

## **News of the week: May 20, 2022**

**Dear Reader —**

The weather's turned a bit milder and that's a good thing for people who are living on the margins without adequate shelter.

We hope you had a chance to read John Dunne's Community Voices essay posted last week. The essay was a good reminder that we all need to dig down a little deeper into our common humanity when seeing the houseless — just like we need to with race, religion, culture and class — if we're going to move forward toward a just society.

The lack of affordable housing in the San Juan Islands for people working for a living wage is exacerbated by the boom in short-term vacation rentals. The lack of affordable housing makes it difficult to welcome and settle immigrants fleeing their homelands because of war and terror. The lack of affordable housing makes it difficult for young people starting out their adult lives, older people needing security in their later years, disabled people, the unemployable, the mentally ill, the drug addicted ... who are the houseless.

Affordable housing intersects many avenues of our society, just as adequate medical care, education opportunity, fair wages intersect all our lives.

Business stories about housing, one of the most basic of human needs, don't often deal with whose housing needs are being met by new construction, who is responsible for finding solutions for homelessness, why there are so many people still unhoused and even who those people are.

Writing those stories is what we seek to do at *Salish Current*. Thanks for reading and coming along for the journey.

... And if you want more news:

[Salish Sea News Week in Review 5/20/22](#): Pac-Man Friday, Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada salmon farms, Washington hydrogen, Springer, humpback mothers, Haida Gawaii, salmon knowledge, Hood Canal green crab, Whatcom's challenge

— Amy Nelson, Publisher

## News from the *Salish Current*

### [WTA diesel bus purchase prompts questions re zero-emission progress](#)



*A passenger boards one of two — for now — electric buses in Whatcom Transportation Authority's fleet. While WTA works with the manufacturer to resolve issues with the two buses, the agency has ordered eight new diesel buses, a move that has been challenged by Whatcom Democrats concerned about reducing greenhouse gas emissions.*

**By Matt Benoit** —Whatcom Transportation Authority's decision to purchase eight diesel-powered buses has gotten pushback from some who find the move at odds with the county's emissions goals. ([Read more.](#))

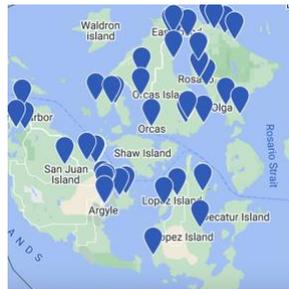
## Managing waste: what's in your bins?



*Sorting it out in the alley: bins in a downtown Bellingham alley collect a variety of recyclable and waste materials — separately — for processing. Communities have revised their processes in the last few years, with bans on plastic bags and foamware, new practices for customers and processors, and new materials from producers; more change is in the works. (Clifford Heberden photo © 2022)*

**By Clifford Heberden** — China's 2018 steps back in accepting the world's throw-aways have resulted in better local systems for managing our millions of tons of waste and recyclables — but more needs to be done. ([Read more.](#))

## San Juans adopt island-by-island vacation rental cap



*A VRBO search map shows a broad sprinkling of vacation rentals across the San Juan Islands. The county council has set a cap on the number of permits approved for such uses, as the county faces the challenges of the effects of tourism and a tight full-time rental housing inventory.*

**By Nancy DeVaux** — How much tourism is too much? San Juan County sets a cap on vacation rental permits. ([Read more.](#))

## Letters to the Editor

- Thomas Reynolds: Local solution needed for waste disposal

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

## **News from around the region**

### **Health and Safety**

The Edmonds City Council passed an ordinance this week making it unlawful for anyone to occupy public property overnight if “available” shelter within a 35-mile radius of City Hall is refused. The law can’t be enforced when no shelter exists. ([Everett Herald](#)) [See "[Community Voices/Who are the homeless?](#)", *Salish Current*, May 11, 2022]

### **Community Health Levels**

- [Whatcom County Community Level Health Risk](#): Medium
- [San Juan County Community Level Health Risk](#): Medium
- [Skagit County Community Level Health Risk](#): Low

### **Education**

Lynden School District board members Brian Johnson and Kelli Kettles resigned from the school board because they are moving out of the district area. Applications to fill the vacancies will be taken until June 14. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

### **Government**

#### **San Juan County**

The county commission met on May 17. [Agenda items](#) included:

- The council voted unanimously to establish caps on permits for vacation rentals on islands in San Juan County. (3:51) [See "[San Juans adopt island-by-](#)

[island vacation rental cap](#)" *Salish Current*, May 12, 2022]

- The council voted unanimously to amend the agenda to eliminate the public hearing on the removal of a planning commissioner. Commissioners Stephens and Minney said they found no basis for discussion or action on the issue. (2:00)

The council will meet again on June 7 and 8.

#### City of Bellingham

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

- Public Hearing: Draft 2023-2028 Transportation Improvement Plan. [Staff memo](#). [Draft plan](#). [Presentation](#).
- Public Works and Natural Resources: Bid Award for Padden Creek Improvement. [Staff memo](#). [Final bid report](#).
- Committee of the Whole:
  - Discussion of in-person council meetings.
  - Council debrief of town hall meeting on public safety.

The council will meet again on June 6.

#### Whatcom County

The council will meet on May 24. [Agenda items](#) include:

- Presentation: Whatcom County Executive Sidhu will present his "State of the County" remarks to Council
- Other items: Resolution supporting every person's right to inclusive healthcare. [Proposed resolution](#).

The council will meet again on June 7.

#### Port of Bellingham

The commission met on May 17. [Agenda items](#) include:

- Consent agenda:
  - Unanimously authorized the Executive Director to execute the [Settlement and Hold-Harmless Agreement](#) payment of \$70,000 between the Port of Bellingham (Defendant) and Craig Kovacevich (Plaintiff).

- Unanimously authorized the Executive Director to enter into a new [Remedial Action Grant agreement](#) with the Department of Ecology for the Harris Avenue Shipyard site to provide \$565,000 in state funding toward site cleanup.
- Presentation: Blaine Marine Industry Update ([view at 6:23](#))
- Action item: Port of Bellingham commissioners unanimously voted (3-0) to update the port's moorage model that will increase slip rates over the next four years. New rates will go into effect July 1. The moorage model will allow the port to plan for large projects and operational expenses without bond financing. It is expected to increase the port's cash flow from almost \$895,000 in 2023 to more than \$6 million in 2026. ([The Northern Light](#))

The commission will meet again on June 7.

### **Elections**

Official candidate filing week opened May 16 and closes May 20. ([Washington Secretary of State](#))

As of 12 p.m. May 20, the primary election slate for Position 3 on the Whatcom County Public Utility District 1 commission had drawn candidates Mike Murphy (incumbent), Eric Davidson and Jamie Arnett. The top two candidates in the August primary will face off in the November election.

[Public Disclosure Commission](#) Campaign Contributions as of May 20:

- LD 42 Senate Campaign

Ben Elenbaas (R)- Raised \$79,866; Spent \$19,254

Sharon Shewmake (D)- Raised \$99,732; Spent \$13,462

Simon Sefzik (R)- Raised \$124,285; Spent \$26,489

- LD 42 House Campaign Position 1

Alicia Rule (D)- Raised- \$64,416; Spent \$20,250

Kamal Bhachu (R)- Raised \$6,284; Spent \$930

Tawsha Dykstra Thompson (R)- Raised \$29,747; Spent \$11,210

- LD 42 House Campaign Position 2

Dan Johnson (R)- Raised \$41,396; Spent \$6,495

Joe Timmons (D-) Raised \$44,196; Spent \$10,208 Debt \$3,601

Kyle Christensen (R)- Raised \$19,228; Spent \$10,118

Richard May (D)- Raised \$52,872; Spent \$10,349

- LD 40 House Campaign Position 1

Debra Lekanoff (D)- Raised \$24,955; Spent \$20,279;  
Debt \$2,000

- LD 40 House Campaign Position 2

Alex Ramel (D)- Raised \$70,732; Spent \$11,280 Debt  
\$3,643

Trevor Smith (D)- Raised \$10,313; Spent \$613

- Whatcom County District Court Judge Position 2

Jonathan Rands- Raised \$29,360; Spent \$6,892; Loans  
\$10,000; Debt \$5.642

David Nelson- Raised \$30,200; Spent \$3,137

Gordon Jenkins- Raised \$5,547; Spent \$849; Loans  
\$5,000; Debt \$4,250

## Nature

New management. Brie Chartier has been hired as the new San Juan Islands National Monument manager by the Bureau of Land Management. ([LopezRocks](#))

Marsh survival. A pilot project to create a "living dike" in Canada's Boundary Bay is designed to help a saltwater marsh survive rising waters due to climate change. ([Salish Sea Currents Magazine](#))

Happy trails. Thanks to the Skagit, Whatcom, Island Trail Maintenance Organization, the Oyster Dome trail and other trails in the region's Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail in the region are kept in hiking shape. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

With faith. The Multifaith Network for Climate Justice leaders from over a dozen spiritual traditions — including Catholicism, Buddhism, Judaism and Paganism — met this month at the group's the first gathering held during Bellingham's annual ALL IN for Climate Action Week. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Climate action. Students for Climate Action organized earlier this month at Western Washington University and pledged to use direct action and demonstration to advocate for greater environmental protection and defense against climate change. ([The Front](#))

Home again. Downtown Poulsbo's SEA Discovery Center, owned and operated by Western Washington University, will reopen on Friday after about 300 sea creatures have returned home from "foster" facilities around Puget Sound nearly two years after leaving their home aquarium during pandemic shutdown. ([Kitsap Sun](#))

## **Business**

Bird flu. Avian flu has been found in Fraser Valley which is where 80% of B.C. poultry farms are located. ([CBC](#))

Petroleum pollution. Jeff Margolis of Van Zandt closed Everybody's Store and gas station in 2019 after operating it for almost 50 years but the property remain unsold because of cleanup costs associated with gasoline that had leaked into the soil from underground tanks installed in the 1930s. ([KGMI](#))

Intalco restart. Ferndale's local machinists' union has finalized a collective bargaining agreement with Blue Wolf Capital Partners, the private equity firm attempting to restart the curtailed Intalco aluminum smelter. A below-cost power contract still being negotiated. ([CDN](#))

Vacation rentals. A handful of Whatcom County residents voiced their opinions about county amendments to vacation rental regulations, some asking that the issue be sent back to the planning commission, some saying that regulations would hinder tourism, and others supporting regulations to protect visitors and enforce revenue payment. ([The Northern Light](#)) [See "[San Juans adopt island-by-island vacation rental cap](#)" *Salish Current*, May 12, 2022]

Skagit housing. The median price for homes and condos in Skagit County at the end of April was \$592,500 compared to \$455,000 a year earlier, an increase of 30.2%. In 2022 alone, the average home price increased by 11.9%. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Drayton Harbor oysters. The Drayton Harbor Oyster Company is exploring a new site for its oyster farm about 3,000 feet off shore and hopes to have permits ready later this year. Julia Lerner reports. ([CDN](#))

## **Commentary**

Trees are good. Karen Sullivan writes that public proclamations of saving forests aren't enough. "We need more, larger, and bolder conservation and restoration measures that can't be reversed by political whim. We need to collectively focus on a coordinated vision for the future, on a scale that hasn't been done before ... Everyone knows infinite growth in a finite system is neither rational, smart, nor possible. Our big Pacific Northwest trees have a giant role to play, if we'll let them." ([Rainshadow Journal](#))

## **Community**

Houseless. A housing vacancy rate of 7-8% is considered healthy and Whatcom County's vacancy rate of 1.8% coupled with affordability issues has affected more people than the unhoused, according to Teri Bryant of the Opportunity Center's Whatcom Homeless Service Center. ([The Front](#))

Oil spill leader. The Islands Oil Spill Association's executive director Tony Parkin will resign as of the end of May and board member Paul Hamdorf will serve as interim executive director. ([Orcsonian/news release](#))

Where's the ferry? Looking to summer Washington State Ferries anticipates traveler increases, continued staffing woes and making do with available vessels. ([Anacortes American](#))

Internet needs. The Port of Bellingham and the Public Utility District No. 1 of Whatcom Count have a [survey](#) for residents to identify what are the biggest broadband needs in Whatcom County.

Preserved. How the Swinomish Tribe and the state worked to safeguard the the Kukutali Preserve, located about five miles northwest of La Conner in Skagit County, once slated to become a summer resort and even a nuclear power plant. ([KUOW](#))

Heat and flood. How Whatcom County tribes, governments and people met the challenges of heat wave and flooding. ([State of the Planet](#))

### **Arts and Leisure**

[Salish Sea Early Music Festival](#) presents "Johann Sebastian Bach Brandenburg 5 & Triple Concerto" performed by Oddie & Cohan & Krause & Phelps & Kuroda & Strand-Polyak & Bonham:

- May 23, 7 p.m.; St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Bellingham
  - May 27, 7 p.m.; Croatian Cultural Center, Anacortes
  - May 28, 12 noon; Grace Church, Lopez Island
  - May 28, 6 p.m.; Orcas Adventist Fellowship Church/Orcas Christian School Gym
  - May 31, 7 p.m.; Brickworks, Friday Harbor
- Masks and vaccination required • \$20 or \$25 suggested donation • youth 18 and under always free [See "[Old is new again with early music festival](#)" *Salish Current*, May 12, 2022]

The Children of the Setting Sun's Salmon People Project, a film and research project years in the making, opened last week in the Northwest Coast Hall of the American Museum of Natural History in New York where it is featured alongside films and artwork from Coast Salish and other Pacific Northwest creators and storytellers. ([CDN](#))

### **Jump in!**

BlackberryBusters: The Sequel! Community Work Party May 21, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Josh Vander Yacht Memorial Park (behind the Van Zandt Community Hall). Ten volunteers braved the weather on April 30 and gave the blackberries something to think about. Can we get more people to finish the job?

[Birds of the Amazon: Ecological Research & Conservation in the SE Peruvian Amazon](#)

North Cascades Audubon Society presents a talk by Ursula Valdez on May 24, 7 p.m., at the Whatcom Museum and virtually [via YouTube](#).

[Can Ukraine Survive the Russian Invasion? A Diplomat's Perspective](#)

The Bellingham City Club presents a talk by John Koenig, retired Foreign Service officer and lecturer at University of Washington. 12 p.m., May 25. [Register here.](#)

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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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