

Salish Current

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

News from the *Salish Current* for the week ending Feb. 26, 2021:

[Internet connectivity has improved in Whatcom County, but many gaps remain](#)



Dance instructor and Mount Baker area resident Juliette Machado has resorted to finding a viable internet connection away from home in order to provide a stable platform for her Whatcom Community College dance classes — just one example of the challenges educators and students face with remote learning.

By Jacqueline Allison — One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, many more students in Whatcom County are able to connect to the internet for remote learning, thanks to communitywide efforts to rapidly deploy mobile hotspots and other steps to boost connectivity. Still, a clear digital divide remains. Rural residents are more likely to have slow or unreliable connections, often with fewer options and at higher cost. ([Read more](#))

[Masked young adults key to beating COVID in the long term](#)



Looking to the future: high school seniors Cameron Morrow, left, and Casey McEvoy mask up to stay healthy and help stop the spread of COVID-19. Young adults are the target audience for a new mask-wearing awareness campaign being launched by Whatcom County.

By Alex Meacham — This winter, the number of COVID-19 cases in Whatcom County spiked among young adults. Why? County officials think the spike is due to young adults not taking precautions in private, and the county will spend \$200,000 on a campaign to influence young adults to adopt safer COVID-19 behaviors. The county will use peer-to-peer messaging to carry the most up-to-date information on what young people can do to stay healthy and help end the pandemic. ([Read more](#))

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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 infection rates (per 100,000 population) as of Feb. 25 by school districts show a decline from post-holiday peaks: Bellingham (145), Meridian (167), Ferndale (320), Blaine (176), Lynden (380), Nooksack Valley (379), Mt. Baker (101). ([Northern Light](#))
- The latest border extension announced Feb. 19 means the U.S./Canada border will have been closed to non-essential travel for a year in March. A state delegation led by Rep. Suzan DelBene is urging President Biden to reopen the U.S./Canada border. ([Northern Light](#))
- A poll of 1600 Canadians indicates that many plan to ignore spring break COVID-19 rules; B.C. respondents are the most likely to ignore rules year-round. ([CBC](#))

Education

- Whatcom County Library buildings will reopen to the public Mar. 1 with modified services, limited hours, and entry requirements for in-person visits but with continued curbside service. ([WhatcomTalk](#))
- Western Washington University is now considering the possibility of students returning to campus. ([Western Front](#))

Government

- San Juan County
- The San Juan County Council held a public hearing on Feb. 22 on the six-month moratorium on vacation rentals in the county, faced a blizzard of public comments both for and against, and continued the hearing until March 9. ([Orcsonian](#))
- The San Juan County Planning Commission begun addressing climate change in the county's comprehensive plan with a briefing by county staff on Feb. 19 ([Orcsonian](#))
- San Juan County Auditor Milene Henley briefed the Charter Commission at its Feb. 17 meeting about the county's budgeting process. County Manager Mike Thomas will be on the Feb. 24 agenda. ([San Juan Journal](#))
- City of Bellingham
- Bellingham City Councilmember Dan Hammill proposed a 0.1% city sales tax that could raise up to \$3 million to provide for affordable housing and services to address homelessness. ([KGMI](#))

- The Bellingham City Council met on Feb. 22. [On its agenda and actions:](#)
- Adopted 7-0 a modified resolution requiring the Zoom meetings of the Broadband Advisory Workgroup to be recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Council voted 6-0-1, (Knutson excused) to hold a public hearing on March 8 to consider an ordinance imposing a one tenth of one percent sales and use tax for affordable housing and related services and also voted 6-0-1 (Knutson excused) to hold a special meeting on March 15 to consider the same.
- Councilmember Stone announced that the Birchwood Neighborhood continues to struggle with food access since the Albertson's store closed several years ago. The Salvation Army has opened a food distribution center at the old thrift store, across from the old Albertson's location. They have drive-through as well as walk-up service that distributes on Tuesdays and Thursdays food boxes that include canned goods, fresh produce, frozen meats, protein, dry goods, and dairy. There are No-Cook Bags for those who do not have access to kitchen or cooking facilities.
- At its [Committee of the Whole Meeting:](#)
- The Council discussed proposed municipal code amendments for tent encampments and camping in public places: Alternate emergency ordinance (park camping) AB#22910 and draft emergency ordinance interim amendments (encampment) AT#22910
- Whatcom County
- The Whatcom County Council met on Feb. 23. On its [agenda and actions:](#)
- [AB2021] Authorized County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and DH Marketing to implement a COVID-19 social marketing campaign plan and messaging platform, in the amount of \$200,000. (5-2, Byrd and Elenbaas nay) (See "[Masked young adults key to beating COVID in the long term](#)")
- [AB2021-124] Authorized County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and Opportunity Council to administer rental and utility assistance to eligible recipients, in the amount of \$6,807,911. (7-0)
- Port of Bellingham
- The Port of Bellingham Commission met on Feb. 18. [On its agenda:](#)
- Staff presented an update on the port's [broadband project](#). (See "[Internet connectivity has improved in Whatcom County, but many gaps remain](#)")

- State Legislature
- HB 1221 — [Standardizing homelessness definitions](#) Introduced by Rep. Alicia Rule (Whatcom County-D). Passed 61 to 36 in the House. Moved to Senate.
- HB 1356 — [Prohibiting the inappropriate use of Native American names, symbols, or images as public school mascots, logos, or team names](#) Introduced by Rep. Debra Lekanoff (Whatcom County-D). Passed 92 to 5 in the House. Moved to Senate.
- HB 1478 — [Concerning fish habitat enhancement projects authorized pursuant to RCW 77.55.181](#) Introduced by Rep. Sharon Shewmake (Whatcom County-D). Passed 57 to 40 in the House. Moved to Senate.
- HB 1143 — [Authorizing the placement of water rights banked pursuant to RCW 90.92.070 into the trust water rights program](#) Introduced by Rep. Alicia Rule (Whatcom County-D). Passed 98 to 0 in the House. Moved to Senate.

Nature

- Two historically-contaminated cleanup sites — the 17 acres of the Cornwall Avenue Landfill and R.G. Haley sites — are being remediated and developed into Cornwall Beach Park on Bellingham Bay. ([Western Front](#))

Business

- The State Department of Ecology has received 446 applications for shellfish farm permits and has issued public notices for decisions on about 150 of them, including one in Skagit County, under Clean Water Act requirements in the wake of a court judgment questioning whether the former permitting system ensured adequate protections for the marine environment. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- Lautenbach Recycling of Skagit County, in partnership with Sanitary Services Company, is now handling Whatcom County's recycling at a rented warehouse on the Parberry Environmental Solutions property in Ferndale. ([My Ferndale News](#))
- The Jensen boathouses at the Port of Friday Harbor collapsed Feb. 14 under the weight of snow and landed on eight boats moored below. ([San Juan Journal](#))
- Skagit County Commissioners voted to send the permit of expanded gravel mining at Lake Erie on Fidalgo Island back to the hearing examiner to resolve issues of groundwater and landslide risks. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- Journalists at the Bellingham Herald newsroom will be allowed to unionize with other Western Washington McClatchy Company newsrooms as one union called the Washington state NewsGuild. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Community

- The Whatcom Opportunity Council will begin distributing nearly \$6 million dollars beginning in March to help county residents with rent and utility assistance. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))
- The Blaine police department is looking for a Blaine resident to serve as a non-law-enforcement city representative in potential police use-of-force investigations. ([Northern Light](#))
- The Skagit Valley Tulip Festival will open tulip fields to the public in April at reduced capacity and will likely require online tickets and reservations. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- The U.S. Department of Transportation has designated Highway 20 from the Cascades to the Sound one of 34 National Scenic Byways. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- The City of Bellingham will partner with Low Income House Institute and Road2Home to build between 30 to 36 tiny homes at the corner of Woburn Street and Lakeview Drive. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Jump In!

- [WSU BeachWatcher Training](#) gives you 80 hours of classroom and field training on Puget Sound wildlife, coastal processes, water quality, climate change and more in exchange for sharing your knowledge as a citizen scientist volunteer giving back 80 hours over the next two years to projects you select. The course materials fee is \$85. [Deadline to apply March 9.](#)
- BirdNote and KNKX present "Winter in the Skagit Valley of Western Washington," a virtual adventure on Mar. 11. Click here to [register](#).
- Register by Mar. 14 for the San Juan Islands Agricultural Summit to be held virtually from March 20-April 16 and participate in a space that brings together farmers, producers, and food system advocates to learn and discuss ways to build an equitable future in the San Juan County food system. ([San Juan Update](#))

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