

# Salish Current

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

**Dear Readers** — As we enter the second year of pandemic safeguards, we hope to see some light at the end of the long tunnel as vaccinations increase and precautions remain. The task before us at *Salish Current* is to continue to bring you ad-free, not-for-profit independent news. We will continue to do so and we encourage you to help us build our readership by asking others to become readers. And while our articles are free to read, we sincerely appreciate your [donations](#) that pay for the work our freelance journalist do for you. Thanks! — Amy Nelson, publisher, and Mike Sato, managing editor.

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

## [In Whatcom's 42nd Legislative District, a series of changes is turning election tides](#)



Snow-clad Mount Baker is a prominent part of the view from a busy Ferndale commercial area. (Image detail: Robert Ashworth from Bellingham, WA, USA, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons)

*By Matt Benoit* — Gains in voter support made by local Democrats in recent years may be due to demographic shifts caused by a wide variety of trends in who lives here, how they work and how each political party gets its message out. ([Read more.](#))

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**Letter to the Editor:**

- [Starlink can provide internet access to remote county areas](#)

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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

- The B.1.1.7 variant of COVID-19, also known as the United Kingdom variant, has been found in Skagit County, ([Anacortes American/paywall](#)) Coronavirus Variant B.1.1.7 Found in Whatcom County ([Whatcom County Health Department](#))

### Education

- Ferndale School District Superintendent Linda Quinn announced her retirement and the school board will meet in special session next week on hiring a replacement. ([My Ferndale News](#))
- The Blaine School District enrollment is 75 students less than what was budgeted which has the district planning budget cuts, including staff layoffs, for next year. ([Northern Light](#))
- On Feb. 23 San Juan Island Community Network aired a local schools panel to discuss school reopening. Speakers were San Juan Island School District superintendent Fred Woods, Orcas Island School District superintendent Eric Webb, Lopez Island School District interim superintendent Carl Bruner, Shaw Island School District board chair John Bogert, and Kaleidoscope Preschool Director Amber Paulson. ([San Juan Journal](#))

### Government

- Ferndale
- City of Ferndale Commissioners by a 4-3 vote approve a retroactive increase of the mayor's 2019 salary from from \$1,889 to \$2,650 per month and a 3% annual increase to the mayor's and council members' salaries from 2024 to 2027. ([My Ferndale News](#))
- Lynden
- The Lynden City Council unanimously approved going forward with financing and development of the Pepin Creek project that will bring 1,578 new dwelling units to the northwest side of the city. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))
- San Juan County
- The San Juan County Council continues its online public hearing on March 9 on the moratorium on the issuance of vacation rental permits. To participate, read the county's [legal notice](#).
- City of Bellingham
- The Bellingham City Council will meet on March 8. [Agenda items](#) include:
- [22922] A public hearing on [an ordinance](#) to authorize a sales tax for housing and related service.

- [22914] Public Works Committee: Habitat Restoration and Stewardship in Lower Whatcom Creek Corridor Presentation Follow-up [[Staff Report](#)]
- [22705] Public Works Committee: Post Point Resource Recovery Project Update [[Staff Memo](#)]
- [22972] Public Works Committee: Report from the February 17, 2021, Lake Whatcom Policy Group Meeting [[Meeting Summary](#)]
- [22929] Community and Economic Development Committee: Consideration of a Resolution Forming a Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism Promotion Area [[Resolution](#)]
- [22930] Council Of The Whole: Staff Presentations in Preparation for City Council Adoption of the 2021-2022 Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Action Plan [[Staff Memo](#)]
- [22931] Council Of The Whole: An Ordinance Amending the 2021-2022 Biennial Budget for the Purpose of a Tiny Home Village [[Ordinance](#)]
- The Council will hold a special meeting on March 15 at 2 p.m. to consider an ordinance imposing an additional sales and use tax of one-tenth of one percent for affordable housing and related services as authorized in RCW 82.14.530
- Whatcom County
  - The Whatcom County Council will meet on March 9. [Agenda items](#) include:
    - [AB2021-137] Authorize the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham for the joint establishment of a Tourism Promotion Area.
    - [AB2021-134] [Ordinance](#) amending Whatcom County Code Section 1.14, Electoral Precincts, for changes in certain voting precinct boundaries in Whatcom County Elections
- Port of Bellingham
  - The Port of Bellingham Commission met on March 2. [Agenda items](#) included:
    - The commission signed a [letter](#) to the Washington State legislature opposing shifting funds or transferring funds from the Model Toxics Control act to the general fund because such shifts would undermine the ability of local governments to clean-up toxic pollution.
- State Legislature
  - HB 1393 — [Delaying certain implementation dates for the photovoltaic module stewardship and takeback program](#) Introduced by Rep. Sharon Shewmake (Whatcom County). Passed 93 to 2 in the House. Moved to the Senate.

- SB 5396 — [Expanding the sales and use tax exemption for farmworker housing](#) Introduced by Sen. Liz Lovelett (Anacortes). Passed 38 to 9 in the Senate. Moved to the House.
- HB 1117 — [Promoting salmon recovery through revisions to the state's comprehensive planning framework](#) Introduced by Rep. Debra Lekanoff (Whatcom County). Passed 58 to 38 in the House. Moved to Senate.
- SB 5328 - [Concerning clubhouses for persons with mental illness](#). Introduced by Sen. Liz Lovelett (Anacortes). Passed 48 to 0 in the Senate. Moved to the House.

### **Nature**

- A 270-acre property comprised of two silt-edged islands connected by a bridge in the southern Skagit River delta may have the majority of the dikes that have long shielded them from the river and nearby Skagit Bay removed. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- In Vancouver, it's geese who reign over the green space in town. The Vancouver Park Board, by its own admission, cannot keep up. ([CBC](#))
- Read about Whatcom County's Governors Point and Randy Bishop's audacious and innovative idea to build a scattering of homes along its western shore and donate the vast majority of it to the Whatcom Land Trust for a nature reserve and public park. ([Cascadia Weekly](#))

### **Business**

- The Washington State Department of Commerce has awarded \$1 million to Orcas Power and light Company to build a 1.2 MW community solar array on San Juan Island. OPALCO will use benefits from the array to offset the annual energy bills of Low-Income Service Providers on the three main islands, and to increase the credits provided to offset low- and moderate-income households' monthly energy bills. ([Washington State Department of Commerce](#))
- Island Hospital has partnered with Orcas Island Health Care District to operate a primary care clinic on Orcas Island beginning April 1. ([Island Hospital/Orcasonian](#)) Island Hospital and the local nurses union reportedly reached a tentative contact agreement last week. ([Anacortes American/paywall](#))

### **Jump In!**

- Do you have questions or comments about the transition plants from Anacortes 100 to Helping Hands Food Bank? Join in a virtual community forum on March 11 at 5 p.m. Register in advance of the meeting [here](#).
- Take the one minute [kidney disease quiz](#) brought to you by the Mt. Baker Foundation as part of their public awareness campaign during the month of March, coinciding with National Kidney Month. 33% of adults in the U.S. are at risk for kidney disease, but most of them don't know it. Take a minute to find out if you're in the 33%. Just one minute might save your life.

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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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