

Salish Current

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

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

News from the *Salish Current*, week of Aug. 6, 2021

[Prepared for the worst, local agencies plan wildfire-fighting strategies while hoping for the best](#)



A ban on campfires is just one element in emergency management strategies aimed at avoiding wildfires. Fire marshals also advise keeping gutters clean of dry needles, removing dried or dead yard debris, watering lawns and ensuring that chains attached to vehicles don't drag on pavement.

By Matt Benoit — Whatcom County's emergency management teams will focus this year's training on fighting wildfires, and are stepping up reminders to the community that most such fires are caused by human actions — and therefore preventable. ([Read more.](#))

Community Voices / New police laws will make our communities safer



In close voting, Washington state legislators enacted new laws in the 2021 session to reform some policing accountability and practices. As the laws have taken effect, legislators are speaking out to clarify what they see as “some misinterpretation” of the new laws.

By Sen. Liz Lovelett, Rep. Debra Lekanoff and Rep. Alex Ramel — In response to "a clear call" for reforms in criminal justice and police accountability, Washington's state legislature responded with several bills. Now, 40th District legislators say they believe there has been some misinterpretation of the new laws, and hope that lawmakers and law enforcement agencies will continue to work to implement the new laws in good faith. ([Read me.](#))

Letters to the Editor

- Guemes water strategies are instructive for all

***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

Whatcom County and state data February through June show that unvaccinated and not fully vaccinated people accounted for over 96% of COVID infections and hospitalizations. ([Whatcom County Public Health](#))

San Juan County's investigation of a recent COVID outbreak on Orcas Island has identified nine additional linked positive cases for a total of ten outbreak cases. Five are confirmed to be unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated, one's vaccination status is unknown and four are possible breakthrough cases. ([Orcas Issues](#))

Skagit County announced Thursday an immediate return to requiring masks be worn in county facilities, regardless of vaccination status, for those 5 and older. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Whatcom County 8/6/21 [COVID ActNow](#) High risk; 12.0/100K; 70.4% vaccinated
San Juan County 8/6/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Medium risk; 9.8/100K; 75.1% vaccinated
Skagit County 8/6/21 [COVID ActNow](#) High risk; 11.4/100K; 59.7% vaccinated

Government

Skagit County

A proposed sales tax increase to fund emergency dispatch services will not be on the Skagit County November ballot after staff realized too late when the deadline was to complete the proper documents and get them signed by each Skagit 911 board director. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Bellingham

The city council met on Aug. 2. [Agenda items](#) included:

Mayor Fleetwood reported that the Lehigh Cement Company has agreed to donate 1,200 feet of the Lehigh Pier to the City to be used as a public waterfront recreational amenity. The pier extends from the southwest corner of Little Squalicum Beach Park into Bellingham Bay. Some renovations must be made and will likely take three to four years. The necessary access easement from the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad is under review.

[23059] The council voted 6-0-1 (Vargas excused) to move the [ordinance](#) renewing the Cascade Natural Gas franchise for first and second reading.

The council voted 6-0-1 (Vargas excused) to maintain the YouTube channel and provide access to the public.

The council voted 6-0-1 (Vargas excused) to discuss increasing lobbying efforts and an additional communications assistant to council at a September meeting.

The council will meet on Aug. 30.

Whatcom County

The county council will meet on Aug 10. [Agenda items](#) include:

[[AB2021-390](#)] Authorize the county executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and the Bellingham Housing Authority for the purposes of funding an EDI loan for phase 3 of the Samish Commons redevelopment project in the amount of \$750,000.

[[AB2021-458](#)] Authorize the county executive to enter into an interlocal agreement amendment between Whatcom County, the City of Bellingham Fire Department and Fire Protection District No. 7 for costs associated with the implementation of the 5th medic unit in the amount of \$1,917,500.

The county council will meet again on Sept. 14.

Port of Bellingham

The port commissioners will meet on Aug 9. [Agenda items](#) include:

[Consent Agenda] Authorize the executive director's acceptance of the [two grant\(s\)](#) and funds totaling \$4,466,863 under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to defray operating, maintenance and debt service costs at the airport and provide relief to the airport's terminal concessionaires.

[Consent Agenda] Approving the new [Airline Operating Agreement](#) with Southwest Airlines Co. for commercial air-service at the Bellingham International Airport.

The commission will hear a broadband update.

[Action Item] Authorize the executive director to execute the restated and amended [Master Development Agreement](#) with Harcourt Bellingham, LLC, to reduce the Master Development Area, adjust the project approval process, and provide detailed financial assurances, pending no substantive changes to the draft agreement.

[Action Item] Authorize the executive director to 1) Accept a [grant](#) of \$1.5 million from the Department of Ecology to construct a marine habitat enhancement project at Little Squalicum Beach; 2) Amend the port's 2021 budget to add funds for the project at Little Squalicum Beach.

The commission will meet on Sept. 7.

Elections

The Aug. 3 [primary election winners](#) in contested Whatcom County council, Bellingham city council and Bellingham port commission now move on to the November general election. What shapes are their campaign finances in, according to the Public Disclosure Commission ([PDC](#))?

- As of the latest count on Aug. 5, the Whatcom County At-Large Position A winners were Kamal Bhachu (37%) and incumbent Barry Buchanan (49%). PDC reports show Bhachu having \$27,351.82 in starting balance and \$8,436.56 in expenses and Buchanan having \$25,801.64 in starting balance and \$18,571.34 in expenses as of their last reports.
- The Whatcom County Council District 1 winners were Kaylee Galloway (55%) and Eddy Ury (27%). PDC reports show Galloway having \$32,150.64 in starting balance and \$18,213.86 in expenses and Ury having \$15,509.22 in starting balance and \$11,294.17 in expenses as of their last reports.
- The Whatcom County Council District 3 winners were Rebecca Lewis and incumbent Tyler Byrd, both with 44% of the vote. PDC reports show Lewis having \$22,999.23 in starting balance and \$16,035.05 in expenditures and Byrd having \$23,714.40 in starting balance and \$891.13 in expenditures.
- The City of Bellingham Council At-Large winners were Kristina Michele Martens (55%) and Russ Whidbee (32%). PDC reports show Martens having \$41,799.33 in starting balance and \$26,233.99 in expenses and Whidbee having \$16,583.51 in starting balance and \$8,631.47 in expenses.

- The Port of Bellingham District 2 Commissioner winners were incumbent Ken Bell (46%) and Kelly Krieger (37%). PDC reports show Bell having \$42,658.36 in starting balance and \$3,405.03 in expenses and Krieger having \$20,151.60 in starting balance and \$15,614.59 in expenses.

Nature

The Upper Skagit Tribe demands that Seattle City Light tear down Gorge Dam to help salmon and free a culturally important stretch of the Skagit River. ([High Country News](#))

The Skagit Land Trust's newly expanded Samish Island Conservation Area features a forest of 100-year-old trees and about 100 acres and about a half mile of shoreline, including 2,300 feet on Padilla Bay and 900 feet on Alice Bay. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Business

The Port of Skagit and contractor Ziplly Fiber announced this week a project to provide fiber-to-the-premises connection to more than 1,200 homes in the east Skagit County communities of Lyman, Hamilton, Concrete and Marblemount by the end of 2022. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

How the Canada-United States' COVID border closure affected border communities is detailed in a new report issued by the Western Washington University Border Policy Research Institute. ([BPRI](#))

When Canada opens its borders on Monday to fully vaccinated U.S. residents for nonessential travel, travelers may face delays as Canadian border patrol workers go on strike. ([Vancouver Sun](#))

The Swinomish Tribe opposes the net pen operation of Cooke Aquaculture scheduled to be stocked with 365,000 sterile native steelhead near the Swinomish Reservation. ([Anacortes American/paywall](#))

Commentary

Christie Stewart Stein details the role, responsibilities, composition and selection process of the Skagit Planning Commission in asking "Do they represent the people of Skagit?" ([Skagit Scoop](#))

Whatcom County Sheriff Bill Elfo speaks on police reform in a 16-minute video interview, July 23. ([Whatcom County Sheriff's Office](#)) Also see: Community Voices / New police laws will make our communities safer ([Salish Current](#))

Community

Lots of good stuff in the August quarterly newsletter of organizations that make up the Mount Baker Community Coalition: Kendall outdoor movie night, South Fork Valley's annual Summerfest celebration, a story about Twin Sisters Farm bursting the food desert bubble and more and more. ([Hello Neighbor!](#))

Arts and Leisure

Allied Arts of Whatcom County presents the Fin and Feather installment Aug. 6-28 which includes work by Deborah Dole, Lori Hill, Rachel Simpson and Liz Cunningham drawing the viewer into a world of whimsy and beauty. ([Allied Arts](#))

Anacortes Arts Festival celebrates its 60th year — in person — Aug. 6-9. The festival stretches down Commercial Avenue from 10th Street all the way to the port dock on the Guemes Channel waterfront. ([Anacortes Arts Festival](#))

The San Juan County Fair Aug. 18-21 is virtual this year but it remains where the islands come together for four summer days and celebrate the traditions and talents of their communities; with plenty of fun for the whole family. ([San Juan County Fair](#))

Washington state poet laureate and Lhaq'temish (Lummi) Nation member Rena Priest will be at the Lopez Island Library on Aug. 9 at 3 p.m.

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