

# Salish Current

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

## Dear Reader:

It's been a tough week of COVID-19 and we're not through the omicron wave. The hospitals are full, vaccination and testing facilities overwhelmed, public services curtailed. And it's not just the virus but employment, rentals, health care, education, childcare, flood recovery, transportation: things that were difficult before this recent wave of infections are made more difficult now.

Will the wave pass? It will — and there may be others to come. There's no easy fix to the pandemic or to the difficulties we need to address in our everyday lives. As we move "on" to MLK Day, I'm going to keep in mind that there are brave and dedicated folks who are doing their jobs to keep us healthy, to keep us fed, to keep us safe — who are working a day "on" and not taking a day "off." Thank you. There's a lot more we, too, can do but at the least, let's get vaccinated, wear our masks, wash our hands, socially distance and isolate if we feel sick. Be well, stay safe.

— Amy Nelson, Publisher

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

## News from the *Salish Current*, week of Jan. 14, 2022

### [Youth has its day + its say in 42nd District Senate vacancy vote](#)



*Whatcom County District Court Judge Angela Anderson administered the Washington State Senate oath of office to Simon Sefzik following the county council's selection of Sefzik to fill the 42nd District seat vacated by the death last month of Sen. Doug Ericksen. (Whatcom County Council screen shot)*

*By Matt Benoit and Mike Sato — In a special meeting Jan. 11, the Whatcom County Council appointed Simon Sefzik as the newest — and youngest on record — member to serve in the Washington State Senate, filling the vacant 42nd District seat of the late Sen. Doug Ericksen. ([Read more.](#))*

## Ferry delays are beyond inconvenience, islanders stress



*Disruptions in schedules on Washington State Ferries routes connecting the San Juan Islands with each other and the mainland have disrupted island residents' lives and livelihoods. How proposed changes in the state's budget to address the issues fare in the legislative session is being seen as a test of the level of support for islands' transportation needs.*

*By Heather Spaulding* — Islanders gave Washington State Ferries staff an earful at a community meeting about how disruptions related to COVID-19, freezing weather and crew shortages on the San Juan-Anacortes ferry route hamper access to healthcare, education, jobs, supplies and families. ([Read more.](#))

## Community Voices / MLK Day in Bellingham: looking backward, stepping forward



*The Bellingham community-organized Martin Luther King Jr. Day event has featured a variety of speakers since its inception in the early 1990s; in 2008, King speechwriter Vincent Harding, who wrote King's "Beyond Vietnam" speech, was featured. The organizing committee chose not to hold an in-person event this year, instead urging attention on voting rights legislation, and avoiding potential spread of COVID-19. (Courtesy photo)*

*Contributed by Clyde W. Ford* — Community organizers of Bellingham's 30-plus-year-old Martin Luther King Jr. Day event are refocusing this year from an in-person gathering to a call for voting rights action — and asking the community to urge Bellingham officials to commit to support for the community-based observance going forward. ([Read more.](#))

## Letters to the Editor

- Joy Monjure — The right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy

## **News from around the region**

### Health and Safety

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. State Department on Monday advised against nonessential travel to Canada because of a rising number of COVID-19 cases as the omicron variant spreads. ([Reuters](#))

Whatcom County COVID-19 infections have skyrocketed beyond anything seen in the two years of the pandemic. Bellingham hospitalizations reached 61 patients this week, 19 patients higher than the 42-

patient peak during the delta variant surge in mid-2021. COVID-19 cases are expected to peak the end of January or mid-February. ([The Northern Light](#))

Due to a surge in COVID-19 cases driven by the omicron variant, Skagit Valley Hospital's emergency room is as crowded as at any point in the pandemic, said Dr. Connie Davis, chief medical officer with Skagit Regional Health. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Whatcom County 1/14/22 [COVID ActNow](#) **Severe Risk**; 194.7/100K; 76.6% vaccinated

San Juan County 1/14/22 [COVID ActNow](#) **Severe Risk**; 93.4/100K; 85.2% vaccinated

Skagit County 1/14/22 [COVID ActNow](#) **Severe Risk**; 198.2/100K; 70.8% vaccinated

Last week's 12-foot king tide, 40 mph winds and 2- to 4-foot waves flooded south Birch Bay damaging residences with flood waters and beach debris. ([The Northern Light](#))

Too much smoke in Whatcom County's Columbia Valley area of Maple Falls has prompted the Northwest Clean Air Agency to issue on Thursday a Stage 1 "air quality burn ban" would go into effect. ([Whatcom News](#))

## **Education**

After opening for in-person classes on Jan. 10, Western Washington University went to remote classes until at least Jan. 24. ([KGMI](#))

## **Government**

### City of Bellingham

Mayor Seth Fleetwood and the city council issued declarations calling for U.S. Senate passage of the [Freedom to Vote Act](#) and the [John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act](#) currently before the U.S. Senate in commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

The city council met on Jan. 10. [Agenda items](#) included:

#### Public Works and Natural Resources Committee

- 23220 Recycling program. The council unanimously approved proceeding with a pilot program for part of the city to determine the cost-effectiveness and other effectiveness for a [single-stream recycling program](#).
- 23137 Public parking. No action was taken on an ordinance regarding public parking. [Staff memo](#).
- 23221 Parking Rates. The council unanimously recommended approval that, in the draft changes to the parking regulations, the discount for low-income subsidized housing be at the 80% level. [Resolution Amending City Parking Rates](#)

#### Final Consideration of Ordinances:

- 23180 Infill housing. The council on final reading unanimously adopted an ordinance regarding infill housing provisions.

The council will meet again on Jan. 24.

### Whatcom County

The county council met in special session on Jan. 11 and voted 6-2 (Elenbaas recused) to select Simon Sefzik to fill the 42nd District Senate vacancy.

The county council met in regular session on Jan. 11. [Agenda items](#) included:

Public hearing:

- [AB2021-715](#) The council unanimously approved adoption of an ordinance granting Zayo Group, LLC, a franchise for the provision of telecommunications services.
- [AB2021-741](#) The council unanimously authorized the county executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Washington State University to continue the jointly shared costs for faculty positions and program support for WSU Extension in the amount of \$240,071 for a total amended contract amount of \$2,731,428.90
- [AB2022-001](#) The council authorized 4-2 (Kershner and Elenbaas opposed, Byrd abstained) the county executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Lewis Publishing Company, Inc. to publish COVID-19 related advertisements, in the amount of \$27,000 for a total amended contract amount of \$67,000
- [AB2022-002](#) The council authorized 4-2 (Kershner and Elenbaas opposed, Byrd abstained) the county executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Cascade Radio Group to provide radio commercial spots for COVID-19 related advertisements in the amount of \$20,000 for a total amended contract amount of \$60,000

The council will meet again on Jan. 25.

### Port of Bellingham

The Port of Bellingham commission will meet on Jan. 18. [Agenda items](#) include:

Consent agenda:

- Authorize the Port of Bellingham's legal counsel to enter into [contracts](#) with Anchor QEA, L.L.C. and other consultants to provide technical expertise in support of the legal work related to the Environmental Division in an amount not to exceed \$153,197.
- Authorize the executive director to approve Bellingham Dockside Market vendor rates (\$35-\$50 per market per stall vendor) and [guidelines](#).

Public hearing:

- [Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvement Plan](#)

Action items:

- Approve [Resolution No. 1400](#) establishing [Commissioner District Boundaries](#).
- [Authorize](#) the executive director to execute grant agreements regarding engineering design and to amend the 2022 strategic budget by \$2,600,000 for the Lignin Parcel Affordable Housing Project in the Waterfront District.

The commission will meet again on Jan. 18.

### For the people

The spirit of unanimity and bipartisanship pervaded the 42nd and 40th District House and Senate delegation the first week of the legislative session. Reps. Rule, Shewmake, Lekanoff and Ramel were unanimous in approving House Bills 1122, 1124, 1141, 1329, 1357. Sen. Lovelett and Sefzik were unanimous in approving Senate Bills 5148, 5201, 5202, 5241, 5245, 5268, 5312, 5354, 5376, 5441. To learn what these bills were about (and all other bills), go to [Washington Votes](#).

### Nature

The Whatcom Million Trees Project plans to plant half a million trees in public property and protect half a million trees between 2022 and 2026. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

The Greer/Solien Foundation will donate \$300,000 to the Salish Sea Institute at Western Washington University to allow the institute to expand its works on transboundary issues. ([Western Today](#))

The 2022 steelhead fishery will not be allowed on the Skagit River because the 2021 return of wild steelhead fell short of a co-managed forecast of 4,000 fish. ([Skaqit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

### Business

The Washington Supreme Court unanimously upheld the state Department of Fish and Wildlife's approval of steelhead farming in Puget Sound. At issue is the plan of international seafood company Cooke Aquaculture to switch from raising nonnative Atlantic salmon at net pens in the region to raising native steelhead trout at the facilities. ([Skaqit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Margery Hite, a member of the grassroots campaign "Right Growth, Right Place," told those attending the online event "Community Conversation: Growth in Skagit Valley" that allowing fully contained communities in Skagit County will lead to urban sprawl and cause the county to become suburban. ([Skaqit Valley Herald/paywall](#)) [See also: "Housing and growth issues surround Skagit County consideration of 'fully contained community' proposal," [Salish Current](#), Nov. 18, 2021]

The City of Anacortes will receive a \$2.3 million Dept. of Commerce broadband grant to install a fiber-optic network to pass every business and home in the city. It will be matched by \$563,433 in local funds and is expected to create 157 jobs, retain 120 jobs and create \$240 million in private investment. ([Anacortes American](#))

### Community

Longtime clean-water advocate and RE Sources board member Peter Willing passed away at age 77 on New Year's Day. Peter is remembered in an essay, "Toward the headwaters." ([RE Sources](#))

## **Arts and Leisure**

Up Close and Personal: The Body in Contemporary Art. The exhibition examines the human body through the expressive lens of 60 artists. Curated by Amy Chaloupka from the Collection of Driek and Michael Zirinsk, Lightcatcher Building, Whatcom Art Museum, through Feb. 22.

## **Jump in!**

Day 3 of 2022 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Human Rights Conference: Jan. 15, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. workshops. Theme is “An Inescapable Network of Mutuality: Creative Extremism for the Cause of Justice.” For info and to register, [click here](#).

Orca Network Virtual Way of Whales Workshop, Jan. 15, 10 a.m.- 4 p.m. Register at [Orca Network](#).

Dr. Martin Luther King Day of Service in Bellingham, Jan. 17. Make it a “day on” rather than a day off: a day of service and a day to educate, advocate and activate for voting rights. ([City of Bellingham](#))

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