



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

Dear Reader —

Around 200 viewers joined in yesterday to hear state attorney general Bob Ferguson and journalists Margaret Sullivan and Hedrick Smith inform and inspire us about why local news is important to a strong democracy. A huge thanks go to our panelists for sharing their time and wisdom, to co-emcees Jill Bernstein and Chuck Robinson, to board members Bill Dietrich, Cheryl Crooks and Matt Thuney, and to our favorite Zoom guy, Robert Clark. To our generous supporters who donated in response to the event, thank you!

Our forum, "Trust 2022: Why Independent Local News is Important to a Strong Democracy," was a good way to punctuate with an exclamation mark this week's National Sunshine Week. The annual event celebrates open government and the role it plays in democracy. Reporters and all citizens can use the Freedom of Information Act, or [FOIA](#), to request records kept by government entities. Exercising that right makes government actions transparent and visible to all.

I believe that transparency — whether it be in government or in media — is a fundamental component of trust. With transparency it is possible to "follow the money" to see whose influences may sway elections, legislation and news coverage. I believe that government should serve the interests of our community as should local news. Transparency allows us to make sure it is so.

The forum can be [viewed here](#). To the extent that you can, we'd sincerely appreciate a [donation](#) in support of our efforts to provide local news that's free to read and free from advertising.

Thank you.

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

[Salish Sea News Week in Review 3/18/22](#): Sleep, old growth, port expansion, heat dome, caffeine, North

Shore sewage, Nooksack flooding, Capitol estuary,
perpetual drought, COVID test

— Amy Nelson, Publisher

News from the *Salish Current*, week of March 18, 2022

Local journalism is key for healthy communities: forum



The decrease in employment and increase in empty desks in newsrooms all over the state has created “a huge challenge for our democracy” said Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson in an online forum this week.

By Clifford Heberden — Local journalism is not optional, but essential, for healthy communities and democracy, asserted speakers in the "Trust 2022" online forum March 17 sponsored by Salish Current and Village Books. ([Read more.](#))

Risk of homelessness high for many in the San Juan Islands



San Juan County's fairgrounds was not intended as a place for people to shelter, but it is being used for that these days. As elsewhere, the island county struggles with helping those without housing to find safe and secure places to live.

By Nancy DeVaux — Unhoused individuals and families live in every county in Washington. In San Juan County, the problem is compounded by low-paying jobs in the

service industry — among the lowest wages in the state — as well as the high cost of housing and a shortage of affordable rentals. ([Read more.](#))

[Seed swaps strengthen community — and improve produce](#)



It's all about the seeds: Salish Seed Guild volunteers harvest grain seed at Inspiration Farm in Bellingham, in preparation for sharing varieties that will yield the healthiest crops for local gardeners.

By Sarah Reeves — Gardening strengthens community ties, along with providing people with access to nutritious, homegrown food. More and more local gardeners are gravitating to seed swapping to enable access to the best plants for the particular microclimates of this region.

[Age scrutiny aside, state's youngest senator looks after business in the 42nd](#)



At 22, Simon Sefzik anticipated age-based judgements after he was selected to serve as the 42nd District's state senator; the reality was a mixed bag.

By Clifford Heberden — It was an abrupt and unplanned career start for Simon Sefzik when he was selected in January to fill the vacant state Senate position for the 42nd District. He looks back at what made it work, and what's next. ([Read more.](#))

Health and Safety

The Canadian federal government announced Thursday that, as of April 1, fully vaccinated travelers will no longer need to provide a pre-entry COVID-19 test result to enter Canada. ([Canadian Press](#))

Infection and vaccination rates for Whatcom, San Juan and Skagit counties [are found here.](#)

Education

Lynden School District has selected five superintendent finalists: Bruce Kelly, the superintendent of Rainier Christian Schools; David VanderYacht, an Assistant Superintendent from Lynden School District; Tavis Peterson, an Assistant Superintendent from Wapato Public Schools; Mike Snow, the Executive Director of Secondary Teaching at Lake Stevens School District; and Lisa Riggs, the superintendent from Sweet Home School District in Oregon. ([KGMI](#))

Government

San Juan County

The county council will continue its public hearing on the disposal of the sheriff's boat at its meeting on March 22. The next scheduled meetings are March 21 and March 22.

City of Bellingham

The city council will hold via Zoom a town hall meeting on March 21, 6 p.m., devoted to Community Voices on Climate Action. ASL, Spanish, Punjabi and Russian language interpretation will be provided. [Join here.](#)
Webinar ID: 924 1334 0826 Passcode: 727693

The city council via Zoom will hold on March 23 at 6:30 p.m. the Annual Lake Whatcom Joint Councils and Commissioners Meeting. [Join here.](#) Webinar ID: 986 7352 1211 Passcode: 912499 [Report of 2/26/22.](#)

The city council met on March 14. [Agenda items](#) included:

- The council will continue its discussion of In-Person Council Meetings at its April 11 meeting.
- The council heard interim police chief [Flo Simon's report](#) and discussed RVs and the 72-hour parking rule.
- The council voted 5-0-1 (Anderson abstain, Stone excused) to approve an Ordinance Amending the 2021-2022 Biennial Budget Increasing Expenditures of American Rescue Plan Act Funding to Support the Childcare Industry.

The council will meet again on March 28.

Whatcom County

The county council will meet on March 22. [Agenda items](#) include:

- [Public hearing. Ordinance](#) repealing Ordinance 2022-005, temporary closure of Gulf Road.

The council will meet again on April 5.

Port of Bellingham

The commission met on March 15. [Agenda items](#) included:

- [Waterfront](#). Brian Gouran, port director of environment and planning, presented an update of Waterfront District projects and activities. [Watch here](#) (13:00-59:00)
- [Harcourt](#). Commissioners unanimously approved authorizing the port's executive director to execute sale of 2,200 square feet of port property to Harbor Development for \$52,000 to accommodate a 20-foot fire barrier on the south side of the condominium development. [Resolution No.1402](#).

The commission has postponed its meeting of April 5.

For the people

[Use of force](#). Governor Jay Inslee signed [HB 2037](#) which clarifies when and how police can use force to stop people from fleeing temporary investigative detentions, known as Terry stops. Police still must use reasonable care, including appropriate de-escalation techniques,

and they may not use force during Terry stops when the people being detained are compliant. ([Associated Press](#))

Capital budget. The legislature unanimously passed [SSB 5651](#) providing \$64 billion for capital improvement projects statewide in the 2021-2023 biennium. Whatcom County projects outside of Bellingham included Nooksack River Integrated Floodplain Management, Ramstead Regional Park in Everson, civic and community campus in Ferndale, Lummi Nation Healing Wellness Center and others. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

Oil spills. The legislature has sent to the governor [HB 1691](#) which requires the owners or operators of oil vessels and facilities to demonstrate their financial ability to pay for its oil damages and apply for and hold a certificate of financial responsibility. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

Elections

Incumbent San Juan County sheriff Ron Krebs announced he will stand for re-election to his third term. ([San Juan Update](#))

Nature

Lake Whatcom. The Lake Whatcom Management Program will [host online](#) its annual Lake Whatcom Joint Councils and Commissioners meeting on Wednesday, March 23 at 6:30 p.m. Topics discussed will include water quality monitoring and cleanup efforts, 2021 program accomplishments, and a preview of work planned for 2022. Also see: "[Rebuilt stormwater facility steps up Lake Whatcom protection](#)" (City of Bellingham) and "[Holding the line on phosphorus in Lake Whatcom](#)" *Salish Current* March 4, 2022.

Puget Sound. The Puget Sound Partnership is taking public comment until April 15 on its [2022-2026 Action Agenda](#).

Business

Border flooding. Leaders from B.C. and Washington say they have reached an agreement to work together on redeveloping a flooding prevention plan and response for the Nooksack River. ([Vancouver Sun](#))

Intalco. The state legislature has provided \$10 million to make environmental and safety improvements at the shuttered Intalco Works aluminum smelter facility in Ferndale but the project's restart depends on investor Blue Wolf gaining a long-term power service contract from Bonneville Power Administration, which faces its own limitations in providing power at reduced cost. ([Cascadia Daily News](#))

Skagit dams. Seattle City Light released results from 33 studies to be done as part of its relicensing process for its three dams on the Skagit River. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Cherry Point. The Washington State Court of Appeals has ruled that Phillips 66's proposed expansion of its fuel storage tanks at Cherry Point will require additional study if it increases vessel traffic. The suit was brought by Friends of the San Juans and Whatcom County. ([KGMI](#))

Skagit meat. The Island Grown Farmers Cooperative of about 80 Skagit area farmers has opened Northwest Local Meats, a retail store, at its new processing facility west of Burlington. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Guemes ferry. The state legislature provided \$14 million to fully fund Skagit County's electric replacement to the Guemes Island Ferry. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Community

Police chief. Three semifinalist City of Bellingham police chief candidates were introduced to the community and answered questions on systemic racism, high crime rates and recruitment struggles. ([Cascadia Daily News](#)) The online interview and a feedback form are available at the city's [Engage Bellingham website](#) until March 20.

Parking rule. City of Bellingham police have begun enforcing a 72-hour parking rule to clear recreational vehicles and cars used as shelter by houseless people. ([Cascadia Daily News](#))

Arts and Leisure

Salish Sea Early Music Festival: Russian Guitar and Beethoven's flute for our friends in Ukraine —Oleg Timofeyev, guitar, and Jeffrey Cohan, eight-keyed flute. Masks and vaccination required Suggested Donation: \$15, \$20 or \$25 • 18 and under free •

- March 18, 7 p.m. St. Paul's Church, [Bellingham](#)
- March 19, 1:30 p.m., Brickworks, [Friday Harbor](#)
- March 19, 8 p.m., Grace Church, [Lopez Island](#)
- March 20, 1:30 p.m., Fir-Conway Lutheran Church, [Conway](#)

Seed Swap Saturday, March 19, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Van Zandt Community Hall (4106 Valley Highway. Free, local COVID-19 guidance will be observed. (See: "[Seed swaps strengthen community — and improve produce](#)" *Salish Current*, March 18, 2022)

RARE: Recycled Arts Resource Expo. Opening April 1, 6-9 p.m., 1418 Cornwall Ave. RARE highlights creative reuse in the form of art through an exhibit at the Allied Arts Gallery and at its [virtual gallery](#) April 1-30.

Jump in!

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

Crypto and NFTs 101: Currency of the Future or High-Risk Investment? City Club program, March 23, features Jessica Greenwalt discussing the risks and rewards for investors and how crypto technology has expanded from the art world to farming as well as what it means to us as consumers and investors. [Register in advance.](#)

Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter, March 29, 7 p.m. North Cascades Audubon Society presents environmental journalist Ben Goldfarb. [Register here.](#)

Boating. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary offers an on-line boating safety class to get a Washington State Boating Education Card. For more information and to register, [go here](#).

Check out the [Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference](#) program schedule for the three-day virtual conference April 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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