours at feeders. ([San Juan Islands Audubon/San Juan Update](#))
- The public comment period on the [State Environmental Policy Act determination](#) for the Navy's proposal to conduct special operations training in 28 state parks has been extended through Jan. 22. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- Whatcom County's [Purchase of Development Rights Program](#) recently performed a Geographic Information System analysis to highlight areas of high conservation value across Whatcom County. This landscape analysis was completed to address the six goals of the PDR program: Agriculture, Forests, Ecosystems, Water, Climate, and Open Space. [Check out the PDR story.](#)
- The discovery of 14,000-year-old bones on Orcas Island means humans were BBQing a lot earlier than previously thought. ([Crosscut](#))
- After a five-year stall, Skagit County will begin work again on a Shoreline Master Program update and make it a priority for the new planning commission in 2021. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

## Business

- Allowing a private company to operate a ferry from Anacortes to Sidney, British Columbia, would not result in cost savings for the Washington State Ferries and would have negative economic impacts on the region, a legislative study released last month found. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

## Community

- Bellingham's Martin Luther King Jr. Day virtual events scheduled for Jan. 18. ([Whatcom Talk](#))
- 23rd Annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Human Rights Conference will run Jan. 14 through 16. ([WHRTF.org](#))
- The Lynden-based group Racial Unity Now will host an interactive online event on the RUN Lynden Facebook page with Black pastor Charles Presley the evening of MLK Day, Jan. 18. The group was formed last summer following the July 5 scene in Lynden that saw gun-toting citizens defending public places and confronting youth and others on a 3-mile March for Black Lives procession across town. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

- Bellingham's deputy police chief Flo Simons has been appointed interim police chief, becoming the first female to hold the position. ([Whatcom Talk](#))
- Court-ordered release of U.S. Customs and Border Protection documents reveal that the U.S. government both covered up and acted illegally when officers were directed to detain all people of Iranian decent, including U.S. citizens, attempting to enter the U.S. last January at several ports of entry, including the Peace Arch Border Crossing in Blaine. ([Bellingham Herald](#)) See also: District judge orders release of CBP Iranian detention directive ([The Northern Light](#))

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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 protect and improve democratic governance by reporting and curating local news with independence and strict journalistic integrity.*

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