

Salish Current

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

Dear Reader —

Thanks to the Bellingham City Club, I had the opportunity this past week to talk in an online forum ([the talk will be posted online](#)) about how *Salish Current's* news reporting is making a difference in our Whatcom, San Juan and Skagit counties readership area. One big difference is that anyone in our community can read *Salish Current*. We're committed to a paywall-free website and subscription-free content because we believe everyone should be able to read the news to be able to participate in our community. But this is made possible only if readers who believe in the free access to news in a community make it possible. [Donations](#) from new and committed readers are essential to our continued growth and success. Your one-time or recurring donation during our [NewsMatch campaign](#) in November and December will be doubled dollar-for-dollar. I thank readers who have donated and those in our Publisher's Circle below who encourage others to donate to our matching campaign. Thank you to all!

Publisher's NewsMatch Circle (as of Nov. 19)

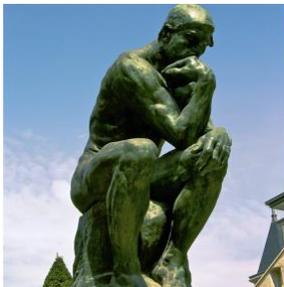
Eric Hirst, Elsie Heinrick, Barbara and Mike Ryan, John Binns and Julie Fleetwood Binns, Betsy Gross, John and Kathy Whitmer, Floyd and Dixie McKay, Sarah Spotts and Kevin Covey, Shaun Hubbard and Harold Kawaguchi, Alan and Elizabeth Hadden Fritzberg, Cindy Madigan, David and Bonnie Dick, Tony Angell and Lee Rolfe.

— Amy Nelson, Publisher

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 Nov. 19, 2021

[The hows and whys of religious exemption from the COVID-19 vaccination requirement](#)



The decision whether to be vaccinated against COVID-19 is simple for some but soul-searching for others. State employers and workers are among those who have been adapting over the past month to accommodating exemptions in classrooms, health care facilities and elsewhere.

By Matt Benoit — With some employees seeking religious or medical exemption from the state's COVID-19 mandate, employers and workers have continued to adapt in the workplace. Receiving a medical exemption is often relatively straightforward, but religious exemptions are less so. ([Read more.](#))

[Housing and growth issues surround Skagit County consideration of 'fully contained community' proposal](#)



Fully contained communities, or FCCs, are meant to create urban villages and increase housing supply, including affordable options. Skagit County planners are considering a proposed amendment to the county's comprehensive plan that would allow for such developments in rural areas of the county. (Google image)

By Lauren Gallup — Mostly rural Skagit County — with a population density about half of Whatcom County to the north and one-sixth of Snohomish County to the south — has a big-county problem: housing. Planners are looking at solutions including a comp plan amendment to create urban villages in currently rural zones. ([Read more.](#))

[In country, town and city, treatment for drug addiction is urgently needed](#)



Addiction treatment programs work when patients are treated as individuals and treatment aligns with the patient, professionals have found. The recent Ralph Munro Seminar convened policy makers and law enforcement and behavioral health experts to share insights on addiction treatment.

By Heather Spaulding — Harm reduction programs and collaborations among police, health professionals and society at large pave the pathways to treatment needed by those addicted to drugs, agreed an expert panel at the recent Ralph Munro Seminar. Along with looking at why people turn to drugs and how to get them the help they need to overcome addiction, the panel offered ideas as to what's needed in the way of policy. ([Read more.](#))

[Community Voices / How farmers can fight climate change](#)



A flooded pasture at Steensma Dairy and Creamery west of Lynden during the atmospheric river event on Nov. 15 dramatically illustrates the storm's overwhelming impact on farmland.

By Stevan Harrell and Katherine Steensma — Farmers are in a powerful position to help curb climate change, and many locally already are taking steps to do so, note dairy farmer Katherine Steensma and author Stevan Harrell. While this bodes well for the future of agriculture here, there is more to be done to stop "wasting and poisoning the good and beautiful things of the world": natural resources. ([Read more.](#))

News from around the region

Health and Safety

The Canadian government has lifted as of Nov. 19 the PCR test requirement for fully vaccinated travelers returning to Canada after short trips. ([Public Health Agency of Canada](#))

Western Washington University is blocking students who have not shown proof of vaccination or approved exemption from registering for winter quarter. ([The Front](#))

State Sen. Doug Ericksen is in stable condition at a Florida hospital and being treated for COVID-19 after being flown from El Salvador where he was stricken, according to former state representative Luanne Van Werven of Lynden. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Whatcom County 11/19//21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 28.7/100K; 71.8% vaccinated
San Juan County 11/19/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 27.6/100K; 80.0% vaccinated
Skagit County 11/19/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 44.2/100K; 67.0% vaccinated

The Skagit River crested Tuesday morning but waters were kept from downtown Mount Vernon by a metal-slatted retaining wall installed in 2018 that the city can put up or take down. ([KUOW](#))

Maps tell how the Nooksack River overflowed north and downhill into Canada, breaching the Sumas River dike that was supposed to contain such a flood, and began to flood the Sumas Prairie. ([The Tyee](#))

The Whatcom County Sheriff's Office reported that a body believed to be that of Jose Garcia of Everson who went missing during the flooding was found on Wednesday. ([KGMI](#))

Photos taken Tuesday from an altitude of about 4,000 feet document the expanse of the floodwaters about six hours after the Nooksack River crested in Ferndale in major flood stage range at nearly 24 feet. ([Whatcom News](#))

Education

The Blaine School Board will hold a special meeting on Nov. 22 at 6 p.m. to discuss the redrawing of school board director districts based on the 2020 census. The public is invited to comment on the draft redistricting plan. ([The Northern Light](#))

Government

San Juan County

The San Juan Council continued the public hearing on the 2022-23 budget until Nov. 30 when additional budget details will be available on adding communication functions to the county [budget](#).

City of Bellingham

The Bellingham City Council met on Nov. 22. [Agenda items](#) include:

Mayor Fleetwood will inform the council of his appointment of Teagan Hudson to the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission.

Parks and Recreation Committee

- **23170** Consideration of an [ordinance](#) accepting the donation of the pier at Little Squalicum Park from Lehigh Northwest Cement Company.

Climate Action Committee

- **23171** City staff will present a climate action fund [report](#) and a city ballot measure anticipated [timeline](#).
- **23172** Puget Sound Energy will present its draft [Clean Energy Implementation Plan](#)

Committee of the Whole

- **23175** Update on City response to recent storm events

The city council will meet again in regular session on Dec. 6.

The next Bellingham City Council Public Comment Sessions will be held on Nov. 29, Dec. 20 and Dec. 29. To participate, [go here](#). (Meeting ID: 923 0705 9297 Password: 018602)

Whatcom County

The county council will meet on Nov. 23. [Agenda items](#) include:

Public hearing

- **AB2021-628** Ordinance amending the 2022 [Whatcom County Budget](#), request no. 1, in the amount of \$50,655,096
- **AB2021-654** [Resolution](#) approving the Shoreline Management Program Periodic Update 2020

Other items

- **AB2021-653** Authorization of county executive to enter into a three-year interlocal agreement among Whatcom County, Port of Bellingham and City of Bellingham to provide economic development services and complete special projects that promote beneficial outcomes for the parties, in the amount of \$2,084,322. [Presentation](#)
- **AB2021-640** Ordinance amending the 2022 [Whatcom County Budget](#), request no. 2, in the amount of \$12,007,450
- **AB2021-680** Approve county executive to award [Bid #21-68](#) for the purchase of 80 each FN303 Mark 2 Less-Lethal Launchers, associated equipment, and related accessories to Arms Unlimited Incorporated, in an amount not to exceed \$86,062.98

The council will meet again on Dec. 7.

Port of Bellingham

The Port of Bellingham Commission met on Nov. 16. [Agenda items](#) included:

The commission received no public comments at its Nov. 16 meeting on its [2022 strategic budget](#) and property tax levy. The commission unanimously adopted the measures.

The commission received a briefing on planned use of its 9000-square-foot Fisherman's Pavilion building at Squalicum Harbor. The port will make available use of the building from Oct. 1 through May 21 for commercial fishing net mending and repair and use for public event June 1 through Sept. 30.

The commission unanimously authorized the Port of Bellingham's executive director to execute an [Indefeasible Right of Use \(IRU\)](#) between Sound Internet Services, LLC d/b/a PogoZone and the Port of Bellingham. The partnership will extend an open access fiber network to provide broadband service to about 456 homes east of the town of Nooksack and about 168 homes off the Mt. Baker Highway in the north Mosquito Lake Road area. The project commits approximately \$114,000 of port funding, \$750,000 of county economic development funding and state Community Economic Development Board funding for a total of about \$2 million.

The commission is scheduled to meet next on Dec. 7.

Elections

42nd District Rep. Sharon Shewmake [D-Bellingham] [announced](#) that she is running in 2022 for the seat currently occupied by 42nd District Sen. Doug Ericksen.

Nature

In response to the threat of a suit by the Swinomish Tribe, the Army Corps of Engineers will review the Skagit Delta Tidegate Fish Initiative, a 2010 agreement in which local dike, drainage and irrigation districts agreed to restore a certain amount of estuary habitat in exchange for being able to maintain tidegates that can block fish from valuable habitat. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Climate change will increase the frequency and severity of floods, and Whatcom County and its cities have their work cut out for them if they're going to protect the public in places like Sumas, Everson and coastal communities, according to Chris Elder who works on Whatcom County climate planning. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Two Skagit County conservation projects have received funding to help with Southern Resident killer whale recovery: \$108,000 to design reconnecting salmon habitat at the south end of the Swinomish Channel through the McGlenn Island Jetty and \$74,400 to expand a stormwater monitoring program. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Business

New York City private equity fund Bookend Capital Partners has purchased for \$6.6 million Chuckanut Bay Foods, a Blaine cheesecake manufacturer that employs 160 people and ships its desserts, including its popular single-serving cheesecake, to over 10,000 stores across the country. ([The Northern Light](#))

Community

The Anacortes/San Juan Islands route returns to four-boat service and operating on its usual fall schedule on Nov. 19. Reservations will remain suspended on the route temporarily. ([WSF](#))

The Lummi Reservation in Whatcom County became an isolated island when the Nooksack River flooded but restocked its only store using large dump trucks on flooded roads, and provided emergency food boxes, diapers and fireplace logs and served outdoor lunch to those in need. The office also delivered 80 bagged lunches to people stranded at the tribe's Silver Reef Casino. ([KUOW](#))

The City of Bellingham seeks comments from residents about current internet access and increasing availability for high-speed internet service. The [survey](#) is open until Dec. 31.

Arts and Leisure

Western Washington University [Music Department](#) returns with live performances:

- We Sing! Concert Choir & Advanced Treble Choir, Assumption Church, Bellingham; Nov, 20, 8 p.m. [Purchase tickets \\$25 in advance.](#)
- Western Washington University Collegium Musicum annual concert, Nov. 29, 8 p.m., Performing Arts Center. Program features: Johann Friedrich Grenser (the 18th century Carl Nielsen), Joseph Martin Kraus (the Swedish Mozart), Anton Filz (he who ingested poisonous spiders), and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. The last will be his magnificent ode Morgengesang.

Jump in!

The Whatcom County Library System's 2022 Whatcom READS selection is *Greenwood* by Canadian author Michael Christie. With trees as a guiding metaphor, *Greenwood* charts a family's rise and fall and the "hopeful, impossible task of growing toward the light." Borrow *Greenwood* as a book, eBook or audiobook from the library or purchase it from Village Books, which donates 10% of each sale to Whatcom READS. Author Michael Christie will visit Whatcom County March 3-5 next year.

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