



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

**Dear Reader —**

We're 12 days away from our "Trust 2022: Why Local Journalism is Important for a Strong Democracy" forum. We're excited to have the opportunity to join in an important conversation with national journalists Margaret Sullivan and Hedrick Smith and Washington's attorney general Bob Ferguson.

Back when we first thought of this event we thought of it as an in-person gathering. Then we had to decide whether to keep it as a remote event. Now, we're happy and relieved like many of you that we are moving out from under the omicron cloud and can one day soon meet in person again. In the meantime, [please register for the forum](#). The forum is free but with a [donation](#) of \$100 or more you can choose a book by one of our panelists— while supplies last. And, if you are a FaceBook user, please [share the event](#) with friends.

I look forward to "seeing you" on March 17.

And, if you'd like more news, here you are:

[Salish Sea News Week in Review 3/4/22](#): Waltz Friday, Leque Island salmon, stream shade, Rosalinda Guillen, sea level rise, Tacoma warehouse, suffocating crabs, kelp beds, salmon rights, new baby orca, Tokitae, biodiversity risk

— 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 March 4, 2022

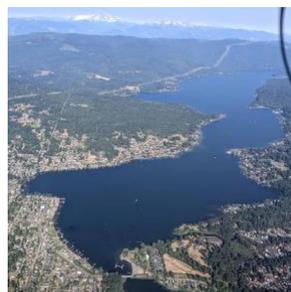
### [Confrontations, demands for parents' rights challenge local school boards](#)



*Students in Lynden public schools have made a point of celebrating diversity, as this poster from 2019 demonstrates. In recent months, some parents in the district have told the school board they want more say in what is taught in classrooms and how the district responds to state mandates.*

**By Matt Benoit** — Impassioned conversations are occurring nationwide as sometimes large groups of parents show up at once sparsely attended school board meetings — including in Whatcom County — with local issues including COVID-19 mask mandates, critical race theory and sexual health education. ([Read more.](#))

### [Holding the line on phosphorus in Lake Whatcom](#)



*An aerial view of Lake Whatcom last July looking east toward Mount Baker demonstrates the lake's popularity with residents and boaters. Since 1998, Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham have been tasked with reducing the amount of phosphorus in the lake to reduce pollution and preserve aquatic life.*

**By Mallory Biggar** — Popular as a residential and recreational site, Lake Whatcom is also the source of drinking water for many county residents. Following its

listing in 1998 as polluted with increasing levels of phosphorus, the lake is the focus of efforts to meet targets to bring down those levels. ([Read more.](#))

## [Broadband's coming but cost, quality still in question](#)



*[Got broadband?](#) That depends where you are, in Whatcom County. Service options are coming to many areas as yet unserved or underserved, but questions about cost and quality remain. Download speeds vary from high (green dots)*

*to low (yellow) and very low (red) speeds; black dots indicate no service at those sites.*

**By Chris O'Neill** — Two years of pandemic isolation not only revealed how important internet connectivity is in today's world but also exposed the stark divide between those with service and those without. Now, the task of providing reliable, low-cost internet service continues. ([Read more.](#))

## **News from around the region**

### **Health and Safety**

The state vaccine requirements ended March 1 and state mask requirements will end on March 12. We will continue reporting through March COVID-19 risk ratings, infection rates per 100,000, vax rates (1+%, 2+%, and booster%).

[COVID Act Now](#). As of March 3:

Whatcom County, High Risk, 14.8/100K, 78.8% 1+vax, 71.0% 2+vax, 38.0% booster.

San Juan County, High Risk, 10.2/100K, 89.2% 1+vax, 81.5% 2+vax, 52.2% booster.

Skagit County, Very High Risk, 50.4/100K, 73.1% 1+vax, 66.4% 2+vax, 35.0% booster.

[Whatcom Health Department](#). As of Feb. 19 Whatcom  
vax rates by school districts:  
Bellingham 83%, Meridian 68%, Ferndale 72%, Mt.  
Baker 50%, Blaine 76%, Lynden 59%, Nooksack Valley  
56%

### **Education**

Whatcom County public schools have seen drops in  
student enrollment in the last two years due to  
increased home schooling during the pandemic.

[\(Cascadia Daily News\)](#)

The Port of Bellingham and Western Washington  
University last week agreed to dissolve the university's  
nonprofit Western Crossings Development Corporation  
and relinquish claim for the university to develop six  
acres of waterfront property. [\(Cascadia Daily News\)](#) See  
also: What's next for the waterfront after WWU, Port  
scrap development project? [\(Bellingham  
Herald/paywall\)](#)

### **Government**

#### San Juan County

The county council will meet again on March 8.

#### City of Bellingham

The council met on Feb. 28. [Agenda items](#) included:

Public Works and Natural Resources Committee:

- The council was briefed on Post Point resource  
recovery updates and biosolids beneficial use RFP  
results. [Staff memo](#). [Presentation](#).

Public Health, Safety and Justice Committee:

- The council was briefed on the fire department 2021  
review. [Presentation](#).

Community and Economic Development Committee:

- The council approved 6-0 (Hamill excused) the  
Consolidated Plan - Community Engagement as  
presented. [2023-27 Plan](#). [Presentation](#).

Parks and Recreation Committee:

- The council approved 6-0 (Hammill excused) an [ordinance](#) amending Bellingham Municipal Code Chapters 7.04.030 and 8.04.070 regarding keeping dogs and animals under control in parks.

Climate Action Committee:

- 2022 Climate Implementation Plan. [Presentation.](#)
- The council voted 6-0 (Hammill excused) to have City staff and Legal look over the statement by the Just Transition to a Clean Energy Workforce. [Statement.](#)

Committee of the Whole:

- Return to City Facilities

The council voted 6-0 (Hammill excused) to continue discussion on March 14 of the administration's plan to return employees who were working remotely to city facilities, to resume in-person City services, and to have council return to Chambers on March 28. Also recommended was that social distancing be honored for these in-person meetings, and that boards and commissions continue remotely. The council vote also asked for additional direction and guidance from Legal and possibly the Mayor's Office to provide recommendations on how to facilitate the transition.

- Update on the Besse Sorts Timber Sale

Mayor Fleetwood reported that the state timber sale scheduled for March 1 will not be held and that Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz has offered to meet with the city.

- The council approved 6-0 (Hammill excused) an ordinance establishing a Sanitation and Solid Waste Division in the Public Works Department. [Staff memo.](#)
- The council will hold town hall meeting regarding the following subjects: March 21 (Climate Action); May 16 (Public Safety); Sept. 19 (budget priorities); and Nov. 14 (affordable housing)
- The council reviewed planning and community development key initiatives for 2022-2023. [Presentation.](#)

The council will meet again on March 14.

## Whatcom County

The council will meet on March 8. [Agenda items](#) include:

AB2022-130 Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and Opportunity Council to build a health, resource, and service navigation system that will provide timely connection of parents and children, pre-natal to five years, to a range of protective and supportive services, in the amount of \$77,797. [Staff memo.](#)

AB2022-145 Resolution docketing Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulation amendments (New Proposals: Capital Facilities, Comprehensive Plan Amendment, Growth Management Act, Zoning) [Staff memo. Draft Resolution with Exhibit A.](#)

### Council Appointments:

Appointment to a vacancy on the Climate Impact Advisory Committee, applicants: Ray Kamada, Ted Clifton, and Charles Bailey

Appointment to the Flood Control Zone District Advisory Committee, alternate position, applicant(s): Alexandra Williams (Council acting as the Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

The council will meet again on March 22.

## Port of Bellingham

The commission will meet again on March 15.

### For the people

Two bills clarifying police reform legislation passed in the 2021 legislative session were overwhelmingly approved by the legislature this week and sent to the governor. [HB 1719](#) allows use of less-lethal weapons like beanbag shotguns and [HB 1735](#) allows police to use physical force to take people into custody or transport them for behavioral health evaluation or treatment. ([Associated Press](#))

The state Senate passed a bill creating the nation's first alert system for missing Indigenous persons in Washington. [HB 1725](#) is sponsored by Rep. Debra Lekanoff [D-40] and returns to the House for a procedural vote and then to the governor. ([KING](#))

### **Nature**

Skagit County Day Creek residents are suing Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group claiming that restoration efforts caused flooding their property. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

### **Business**

Alliance Freeze Dry, a pet food manufacturer from Langley, B.C., plans to build a new 220,000-square-foot facility on 9.9 acres in Lynden and employ about 50-75 people. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

The Washington Department of Ecology's Nooksack River water rights and adjudication process forum was held on Jan. 27 and laid out the complexities of documenting senior and junior rights to water use. ([The Front](#))

The Department of Ecology explains in a podcast why getting a water right is so hard in "Water Law 101." Read the transcript [here](#).

Puget Sound Energy has formed an advisory group of regional, state and industry leaders as part of its aspirational goal to be a Beyond Net Zero Carbon company by 2045. Among those in the group are Bellingham mayor Seth Fleetwood and 40th Legislative District representative Debra Lekanoff. ([Puget Sound Energy](#))

### **Commentary**

Jack Knox in the *Victoria Times-Colonist* writes: "Relaxed rules or not, it's still a testing time for cross-border travel. Testing for COVID rules have relaxed for entering Canada. The question is, will Monday's change be

enough to make a real difference, or will travellers still balk?" ([Times-Colonist](#))

## **Community**

Candidates for Bellingham Police Chief will be introduced to the public at a virtual meeting on March 17 and will answer questions provided by the public. ([City of Bellingham](#))

Rosalinda Guillen, Executive Director of Whatcom County-based Community to Community Development (C2C) was appointed by Gov. Jay Inslee to the state's Environmental Justice Council, formed to coordinate state agency efforts to eliminate environmental and health disparities among communities of color and low-income households. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Skagit County's Habitat for Humanity program announced that it will increase its construction of affordable housing from two dwellings a year to 15 to address a lack of affordable housing. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

## **Jump in!**

Register now for "[Trust 2022: Why Independent Local News is Important to a Strong Democracy](#)," a March 17 online public forum featuring Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson, *Washington Post* media columnist Margaret Sullivan, and journalist and documentarian Hedrick Smith speaking and taking questions. Presented by *Salish Current* and Village Books. [Register here.](#)

[Wings Over Water Northwest Birding Festival](#) returns on March 18-20 with in-person programs at Blaine, Birch Bay and Semiahmoo locations.

Check out the [Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference](#) program schedule for the three-day virtual conference Apr. 26, 27, 28. [Registration deadline](#) April 20.

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Mike Sato, Managing Editor**

*Salish Current* is a nonprofit online newsroom serving Whatcom, San Juan and Skagit Counties. Founded in 2020, *Salish Current* exists to protect and improve democratic governance by reporting and curating local news — freely accessible to all — with independence and strict journalistic integrity.

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