

# **Salish Current**

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

**Dear Readers —**

We're moving into summer with an eye toward what's new and what's not so new in our readership region as we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic tunnel. This week, **Kenneth Duncan**, our spring quarter Western Washington University Journalism School intern, examines the increase in deaths by guns through a public health lens rather than reporting on the customary pro-con gun polemic. Looking to the future that has arrived today, writer **Kimberly Cauvel** takes us on two new Whatcom Transportation Authority electric buses going into use this Sunday. And, as live theater prepares to return to the stage, writer **Matt Benoit** asks its practitioners how they balance new cultural sensibilities with experimental and classic theater. There will be more to come in the weeks to come as we report on the reopening of our region. Maybe even some pictures of Canadians .... Enjoy the read—and share this newsletter with a friend, an associate, a family member-- and please encourage them to subscribe (it's free) using the button at the end of this newsletter. Thank you for reading and for your [support](#).

— Amy Nelson, Publisher, and Mike Sato, Managing Editor

**News from the Salish Current, week of June 11, 2021**

## [As gun death rates rise in Whatcom, Skagit and San Juan counties, state refocuses to public health approach](#)

*Never mix alcohol or drugs with firearms, advises Step 15 of a wikiHow article on firearm safety. A rise in the number of suicides involving firearms is moving policy and law makers toward a public health emphasis for prevention.*



*By Kenneth Duncan —* With the number of gun deaths in Whatcom, Skagit and San Juan counties on the rise and outpacing statewide trends, policy and law makers are stressing public health-focused solutions that could be more effective in prevention than legal tactics. ([Read more.](#))



## [Electric buses to debut, marking trend in Whatcom County](#)

*“100% electric” read signs on the latest additions to Whatcom Transportation Authority’s fleet. Part of the strategy to help mitigate climate change through reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, the buses are expected to go into service this weekend.*

*By Kimberly Cauvel — Two new all-blue additions to Whatcom Transportation Authority's fleet are its first electric buses — and part of a growing movement to replace fossil-fuel-powered vehicles with electric models to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change. ([Read more.](#))*

## [In an age of social controversy, the show goes on](#)



*Theater content is receiving a new sort of scrutiny as the community works through the interplay of art, social justice and their context in the greater society; shown here, a scene from iDiOM Theater’s 2019 production of “Orlando.”*

*By Matt Benoit — Theater producers, actors and audiences are bringing new perspectives to the question of what play content may be inappropriate, offensive or even harmful. Responses to a recent choice by Western Washington University's theater department were part of the debate of those questions among the local theater community. ([Read more.](#))*

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

## **News from around the region**

### **Health**

Canada is responding to U.S. pressure to reopen the border by looking at a multiphase approach that would begin with allowing fully vaccinated travelers to enter starting this summer. ([CBC](#)) Meanwhile, Point Roberts wants to be a test case in moves to open the U.S./Canada border. ([CBC](#))

Whatcom County 5/21/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Medium risk; 9.6/100K; 54.7% vaccinated  
San Juan County 5/21/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Low risk; 0.0/100K; 70% vaccinated  
Skagit County 5/21/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Medium risk; 6.2/100K; 50% vaccinated

### **Education**

Check out an ongoing mapping and naming project to identify historic Coast Salish locations throughout the San Juan Islands and Strait of Georgia. The project mapping helps to breathe life and

acknowledgement into Salish place names as each person interacts with the audio links and locations. ([Samish Nation](#))

Congratulations to Whatcom County High School Grads!

Meridian (6/9); Lynden Christian (6/10); Nooksack, Lynden, Ferndale, Blaine (6/11); Bellingham (6/12); Mt. Baker (6/15); Lummi (6/17)

Congratulations to Skagit County High School Grads!

Concrete (6/4); Mt. Vernon (6/8); Mt. Vernon Christian (6/10); Cap Sante, Sedro-Woolley, Burlington (6/11); State Street (6/15); Anacortes (6/16); La Conner (6/18)

Congratulations to San Juan County High School Grads!

Spring Street International (6/11); San Juan, Orcas, Lopez (6/12)

## **Government**

### **San Juan County**

The San Juan County Charter Commission held its public workshops to hear public responses to major issues regarding climate change and equity but postponed its June 8 meeting with the county commissioners due to contradictory directions from the county's prosecuting attorney on how and when the charter amendments should be put on the ballot. ([San Juan Journal](#))

The Town of Friday Harbor has adopted interim regulations allowing attached accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in single-family residential zones and turning existing structures into livable spaces while the town continues to develop permanent regulations for all types of ADUs. ([San Juan Update](#))

### **Bellingham**

The Bellingham City Council and its committees met on June 7. [Agenda items](#) included:

The mayor announced his appointment of Rachel Jewell to the Community Development Advisory Board; Matt Lesinski, Christine Jenkins and Craig Jewell to the Tourism Commission; Kurt Gazow and Molly Foote to the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission; and Mary Hooker to the Bellingham Sister Cities Board.

The Council amended (7-0) the city's 2022-2027 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). [30:30]

The Council adopted (7-0) the biennial budget allowing adding a plans examiner position to the Development Services Fund. [32:58]

The Council authorized (7-0) the Mayor to modify the lease of the Craft Studio space (Woods Coffee) at Boulevard Park. [34:33]

The Council amended (7-0) BMC Chapter 8.04 to update rules regarding park use. [35:36]

The Council discussed oversight of law enforcement in Bellingham and directed staff to assist them further with a "review and audit" hybrid type models of oversight boards for discussion at a future meeting. [39:28]

The next City Council meeting is scheduled for June 21.

### Whatcom County

The Council will meet on June 15. [Agenda items](#) include:

[[AB2021-322](#)] By consent agenda: Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a [contract](#) between Whatcom County and the Executive Office of the President for a grant award for funding from the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program in the amount of \$205,073.00

[[AB2021-324](#)] Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into Local Agency Agreement Supplement No. 4 between Whatcom County and the Washington State Department of Transportation for the Birch Bay Drive and Pedestrian Facility [Project](#) in the amount of \$1,100,000

[[AB2021-331](#)] Request authorization for the County Executive to award bid #21-26 and enter into a contract between Whatcom County and Tiger Construction LTD for the Plantation Indoor Range HVAC and Roof Replacement [Project](#) in the amount of \$1,032,352.54

### Port of Bellingham

The June 15 meeting of the Port Commission has been cancelled. The next meeting is scheduled for July 13.

### **Nature**

Based on lab tests, the state Department of Fish and Wildlife has determined that a viral infection known as adenovirus hemorrhagic disease (AHD) is affecting deer on the San Juan Islands. Deer with AHD exhibit rapid or open-mouth breathing, foaming or drooling from the mouth, diarrhea, weakness, and emaciation. ([San Juan Journal](#))

Nine fish-focused restoration projects in Skagit County will receive a combined \$1.9 million from the state's Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program. Two Stillaguamish River delta projects in Snohomish County will get a combined \$1.2 million through the program. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

### **Business**

The union representing a Burlington Northern rail crew and a retired federal investigator of railroad accidents claim that sabotage was the only way last December's derailment of 10 oil tank cars in Whatcom County could have occurred. ([KUOW](#)) The National Transportation Safety Board released its report on the December derailment and fire last week but limited its findings to the performance of the derailed tank cars. ([Associated Press](#)) Sen. Doug Ericksen (R-42) called for the state legislature to investigate possible sabotage in the oil train fire; Rep. Sharon Shewmake (D-42) says let investigators complete their work and issue their reports. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

The National Labor Relations Board has found that the McClatchy Company illegally withheld long overdue wages and bonuses from recently unionized journalists at Washington newspapers including those at the *Bellingham Herald* in retaliation for unionizing activities. ([Washington State News Guild](#))

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission agreed last month to delay finalizing the relicensing study of Seattle City Light's Skagit River dams to allow additional comments by indigenous people in Canada left out of the initial review process. A final study report is expected next week. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Amazon is building a distribution center facility west of Burlington on Bay Ridge Drive near the Skagit Regional Airport. The facility will employ about a hundred workers. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Port of Skagit Executive Director Patsy Martin will retire at the end of September, after nearly three decades at the port and nearly 14 as executive director. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

### **Commentary**

Jean Godden explains why June 15, the 162nd anniversary of the starting incident of the Pig War, is her favorite war. ([Post Alley](#))

Retired Lynden dairy farmer Marius "Mick" Vander Griend writes about the empty barn and the decline of the family dairy farm in Whatcom County due to financial income, the affordability of technology and government regulation. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

### **Community**

People First Bellingham has begun collecting signatures for a slate of four ballot initiatives addressing renter protection, policing, right to organize and worker rights in the city of Bellingham. ([The Front](#))

Skagit Transit will resume commuter routes on Monday ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#)) Whatcom Transportation Authority will return to regular bus service on June 13 and begin collecting fares on July 1. ([Whatcom Talk](#))

### **Arts and Leisure**

Check out the top winners of the 2021 Essence of Bellingham Photography Contest as well as all entrants and contests since 2017. ([City of Bellingham](#))

The Ferndale Arts Commission seeks from Coast Salish artists designs for a mural to be installed on the west exterior wall of the Ferndale Pioneer Pavilion Community Center. ([Whatcom News](#))

### **Jump in!**

Join local Watershed Watchers on June 12 from 12 noon to 3 p.m. to [help clean up](#) Birch Bay State Park.

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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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