

Salish Current

Independent fact-based news for Whatcom, San Juan and Skagit counties

News from the *Salish Current* for the week ending Feb. 5, 2021:

Dear Readers — We're happy this week to share with you the new look and functionality of our [website](#) redesigned by Shew Design of Bellingham. Great folks to work with; thank you, Eric and Becca! Along with the redesigned website, we also begin a second year of distributing this weekly newsletter. One of our goals for 2021 is to at least double the distribution of this newsletter. That can be done very simply if everyone reading today gets a friend, family member or neighbor to [contact us](#) to subscribe. We're happy that you read the news, that you [donate](#) and that you support making our community a better place for all. — Amy Nelson, Publisher

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[Local food banks have been addressing a hunger crisis](#) [— even before COVID](#)



“If anything positive came out of the pandemic, it’s that it shined a light on how vulnerable food security is and how many ... are going hungry each day,” noted Skagit Helping Hands development director Nichole Long. Volunteers are vital to food bank operations, working at satellite distribution sites and in other roles. (Nichole Long photo © 2020)

By Heather Spaulding — Even before the pandemic lockdowns caused unemployment to skyrocket, millions of Americans were not able to feed their families. The food crisis at food banks in Whatcom, Skagit and San Juan counties got a lot more critical when the pandemic hit. Here's how they responded — and look to the future. ([read more](#))

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Community Voices / Powerful stories bring understanding, in celebration of Black History Month



Reading is one way to learn more about Black history and experience. One more option: check out [Esi Edugyan's "Washington Black,"](#) [this year's Whatcom READS](#) selection.

By *Terri Thayer* — February is Black History Month. The idea of Black History Month is wrapped within recognition of National Freedom Day, Negro History Week and the civil rights movement. The study and knowledge of Black history brings understanding to race and racism in the United States. [\(read more\)](#)

The essays, analyses and opinions presented as Community Voices express the perspectives of their authors on topics of interest and importance to the community, and are not intended to reflect perspectives on behalf of the Salish Current.

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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 and Safety

- Whatcom County COVID-19 cases continued to grow the last two weeks in January with Ferndale, Lynden and Nooksack school districts having the highest case rates but increasing slower. [\(The Northern Light\)](#)
- The Whatcom County Council, sitting as the County Health Board, sent a letter to Gov. Jay Inslee on Feb. 2 complaining that the state's Roadmap to Recovery metrics "cannot be justified with science, risk or equity." The letter complains that San Juan County with a two-week case rate of 64/100,000 cannot reopen while King County at 300/100,000 can. [\(My Ferndale News\)](#) On Feb. 4, the governor responded to the Whatcom Health Board letter. [\(My Ferndale News\)](#)

- Whatcom County's two-week COVID case rate stood at 397.7/100,000 as of Feb. 3 ([Whatcom County Health Department](#))

Education

- San Juan County health officer Frank James has recommended that schools consider opening grades K to 6 for in-person education. ([San Juan Update](#))
- Western Washington University student and faculty are pushing to remove the name of Thomas Henry Huxley from the name of the College of the Environment due to Huxley's 19th century writings on scientific racism. ([Western Front](#))

Government

- City of Lynden

- The city plans to establish a hearing examiner process by April to decide complex legal and technical issues on appeal instead of the current citizen panel process. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

- San Juan County

- The San Juan County Council will meet on Feb. 8. [Agenda](#) items include: The council will hear presentations on the sheriff's department, programs on clean water, stormwater and groundwater, and continue its vacation rental workshop
- The San Juan County Council will meet on Feb. 9. [Agenda](#) items include: The council will hear presentations on the superior and juvenile court and oil spill response. It will discuss an update of comprehensive land use issues.

- City of Bellingham

- The Bellingham City Council is next scheduled to meet on Feb. 8. [Agenda](#) items include:
- [\[22904\]](#) Presentation by Whatcom County Health on Serving the Homeless
- [\[22505\]](#) 2021 Implementation Plan for the Climate Action Plan.
- [\[22909\]](#) Council Discussion Regarding Public Comment Period During Evening Council Session

- Whatcom County

- The Whatcom County Council will meet on Feb. 9. [Agenda](#) items include:
- [\[AB2021-051\]](#) Public Hearing: Ordinance adopting Countywide Planning Policies relating to the Review and Evaluation Program (also known as Buildable Lands) and dispute resolution procedures

- [\[AB2021-080\]](#) Authorize the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and the United States Department of the Treasury for rental and utility assistance and other housing expenses, in the amount of \$6,911,585
- [Port of Bellingham](#)
- The next scheduled meeting of the Port of Bellingham Commission is Feb. 16.
- [State Legislature](#)
- Senator Doug Ericksen of Ferndale and three other Republican Washington state senators are forming a “Freedom Caucus” to push back against what they see as the Democratic majority’s “radical agenda.” Joining Ericksen are Mike Padden of Spokane Valley, Phil Fortunato of Auburn and Jim McCune of Graham. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Nature

- A cougar seen and photographed in the Blaine area is suspected of killing two goats Jan. 24 at a home east of Blaine. ([The Northern Light](#))
- The nonprofit group Evergreen Islands on Feb. 9 will argue its appeal to the Skagit County Commissioners of a hearing examiner’s decision allowing a gravel mine expansion near Anacortes. ([Associated Press](#))
- Some of the region’s great blue herons will begin their seasonal move-in this month at a nesting site on March Point. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- A record 337 illegal commercial crab traps have been seized in Boundary Bay in a five day joint venture between the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Canadian Coast Guard. ([CBC](#))
- Walsh Construction Company was fined \$2,000 by the State Department of Ecology for polluting the Nooksack River with concrete runoff during removal of the Middle Fork dam. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Business

- December 2020 unemployment rates were Whatcom 7.2%, Skagit 7.9% and San Juan 7.7%, according to the state Employment Security Department. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- Skagit County businesses dealing in kayaks, luxury cruising boats, whimsical stickers and salsa are finding business booming during the pandemic. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- Contractor Stremler Gravel has completed the Gateway stormwater pond located between Boblett Court and Pipeline Road in Blaine and the facility was dedicated in January. ([The Northern Light](#))

- The late Tommy Thompson's family has asked the city of Anacortes to return the Tommy Thompson Train which the city is not displaying or taking care of properly, according to the family. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Community

- CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets) has been operating in Eugene, Oregon, for years responding to crisis call with social workers instead of police. ([Crosscut Podcast](#))

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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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