

Salish Current

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

Dear Readers — This week we'd like to thank **Joan Connell** who will be leaving our board of directors. Joan is a journalist who teaches narrative journalism and media ethics at Western Washington University and has been a stellar guide in providing the strong journalistic foundation *Salish Current* is based on. Thank you, Joan! We're very happy to welcome **Bill Dietrich** of Anacortes to our board of directors. Bill is a journalist and author who won a Pulitzer Prize for covering the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill while at the *Seattle Times*, and was an instructor in journalism and advisor for *The Planet* magazine at WWU's Huxley College. Welcome, Bill! And a hearty thanks this week to freelance reporter **Matt Benoit** for pulling together the quickly developing story of mandatory vaccination requirements in the public, private and government sectors. Great board members and advisors and freelance reporters — tell others about *Salish Current* and [help grow](#) community-based, independent, open-access journalism in Whatcom, San Juan and Skagit counties. 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 Sept. 24, 2021

[Vaccine mandate becoming latest COVID 'new normal' for work or play](#)



Bringing the message home, an image from a social media advertising campaign run by Whatcom County earlier this year urges individuals to do whatever they can to help fight COVID. The pandemic rages on, with a death toll in the United States exceeding 660,000 ... and climbing.

By Matt Benoit — As the Delta variant of COVID-19 ravages the unvaccinated population, killing some and filling hospitals, public, private, and government entities have renewed masking mandates, and more are enacting vaccination mandates and requiring proof of testing to stamp out the virus. ([Read more.](#))

News from around the region

Health and Safety

The White House extended border restrictions on nonessential travel to Canada and Mexico through Oct. 21. ([USA Today](#))

Less than a month before Governor Jay Inslee's Oct. 18 deadline for all state employees and healthcare workers to be fully vaccinated, about 95% of PeaceHealth employees in Whatcom County are fully vaccinated. ([The Northern Light](#))

Bellingham Bay, Portage Bay, Chuckanut Bay and Larrabee State Park are closed to shellfish harvesting due to high levels of toxins causing paralytic shellfish poisoning. ([KGMI](#))

Whatcom County 9/24/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 28.2/100K; 75.6% vaccinated
San Juan County 9/24/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Medium; 6.5/100K; 78.1% vaccinated
Skagit County 9/24/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 44/100K; 66.0% vaccinated

Education

Fifteen parents at the Aug. 23 Blaine School Board meeting objected to state mandates requiring students to wear masks and K-12 staff to get fully vaccinated against COVID-19. The school board told 42nd District legislators that mandates are causing parents to withdraw students from school and that the Blaine community was being divided and eroded by the removal of power of the board to make local decisions. ([The Northern Light](#))

Government

San Juan County

San Juan County Council on Sept. 21 issued a [Request for Proposals](#) for a reputable developer to purchase five acres of land on Fisherman Bay Road north of Lopez Village on Lopez Island. The property is offered at no- or low-cost by the county for the development of affordable housing.

The council will meet on Sept. 28 to continue the public hearing, discussion and decision regarding Planning Commission recommendations on the [2021 Docket](#) regarding indoor recreation facilities in rural areas and build-out analysis.

The council will discuss population forecasts and vacation rentals with planner Adam Zack.

On Sept. 17, the San Juan County Planning Commission voted 4-3 to recommend to the County Council a maximum of 650 permitted vacation rentals in the islands, based on the number of compliant permits as of July 31, 2021. ([Orcasonian](#))

City of Bellingham

On Sept. 20, the City Council initiated the first of eight virtual public comment sessions allowing speakers three minutes to address council president Hannah Stone and two council members. The next seven sessions will be held on Mondays when the council does not meet and will not be broadcast, filmed or replayed by the city. The Sept. 20 was recorded and placed on [YouTube](#) by HomesNow!

The council will meet on Sept. 27. [Agenda items](#) include:

Public hearings:

- Emergency [Ordinance](#) Renewing and Extending a Moratorium on the Processing of Applications for Detached Single-Family Development in Multi-Family Zones
- Consider [Amendments](#) to the Comprehensive Plan and Municipal Code for the Residential-Multi Project
- Consider [Amendments](#) to Bellingham Municipal Code Chapter 20.15, Temporary Shelters for People Experiencing Homelessness
- Public Works and Natural Resources Committee:
- [Update](#) on Lake Whatcom Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Update — Part 2: Monitoring and Modeling

Committee of the Whole:

- Opportunity Council presentation on local federal assistance
- American Rescue Plan Act [Update](#)
- Update on process to create a countywide Racial Equity Commission
- [Resolution](#) Affirming that Racism is a Public Health Crisis

The council will meet again on Oct. 11.

Whatcom County

The council will meet on Sept. 28. [Agenda items](#) include:

Public Hearings:

- [AB2021-414](#) Ordinance granting Cascade Natural Gas Corporation a franchise for the transportation of natural gas in Whatcom County
- [AB2021-359](#) Request for public comment related to the Whatcom County Wildlife Advisory Committee's recommendation regarding Nomination of Species of Local Importance and request for Council motion to designate four wildlife species as "Species of Local Importance"

Consent Agenda:

- AB2021-513 Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a [transfer option agreement](#) between Whatcom County and Opportunity Council for the property located at Laurel and Forest streets for the appraised amount of \$1,230,000

Finance and Administrative Services Committee:

- AB2021-545 [Request](#) authorization for county executive to enter into an [Interlocal Grant Agreement](#) between Whatcom County and the Administrative Office of the Courts to reimburse

Whatcom County for extraordinary costs associated with the Blake decision in the amount of \$1,790,621

Council Committee of the Whole:

- AB2021-209 [Resolution](#) regarding permanent affordability of childcare in Whatcom County
- AB2021-525 Discussion and request for council motion regarding [request for proposals \(RFP\)](#) for independent review of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The council will meet again on Oct. 12.

Port of Bellingham

The Port of Bellingham Commission met on Sept. 21. [Agenda items](#) included:

- The commission heard an [update](#) on the Whatcom County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

The commission will meet again on Oct. 5.

Elections

Lawsuits filed last Thursday in Clark, Snohomish and Whatcom counties claim the auditors in each of those counties "flipped votes," kept illegal records of voters by political party, defied public records laws and, in some cases, used unverified election equipment during the November 2020 election. ([The Columbian](#)) Sept. 28 is National Register to Vote Day ([Washington State Secretary of State](#))

The Bellingham City Club will host a virtual Bellingham city candidate forum featuring at-large candidates Kristina Michelle Martens and Russ Whidbee, and Ward 6 candidates incumbent Michael Lilliquist and Eve Smason-Marcus. Registration for the Sept. 29 event closes Sept. 27. [Register here.](#)

The Bellingham-Whatcom County League of Women Voters will host [virtual candidate forums](#):

- Oct. 1 — Port of Bellingham
- Oct. 5 — Whatcom County Council
- Oct. 7 — Ferndale City Council, Ferndale School District
- Oct. 8 — Bellingham City Council, Bellingham School District
- Oct. 13 — Lynden City Council, Lynden School District, Blaine School District
- Oct. 14 — Blaine City Council
- Oct. 16 — City of Bellingham Citizen Initiatives 1-4

The Bellingham/Whatcom County chapter of the League of Woman Voters invites the Whatcom County community to [submit questions](#) to the candidates in advance of the forums.

The San Juan County League of Women Voters will hold a virtual forum on Oct. 12 at 5:30 p.m. on six proposed county charter amendment proposed by the Charter Review Commission. To register, email charterreview.forum@gmail.com

Nature

Friends of the San Juans and the Salmon Point Community have successfully restored priority shoreline habitat on a south end Lopez Island beach by removing boulders and toxic creosote logs and making forage fish spawning habitat. ([Friends of the San Juans](#))

The annual census of the endangered Southern Resident killer whales ... will show 74 whales ... [but]the actual number of Southern Residents today stands at 73 ... The number of whales in L pod now totals 33, J pod has 24, and K pod has 16. This does not include Lolita/Tokitae, an orca from L pod that was captured in Puget Sound and is held at the Miami Seaquarium in Florida. ([Puget Sound Institute](#))

The Washington State Department of Agriculture said Thursday that it has eradicated the third Asian giant hornet nest of the year in Whatcom County. ([Seattle PI](#))

Business

The Sauk-Suiattle Tribe has sued Seattle City Light, claiming that the utility's green power claims are misleading and asking that the utility stop advertising itself as a fish-friendly, green and environmentally responsible utility until Seattle provides fish passage at its three Skagit River dams. ([Seattle Times/paywall](#))

WSU Skagit County Extension Service reports that Skagit County farmers produced about \$314 million worth of crops in 2020, three dairy farms went out of business and crops such as Brussels sprouts continued to grow in popularity. ([Skaqit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

The Swinomish Tribe has joined as a friend of the court in a lawsuit before the state Supreme Court to block permits that allow steelhead farming in a commercial net pen just offshore near Hope Island. The tribe says the pen is a deep cultural insult and violation of their treaty fishing rights reserved in the Treaty of Point Elliott, tribal members stated in declarations. ([Seattle Times/paywall](#))

Skagit County and the Port of Skagit received a total of \$2 million in funding from the Washington Community Economic Revitalization Board coronavirus capital projects fund to provide high-speed internet connections in east Skagit County. Other projects funded are in Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Mason and Thurston counties. ([EIN Presswire](#))

The Coast Guard is monitoring the unprecedented number of container ships anchored in the greater Puget Sound area due to a logistics backlog affecting the entire U.S. West Coast and Canada from Los Angeles to Prince Rupert. ([Workboat](#))

An electric future? Natural gas proponents won't go without a fight. Even a green city like Bellingham has learned it's not easy to cap demand for fossil fuel. ([Investigate West/Grist](#))

Commentary

John Doyle writes that Skagit County commissioners' concern about affordable housing is leading them down a bad path in considering Fully Contained Communities as a solution. ([Skagit Scoop](#))

Community

A San Juan County jury convicted Lopez resident Laverne Dwight Lewis of reckless endangerment and malicious mischief for his destruction of a Black Lives Matter memorial on the island on Aug. 12, 2020, in what he claimed was retaliation for defacement of his political sign. ([Islands' Sounder/paywall](#))

Local artists Jason LaClair and Gretchen Leggit are painting a Forest Street mural in Bellingham that tells the story of the "salmon people." ([KING](#))

Whatcom County Library System will hold four online meetings to discuss funding construction of a new Birch Bay Library. The first meeting is scheduled for Sept. 27. [Register here.](#) ([WCLS](#))

Arts and Leisure

New concertmaster Dawn Posey is the featured soloist in the first Bellingham Symphony concerts of the 2021-2022 season, Sept. 25 and 26 at the Mount Baker Theatre. ([Whatcom Talk](#))

Join the 2021 [Whatcom Artist Studio tour](#), a free, self-guided tour Oct. 2-3 and 9-8, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. See sculpture, glass, jewelry, painting and more. Meet the artists and learn more about their inspiration and techniques in creating their works of art.

"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 Oct. 10.

Jump in!

The Whatcom Racial Equity Commission will hold an online Town Hall on Sept. 30 to share progress to date and what's been learned along the way. Join in from 12:20-1:30 p.m. [here.](#) ([WREC](#))

Like this newsletter? Share it. And it's easy to subscribe by reply mail. Your email address will never be shared and you can unsubscribe at any time. — Mike Sato

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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