

# The Northern Light

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Community Newspaper of Blaine and Birch Bay

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## WCLS won't pursue joint levy for Blaine, Birch Bay Libraries

BY OLIVER LAZENBY

In the face of Covid-19-induced fundraising challenges, the Whatcom County Library System (WCLS) board of trustees decided not to pursue a joint levy to fund a new library in Birch Bay and a remodel to the Blaine library.

The board of trustees voted to split the projects at its July 21 meeting so that it could focus on funding the future Birch Bay Vogt Community Library, at 7968 Birch Bay Drive. The Washington legislature set aside \$2 million for the Birch Bay library project in April 2019 for its 2020-2021 budget, but the project will only receive the money if WCLS and the Friends of the Birch Bay Library can match that amount by June 30, 2021.

Previously, the WCLS board was pursuing forming a single taxing district to fund both projects. It hoped to put two ballot propositions on the August 2020 special election ballot – one to form a taxing district and another to levy money for the projects.

“We realized that with the challenges our communities are facing right now, there’s no way we could go out and ask voters to approve the levy to build both of those projects,” said Mary Vermillion, WCLS community relations manager. “We are going to make a push for the Birch Bay project.”

WCLS and the Friends have a design for an approximately 7,600-square-foot library in Birch Bay, at a property that WCLS purchased in 2017. The Friends group has raised about \$160,000 so far, said Dianne Marrs-Smith, president of Friends of the Birch Bay Library.

Marrs-Smith said that the Friends group is grateful the library system is working with the group to match the \$2 million in state funds, and that WCLS and the Friends are working on a plan to raise the rest of the money. So far, all options are on the table, she said. To learn more about future fundraising plans for the Birch Bay library, visit [friendsofbirchbaylibrary.org](http://friendsofbirchbaylibrary.org).

The Friends of the Blaine Library hired a design team last year and held a series of meetings to plan a remodel to the Blaine Library. The design team revealed a concept in February 2020 that is about 8,600 square feet, roughly twice the size of the current Blaine library.

## New Birch Bay brewery opens this week



▲ Beach Cat Brewing, at 101-7876 Birch Bay Drive in Birch Bay, plans to open at noon on Thursday, August 6. Read more in a story about the brewery on page 15

Photo by Kyra Planetz

## Birch Bay feels absence of part-time residents

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Crystal Anderton has been visiting Edgewater Trailer Park since she was an infant. Even before she was born, her great-great-grandparents rented a cabin in one week every summer in Birch Bay, spurring a tradition that carried through generations – a story similar to many of her neighbors.

What made Edgewater feel like home was the people who shaped those memories: The ones who were there when she potty trained and the ones who were at her wedding reception in the park 13 years ago.

But now Anderton and her husband, Josh, are one of two American homes left at Edgewater, along with an essential worker from Canada – a stark difference from the dozens of homes normally occupied. And

with repeated border closure extensions since the first shutdown to non-essential travel on March 21, Anderton isn't sure when her Canadian neighbors will return.

When the border first closed, the Andertons got to work helping neighbors. They exchanged emails, collected spare keys, emptied fridges, turned off water and upgraded their phone plan for international calls.

“In the beginning it was ‘don’t drink all of our beer,’ then it was ‘you better drink it, it’s going to get expired,’ and then it was ‘we’ll get you a 12-pack when we’re back,’” Anderton said.

Anderton likens the quiet park to the aftermath of an atomic bomb. Bird feeders are overrun with yellow jacket nests, children’s toys are cluttered on a deck, and a Canadian flag is blowing in the wind.

CBP spokesperson Jason Givens said in

an email to *The Northern Light* that travel into the U.S. for visiting the personal property is not essential under the tempo-

(See Absent owners, page 3)

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▲ Crystal Anderton demonstrates how she cleans fridges in Canadian households. Anderton is helping take care of properties belonging to part-time Canadian residents in Birch Bay during the border closure. Photo by Grace McCarthy

## Absent owners

From page 1

rary travel restrictions but if additional circumstances make the travel essential, then a traveler may be permitted into the country. Final determination on what is considered essential is made at the port of entry.

Janice Massender, one of Anderton's Canadian neighbors, said she grew up spending summers in Birch Bay and has owned her own property there for over 30 years. Memories like kayaking, swimming in the ocean, and the annual sand sculpture contest were put on hold this year.

"We were just sick," Massender recounted hearing of the border closure. "This is the first time in my whole life I haven't been in Birch Bay. My whole life."

For Massender, the most frustrating element is that, even if she vows to make a non-stop trip, she can't drive across the border to check on her property but can fly across the border, something she calls a double standard.

Massender's cousin, Linda Sharpe from Maple Ridge, B.C., has visited her Birch Bay home almost weekly for nearly 30 years. She visits often in the summer for the crabbing season and two times per week in the winter. "It's my paradise," she said.

Sharpe said she would feel more worried if it were not for neighbors helping her out, but her husband, Cal, worries about servicing the lawnmower and other equipment that may not start when they return, and pesky intruders including ants and mice.

Canadian property owners in Blaine and Point Roberts are also struggling to connect with their properties.

About 2,367 properties in the 98230 zip code, which includes Birch Bay and Blaine, have taxpayers with a Canadian mailing address, according to the Whatcom County Tax Assessor's Office. But the taxpayer is not al-

ways a complete indication of Canadian homeownership because properties will also have divided ownership with one address, said county assessor Rebecca Xczar.

In Point Roberts, Canadians are petitioning to maintain or remove belongings from their American properties. Kevin McIntosh of Ladner, B.C. started a petition after the border closure was extended in May to allow Canadians to check on boats, horses and other property, which has gathered nearly 3,400 signatures to date, more than double Point Roberts' population.

Anderton and her husband said none of the homes contain valuables and there are many cameras on the property to help catch potential intruders. They've also had a great relationship with Birch Bay deputy Todd Damon, who they said will go out of his way to patrol the entirety of Edgewater.

"My general feel is when the border opens up that we will get an increased number of calls from things undiscovered," said Damon, who has seen more burglaries to homes that he

knows are Canadian-owned than ones occupied.

Damon recommends Canadians contact the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office to add their address to the office's computer service system. That way, if there is a crime, the sheriff's office will know whom to contact.

"It's setting up to be good if you're a criminal, not so good if you're a homeowner," Damon said.

The Andertons spend a few hours each week maintaining homes and mailing left-behind items like summer clothes but prepare for more work to winterize the mobile homes if the border isn't open by the first freeze.

"Our list is going to get longer," Anderton's husband, Josh, said.

For now, the Andertons video chat with their cross-border friends, gathering for happy hour and reminiscing on the times when they were together.

"It's part of their life, their history," Anderton said of her Canadian neighbors. "Not to be here is an odd feeling. It's like something is missing."

# The C Shop broken into because alleged suspect couldn't wait for it to reopen, shop says

BY IAN HAUPT

A suspected thief from Bellingham allegedly broke into The C Shop late last week taking a two-pound bag of sour patch kids, a handful of taffys and some truffles, the shop's co-owner said.

Patrick Alesse said he woke up Friday morning to the cops in his shop, a broken door and taffy jar lids and taffy strewn across the shop floor. "He was probably in a real hurry," Alesse said.

The Whatcom County Sheriff's Office booked Samuel Matamua, 38, into Whatcom County Jail on July 31, on suspicion of second degree burglary, and jail records show he is being held in lieu of \$10,000 bail.

"It seems that some fellow was in such desperate need of candy because we haven't been open, that he broke down the door to get some taffy and sour patch kids," The C Shop wrote in a July 31 Facebook post. "He missed out on all the good homemade stuff that was on the lower shelf of the display case!"

At approximately 7:30 a.m., deputies responded to a report of a burglary in progress at The C Shop, sheriff's office spokesperson Deb Slater said in an email. A witness reported seeing a man kicking in the front door of the business, entering and leaving

with what looked like a big bag of candy.

Another witness reported, at approximately 10:30 a.m., seeing a man who matched the earlier description of the man seen fleeing The C Shop in the 7800 block of Birch Bay Drive, Slater wrote.

Deputies found Matamua, who admitted to entering the store and taking candy, taffy, chocolate and a big lollipop. Some of the items were found in the suspect's backpack, Slater reported.

Alesse said two envelopes with some cash in them sat visible on the counter in the shop but were untouched by the thief. He was grateful someone was driving by at the time of the robbery and called the police, he said.

"We would love to know who called in the break-in so we could say thanks to them with some candy," The C Shop's Facebook post reads.

Court records show Matamua had a preliminary hearing in Whatcom County Superior Court August 3, and has an arraignment hearing set for Friday, August 14 at 9 a.m.

The C Shop has been closed during the Covid-19 pandemic and said in a July 26 Facebook post it would not open until Whatcom County is well into phase 3 and the Canadian border reopens.



Keith Alesse, The C Shop co-owner, making chocolate in 2016. File photo

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