

Salish Current

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

Dear Readers —

We're among those who have been fully vaccinated and have been seeing family without their masks, getting used to giving and getting hugs and eating indoors at restaurants — a couple of times. We follow closely the local vaccination rates and this week publish **Ella Banken's** story about a campaign encouraging young people to be vaccinated. We think of vaccination as a public health, not a political, issue with the emphasis on “public” and “health.” There must be readers who feel otherwise — and we welcome their letters or essays explaining why with facts and reason, no polemic. It's our community and Salish Current is a community service. Thank you for reading and for your support.

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

News from the *Salish Current*, week of July 16, 2021



[Whatcom council axes young adult social media COVID campaign despite vaccination success](#)

One image in a social media campaign featuring public health messages around COVID-19 developed to reach young adults called out medical professionals in recognition of Nurses Day.

By Ella Banken — In January, Whatcom County began an awareness campaign to engage young adults with information about COVID-19 safety. On June 29, a tie vote by the county council nixed an extension of the campaign.

[\(Read more.\)](#)

***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 and Safety

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee on Wednesday declared a statewide drought emergency because of hot, dry conditions that have plagued the region and lowered water supplies. ([Associated Press](#))

Effective Friday, all campfires are banned throughout all portions of the North Cascades, including Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas. ([KGMJ](#))

Throughout the San Juan Islands, the fire danger level is high as of July 12. ([San Juan Update](#))

The number of deaths by suicide dropped by over 30% while accidental drug overdose deaths increased 250% according to the annual report for 2020 compiled by the Whatcom County Medical Examiner. ([Whatcom News](#)) See: ("Pandemic job loss, quarantine, anxieties fuel opioid use surge," [Salish Current](#), Apr. 16, 2021)

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday Canada could start allowing fully vaccinated Americans into Canada as of mid-August for nonessential travel and should be in a position to welcome fully vaccinated travelers from all countries by early September. ([Associated Press](#))

As of July 10, 70.1% of Whatcom residents 16 and older have initiated vaccination. ([Whatcom Health Dept](#))

Whatcom County vaccination rates (at least one shot) by school districts (July 14):

- Bellingham: 68.9%
- Meridian: 56.4%
- Ferndale: 55.6%
- Blaine: 59.4%
- Lynden: 45%
- Nooksack Valley: 39.8%
- Mount Baker: 39.7%

([Whatcom Health Dept](#))

As of July 10, 151,499 vaccine doses have been administered in Skagit County, and roughly 64% of all Skagitonians 12 years and older are at least partially vaccinated against COVID-19. ([Skagit Dept of Health](#))

Two cases of a new, highly contagious delta variant of COVID-19 have been identified in Skagit County, and the Skagit County Public Health said it should be assumed that more cases are present in the community. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Government

San Juan County

The county council on July 12 unanimously approved extending the county's vacation rental moratorium to Jan. 13, 2022. ([Orcasonian](#))

Bellingham

The city council met on July 12. [Agenda items](#) included:

In-person services are now available at the city's permit center, the mayor's office and Finance.

[23029] Angela Nelson was reappointed to the Lake Whatcom Watershed Advisory Board. (5-0, Hammill and Vargas excused)

[23038] The council will revisit options for in-person meetings at the Aug. 30 meeting. Boards and commissions are expected to resume in-person meetings in September.

[23039] The council awarded the bid for West Cemetery Creek Water Quality Improvements Project to Henifin Construction for \$608,103.84. (5-0, Hammill and Vargas excused)

[23044] The council directed staff to draft an ordinance that addresses restaurant delivery best practices using as a template a model ordinance passed by the City of Seattle.

[23045-23049] The council voted to defer (4-0-3, Hammill and Vargas excused, Lilliquist abstain) initiatives on renter relocation assistance, restricting use of advanced police technologies, neutrality in labor campaigns, and fair treatment of hourly wage and gig workers to the vote of the people. During committee, council members also voted to direct staff to hold an executive session at the next council meeting to discuss legal concerns and constraints on the legality of the initiatives.

[23050, 23051] The council voted (5-0, Hammill and Vargas excused) to amend the city charter to reduce the number of signatures required to propose a charter amendment and to propose an initiative by the petition method. During committee, council members also voted to return with an update at the next meeting from staff on possible ways to lengthen the timeline for processing initiatives and provide more time for Council to consider offering an alternative.

The council will next meet on July 26.

Whatcom County

The council met on July 13. [Agenda items](#) included:

[AB2021-393] The council authorized (6-1, Elenbaas opposed) the county executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and Washington State Department of Commerce for resources to assist people who are experiencing homelessness to obtain and maintain housing stability, in the amount of \$6,335,182.

[AB2021-397] The council authorized (7-0) the county executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and City of Lynden for Economic Development Investment (EDI) loan and grant funding to support the West Front Street Arterial Improvement Project, in the amount of \$2,000,000.

[AB2021-398] The council authorized (7-0) the county executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and Washington State Department of Social and Health Services for the administration of developmental disabilities services, in the amount of \$4,125,535.

[AB2021-360] The council adopted 6-1, Elenbaas opposed) an ordinance to establish an independent review of the community response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[[AB2021-403](#)] The council voted (7-0) to introduce for public hearing a substitute ordinance adopting amendments to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan and Whatcom County Code relating to the Cherry Point UGA fossil fuel facilities, renewable fuel facilities, piers, SEPA, greenhouse gas emissions, and other matters.

The Council will next meet on July 27.

Port of Bellingham

The Port Commission met on July 13. [Agenda items](#) included:

The commissioners by content agenda authorized (3-0) the executive director to [contract](#) Zayo Fiber Network for engineering, designing, permitting, and bid documents for construction of segment one, from Deming to Glacier, of the Whatcom County Rural Broadband Fiber Network. The contracted services amount is \$319,414.34 with a \$200,525.86 contingency for environmental tasks that may only be spent upon approval by the Broadband Project Manager. Funding for these services are included in the approved rural broadband capital budget of \$2,032,782.

The commissioners authorized (3-0) the executive director to execute a 2021-2024 [interlocal agreement](#) with the Public Utility District of Whatcom County (PUD) for the purpose of joint collaboration in the continued development and implementation of the Whatcom County Rural Broadband Fiber Network. The broadband steering committee comprises port commissioner Shepard and port staff, and PUD commissioner Christine Grant and PUD staff.

The commissioners authorized (3-0) the executive director to enter into an [insurance contract](#) with carrier Lexington Insurance Company and authorize payment for the renewal of the Port's Property, Cyber and Crime Insurance coverage for the period from July 1, 2021, through July 1, 2022. The commissioners discussed cybersecurity and working with the Washington Public Ports Association and the Port of Vancouver in enhancing security measures.

The commissioners authorized (3-0) a cost of living allowance effective immediately for Executive Director Rob Fix and a 10% monthly pay raise until Dec. 31, 2021, for extra duties he is performing.

Lynden

John Williams has been hired as city administrator to replace Mike Martin who is retiring. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

Elections

The League of Women Voters of Bellingham/Whatcom County will be holding an online forum with three candidates for a Ferndale City Council position on July 22 at 6 p.m. The forum will be broadcast live on KGMI and on the [LWV website](#).

Past candidate forums hosted by the Whatcom County/Bellingham League of Women Voters are now available [online](#). The forums feature candidates for Whatcom Council At-Large, Whatcom Council District 1, Whatcom Council District 3, Port of Bellingham District 2 and Bellingham Council At-Large.

Nature

The decade-long delay by the City of Bellingham to clean up two former Bellingham Bay industrial sites and transform the waterfront area into a public access point informally called Cornwall Beach Park is due to lengthy bureaucratic processes at the city, state and federal levels, according to a city representative. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Business

More than 100 employees at Bellingham Cold Storage ended a two-week strike and returned to work July 15 while negotiations continue on a new contract which has been underway since November. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Gary Slavin, owner of The Rustic Fork Eatery in Blaine, has advertised for open positions for dish washers, servers, prep cooks, line cooks and pizza cooks with little success hiring this summer. ([The Northern Light](#))

Commentary

In an open letter, Whatcom County law enforcement officials take exception to the state legislature's recent passage of police reform laws. The letter is signed by Bill Elfo, Sheriff, Whatcom County; Flo Simon, Chief of Police, Bellingham; Dan MacPhee, Chief of Police, Everson-Nooksack; Kevin Turner, Chief of Police, Ferndale; Donnell Tanksley, Chief of Police, Blaine; Daniel Debruin, Chief of Police, Sumas; and Steve Taylor, Chief of Police, Lynden. ([Whatcom News](#))

Community

The Bellingham Municipal Court opened on July 13 for some in-person court sessions involving hearings for criminal defendants who are not in custody. The court will continue to operate its in-custody

calendars via closed-circuit television and by telephone on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. ([Bellingham Municipal Court](#))

The Whatcom Old Settlers Picnic is back for 2021, celebrating its 125th year July 23-24 at Pioneer Park with no parade, and dancing at one's own risk. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

Rental assistance is available for San Juan County tenants and landlords. ([San Juan Journal](#))

The Bellingham and Whatcom County Housing Authority held a virtual grand opening ceremony July 14 to celebrate the completion of the first phase of the redevelopment project. Dubbed Samish Commons, the old Aloha Motel property boasts 69 long-term rental units, a parking garage and new office space for the housing authority at 1000 Otis Street. Residents began moving in on June 1. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

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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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