

Salish Current

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

Dear Readers —

In the past two weeks we've made it a point to eat at the Black Sheep and Pepper Sisters restaurants not only because we enjoy their food and service but also because they are among a number of local restaurants and bars requiring proof of vaccination for indoor seating. Our choice was to vote with our pocketbook and to support financially the owners and the workers who make our community a safer place to live.

There are many ways to make your voices heard but nothing quite speaks like money to show your support for what you believe is right and for the good. As a not-for-profit community service, we like to think your financial support of *Salish Current* is a vote of support for independent, fact-based news freely available to all readers. With your financial support, your pocketbook vote, our freelance reporters are paid for their reporting and we will grow this model of community news reporting. Help us by telling others about *Salish Current* and make a [donation](#) to support *Salish Current*. Please use the [DONATE](#) button below. Thank you for reading and thank you for your [support](#).

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

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

News from the Salish Current, week of Sep. 10, 2021

[Pack a lunch, don a mask: kids go back to school in person as COVID-19 persists](#)



The school day starts at the bus stop, for many kids in south Bellingham and throughout the county. This year, masks are part of the daily protocol, starting first thing in the morning as students gather to board the bus.

By Ella Banken — In the midst the ongoing pandemic, students are dusting off backpacks, packing lunches — and picking out masks to accompany their back-to-school outfits. ([Read more.](#))

[From the Editor's Desk — 9/11: Who we were, who we've become](#)



A structural beam from the fallen World Trade Center towers of 9/11 is the centerpiece of a memorial in the Eastsound Fire Station on Orcas Island. The artifact was awarded to Orcas Island Fire and Rescue in a program for local fire departments to memorialize the thousands who died in the attack, including more than 300 firefighters.

By Mike Sato — Twenty years after 9/11, have the terrorist attacks and their aftermath changed us? *Salish Current* readers shared memories of where they were 20 years ago when they first learned of the attacks and what they thought and felt. ([Read more.](#))

News from around the region

Health and Safety

The Federal Railroad Administration in its report issued Thursday on the Dec. 22, 2021, 10-car derailment and fire near the Cherry Point refinery area identified vandalism as a possible cause but held BNSF responsible for failure to notify employees of previous vandalism events, failure to comply with federal requirements regarding securing trains and failure of crews to perform "chain check" functions. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Ellen Reiche of Bellingham was convicted of trespassing and placing a wire device to disrupt train signals on BNSF railroad tracks in November. ([KGMI](#))

As of Sept. 8 at least 168 people tested positive for COVID-19 after attending the Northwest Washington Fair in Lynden. ([Northern Light](#)) In Skagit County there were 394 new cases of COVID-19 for the seven-day period running Aug. 29 through Sept. 4, the fourth consecutive seven-day, Sunday-through-Saturday period with 300 or more new cases, and the highest number over that span. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Whatcom County 9/10/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 34.6/100K; 74.4% vaccinated
San Juan County 9/10/21 [COVID ActNow](#) High risk; 10.6/100K; 77.6% vaccinated
Skagit County 9/10/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 41.1/100K; 64.3% vaccinated

Government

San Juan County

The San Juan County Commissioners will meet on Sept. 14. Draft agenda items include:

- Consider Planning Commission [recommendations on the 2021 Docket](#)
- Update on Ferry Service by Jim Corenman, Chair Ferry Advisory Committee

City of Bellingham

The Bellingham City Council will meet on Sept. 13. [Agenda items](#) include:

- Committee of the Whole: [Update](#) on Implementation of Interim Housing Strategies (i.e. Shelter) for Those Experiencing Homelessness
- Committee of the Whole: [Report](#) from the Sept. 1, 2021, Lake Whatcom Policy Group Meeting
- Committee of the Whole: The Council President will provide an update regarding the new public comment session that will commence on Sept. 20, 2021. Previous Council Action: Aug. 30, 2021, the Council voted 6-0-1 (with Dan Hammill excused) to implement a pilot public comment session to be held on off-Council Mondays.

The council will meet again on Sept. 27.

Whatcom County

The Whatcom County Council will meet on Sept. 14. [Agenda items](#) include:

- [AB2021-359] Presentation/discussion of Wildlife Advisory Committee [recommendation](#) regarding Nomination of Species of Local Importance and request for Council motion to designate four wildlife species as "Species of Local Importance"
- [AB2021-489] [Resolution](#) for tourism-related facilities and activities as defined through RCW 67.28.1816 in the amount of \$1,469,575.

The council will meet again on Sept. 28.

Port of Bellingham

The Port of Bellingham Commission met on Sept. 7. [Agenda items](#) included:

- The Port's Climate Action Strategy update includes results of Greenhouse Gas inventory and reduction by 18-year participation in Puget Sound Energy's Green Direct Program. Staff will return by end of year to propose adoption of a final Climate Action Strategy, then begin work on Port resiliency planning and sea level rise.
- The Federal M-5 Coastal Connector program has designated the Port of Bellingham among West Coast ports-of-call for container barge service planned to begin in the first quarter of 2022.
- SeaFeast has been postponed from Sept. 18 to Oct. 30 due to COVID-19.
- The commission voted unanimously to authorize the Executive Director to execute a Lease Agreement and Construction of Tenant Improvements with [Southwest Airlines Co.](#) The airline will begin a three-flight-a-day schedule beginning on Nov. 7, invest about \$700,000 in terminal facilities and employ 31 staff. Facilities improvements will cost the Port about \$270,000 and staff estimates a net gain from non-aeronautic income of about \$1 million over two years and more as the airline is expected to ramp up service to 8 to 10 flights a day.

- The commission voted unanimously to authorize the Executive Director to execute an [Option to Purchase Real Property](#) between Mercy Housing Northwest, The Millworks LLC and the Port of Bellingham for approximately 3-acres of what is known as the Lignin parcel off the corner of Laurel Street and Cornwall Avenue in the Waterfront District. The property is estimated to be worth about \$2 million and the purchase option extends to the end of 2022 and could be extended to 2023. Mercy Housing will build and operate affordable housing and Millworks/Whatcom Community Foundation will establish a food hub for storage and processing local food products. The property purchase will be completed when all financing, design and permitting is in hand.

The Commission will meet again on Sept. 21.

Elections

The Bellingham/Whatcom County chapter of the League of Woman Voters invite the Whatcom County community [to submit questions](#) to the candidates before the chapter forums set for early October.

Nature

Washington has the most glaciers of any state in the lower 48. But Northwest glaciers, shrinking, receding and collapsing, are on a climate-change driven path of decline. In the North Cascades, researchers and climbers watch Washington's snowpack quickly melt, exposing glaciers' retreat. ([Seattle Times](#))

Bigg's orcas are in the Salish Sea in record numbers this year. As of Monday, there have been 793 sightings, eclipsing the previous record of 747 sightings in 2019 — with more than four months remaining in the year. ([Victoria Times Colonist](#))

The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community sent the Army Corps of Engineers on Thursday a 60-day notice of intent to sue over what it says is the Corps' failure to uphold the federal Endangered Species Act by granting construction permits to dike districts in the Skagit River delta over the past five years without requiring that estuary habitat be restored as mitigation for harm such construction causes endangered chinook salmon. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

A third Asian giant hornet nest was located Thursday in east Blaine. ([The Northern Light](#))

Business

Over three decades, the Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program has protected about 13,500 acres from development to ensure that agriculture remains viable. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Community

The Snoqualmie Tribe is launching a public awareness campaign to make recognizing use of ancestral lands more than "checking a box." ([Crosscut](#))

Arts and Leisure

"Future Artifacts" at the [Museum of Northwest Art](#) features work by Lummi Nation glass artist Dan Friday, who draws from cultural themes and uses modern processes — while still maintaining basic Native American qualities. Through 10/10.

Join journalist Lynda Mapes on a dive into the world of the endangered southern resident orcas when she talks about her book, *Orca: Shared Waters, Shared Home*, outside the Lopez Island Library on Sept. 18 at 2 p.m. [Reservations required.](#)

Jump in!

[Camas Club](#), a recently created virtual space where island backyard habitat enthusiasts can connect, welcomes questions, sharing resources, organizing seed swaps and more. Check it out.

The Islands' Oil Spill Association is offering free [oil spill response training](#) on Lopez, Orcas and San Juan islands for interested islanders in October.

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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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