

## City's pre-cleanup costs add up

### Council left decisions, spending on handling contamination of former plant to mayor; work expected to be done next year

BY RICHARD WALKER  
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When cleanup of Anacortes' contaminated former water treatment plant begins as soon as next year, the city will already have spent about \$2 million prepping for a cleanup job estimated by the Public Works director to cost \$229,000, according to public records obtained by the Anacortes American.

It's money that was spent without notification to the public, and even City Council members did not realize how large the tab had grown as the bills rolled in.

For more than two years, the City Council was advised in closed session of work being done to determine the level of PCBs, lead and arsenic contamination. City Attorney Darcy Swetnam said in November that she also kept the council updated by email — communications she said are protected by attorney-client privilege; those emails were not included in responses to public records requests filed by the Anacortes American.

Council members said recently that they received information about expenses along the way, but did not know the total costs to date. Many were surprised to learn that the cost had reached almost \$2 million and



SKAGIT PUBLISHING FILE PHOTOS

This 1970 building and holding tank facility at the former Anacortes Water Treatment Plant in west Mount Vernon are expected to be demolished when the site is decontaminated, as early as next year.

counting.

Mayor Laurie Gere acknowledged that the total sum was a lot. For perspective, the city's general budget for 2020 was \$70 million and for 2021 is expected to be \$72.6 million.

"We had no concept of what it would cost," Gere said of preparing for cleanup. "The expenses came as a surprise to all of us."

The work has been coordinated by a Seattle law firm, Foster Garvey (formerly Foster Pepper), rather than by the city. With the law firm as the go-between, the city did not legally need to notify the public about



contracts signed for work done at the site. The council had no role in approving any of the work, which was never discussed in open session.

However, Gere said the expenses were necessary, as was the expertise

of the law firm.

"The amount of money it takes to clean up a site like this is breathtaking, but we at the city wanted to do everything with the best possible science, so we had to have those types

#### At a glance

##### What are PCBs?

PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyl, was a fire-retardant and insulating chemical formerly used in adhesives, caulking, coatings, lubricants and paints. It was banned in 1978 as a health risk.

The dangers were not known in 1970 when the plant was built, but the city started testing drinking water for contaminants in 1976. No samples ever showed PCBs in detectable concentrations, according to the city.

##### How much contamination was found?

The PCB level was determined to be 1 particle per 1 million, or 1 ppm, according to Ecology; the federal allowable standard is 0.5 ppm. Public Works Director Fred Buckenmeyer said the source was exterior coatings and building materials such as caulking that flaked off into the soil but did not affect groundwater or surface water.

##### Why has cleanup not begun?

Cleanup of contaminated sites is a detailed process, and the city is more than halfway through it. Ecology and the city collected public comment on the preferred cleanup plan: contaminated soil will be excavated and trucked to a permitted landfill; the sedimentation and filtration basins will be demolished and trucked to a permitted landfill off-site. Other decommissioned plant structures that are not sources of PCBs — the former clear well and administration building — will be demolished as needed.

A public meeting took place on March 23, online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ecology will next issue the cleanup action plan and a legal agreement for public review.

of agencies," she said. "We needed a law firm that understands the Toxic Cleanup Act, that are experts in that. So yes, it's a lot of money. The bottom line was community health and safety, and if we could have done it for less, we would

have." Costs ranged from \$612,108 to one company for soils and materials testing to \$63,140 for a public relations firm to help the city inform the public of the situation.

See *Plant*, page A4

## Oh, Christmas trees



PHOTOS BY BRIANA ALZOLA / ANACORTES AMERICAN

Members of the Kiwanis Sunrisers set up their tree lot in the Sebo's store parking lot Friday, Nov. 29, after hauling roughly 300 trees to Anacortes. Sales are ongoing, with the club president expecting to sell about 500 trees this holiday season.



## County sees worst month so far for COVID-19 cases

BY COLETTE WEEKS AND QUESTEN INGRAM

The number of hospitalizations due to COVID-19 are rising in Skagit County, with 36 people hospitalized in November, the highest number since the virus was found in Skagit County.

That compares to seven in October and seven in September. The next highest was April with 29 hospitalizations.

Meanwhile, the total confirmed case count had reached 2,023 by Sunday. Of those, 762 came in November. The death count as of Nov. 30 was 27.

The county is averaging 300 cases per 100,000, said Skagit County Health

Officer Howard Leibrand.

That's the bad news. But the good news is that treatment has improved as doctors learn more about the disease, leading to better outcomes, he said.

More good news: Leibrand is expecting vaccine doses very soon.

"We will get first doses before the end of the year," he said.

Skagit County will be the area distributor, and the first to get doses will be health care workers who interact with COVID-19 patients and in elder care facilities. The next tier might include workers such as teachers, he said.

See *Virus*, page A7

## Gravel quarry gets OK to expand to 53.5 acres

BY RICHARD WALKER  
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Lake Erie Pit LLC's permit application to expand its gravel quarry near Rosario Road and Marine Drive from 17.78 acres to 53.5 acres was approved Monday by the county hearing examiner.

The company plans to remove 60,000 tons of gravel per year for 60 years. Peak mining operations could see 26 truck trips per day — 13 empty and 13 full, an increase from nine empty and nine full.

Thirty-four Fidalgo Island residents testified at an Oct. 14 public hearing, most of them opposed. But Skagit County Hearing Examiner Wick Dufford on Monday approved said testimony didn't outweigh existing local land-use laws.

"The question of the appropriate use of the

site has been legislatively resolved by the approval of an enlarged Mineral Resources Overlay which encompasses the area of the applicant's mining proposal," Dufford's decision states.

That overlay is meant to allow continued operation of existing natural resource industries and ensure the use of adjacent lands does not interfere with the extraction of minerals. The site is zoned Rural Resource Natural Resource Land.

In an effort to address some of the public concerns, Dufford's approval includes several conditions that mine owner Bill Wooding must meet, including:

- The quarry can operate only from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to noon Saturday.
- Rock crushing is limited to a month in spring and a month in fall.

- A 100-foot setback must be established to protect neighboring properties from slides.

- Once parcel near homes is restricted from mining.

- The permit will be void if the quarry is dormant for a year.

The expanded operation must begin within two years and be reviewed every five years, starting in 2025, to ensure compliance.

In earlier testimony, some neighbors called Wooding a good neighbor and the quarry a provider of good jobs. But others expressed concern about additional truck traffic, dust and noise; interruption of groundwater flow and disruption of slope stability.



# Plant

Continued from page A1

Foster Garvey submitted invoices totaling at least \$108,701 for its own work on behalf of the city.

State Sen. Liz Lovelett, who served on the City Council at the time before being appointed to the state Senate, said she was satisfied with the city's handling of the matter before the public was notified.

"They have to do it right," she said in a Sept. 20 interview. "Obviously, there is the utmost sensitivity because it has to do with a public drinking water supply."

## Tracking expenses

Anacortes' new \$56 million water treatment on Riverbend Road in Mount Vernon, adjacent to the former treatment plant, was completed in March 2013. The former treatment plant was then decommissioned and slated for demolition.

Contaminants were detected in January 2015.

Gere said she was notified by Public Works Director Fred Buckenmeyer, and they "looped in" Brad Furlong, a Mount Vernon lawyer who worked as Anacortes' contracted city attorney. They then contacted Foster Pepper and notified the Department of Ecology of the contamination.

Gere said the City Council was told about the contamination within a week in closed session. With her authorization, the law firm now known as Foster Garvey became "the quarterbacks" of the cleanup.

"They've ensured we've followed all proper processes, communicated with Ecology and engaged the right consultants at the right time to move the project forward," Gere said.

The city hired attorney Swetnam in 2015, but Foster Garvey stayed at the helm of the water treatment plant issue.

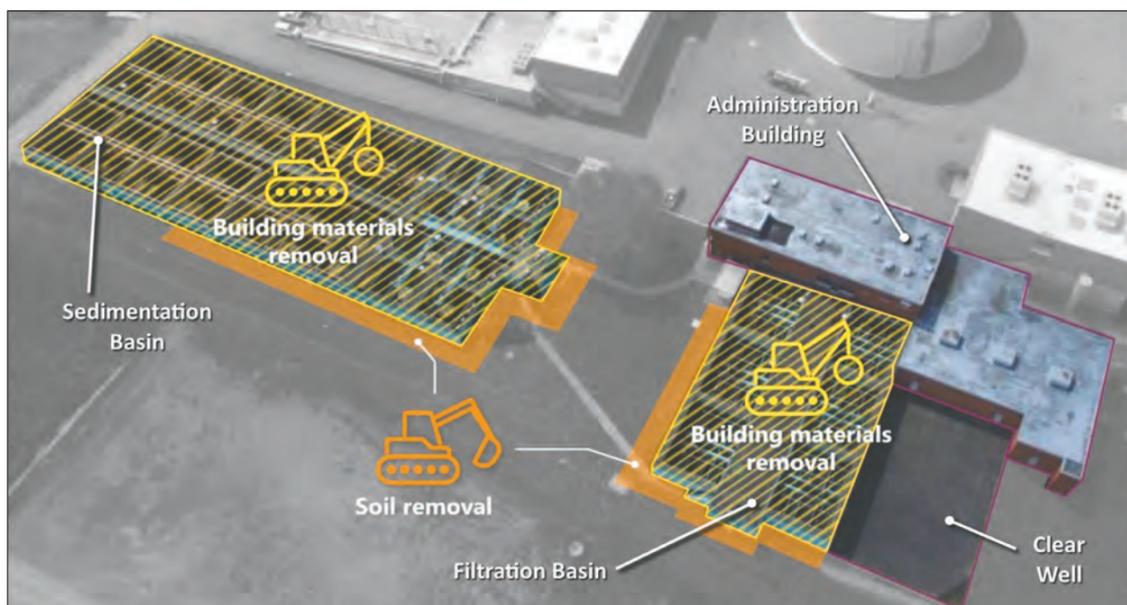
The law firm hired companies to do various work at the site: testing soil, evaluating cleanup options, analyzing risk levels posed by the contamination and more. The firm advised the mayor and city attorney, who in turn informed the council in closed session, of companies hired and work being done.

While the seven-member council controls the budget, it had no control over expenses or decisions made by Foster Garvey. Council consent wasn't sought; any council decisions would have to be made in open session.

"We discussed it — 'This is what we did this week' — but we didn't ask permission on each step," Gere said.

Council member Matt Miller recalled in a Sept. 16 interview that the council wasn't involved in decisions and that expenses were reported piecemeal.

"The council got a good understanding that it was going to be quite expensive. When we authorize the budget, we obviously give money for outside consulting services. If I were to look at the dollar amount, I'm sure



DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY GRAPHIC

This graphic from a feasibility study of the former Anacortes Water Treatment Plant along the Skagit River highlights two buildings that would be demolished and where contaminated soil would be removed. Below is a photo from the Anacortes American of the facility when it was first built in 1970.

I'd say that seems like a lot of money to consult on something like this."

Several council members said they were not given a total of what money was being spent, but that wasn't uncommon.

"It's shaky when it comes to consulting services or outside counsel because often that's incremental. Each (invoice) by itself doesn't exceed the mayor's budget authority," Miller said. "We obviously give the mayor a lot of authority and a lot of discretion to spend money."

Gere and Swetnam didn't provide the council with a rolling tally of expenses related to the cleanup in their updates, but it was clear the work would be expensive, said former council member Eric Johnson, who served from 2011-19.

"What that total amount was, it was always kind of an estimate," he said.

Lovelett, who served on the council from January 2014 to February 2019, said she remembered only a few briefings in the council's Public Works Committee or in closed session regarding the water treatment plant cleanup. And expenses weren't covered in detail.

"It's not necessarily that most granular level of detail where we're looking at all the invoices and things," she said. "It's generally keeping us apprised of the general framework of what was going on."

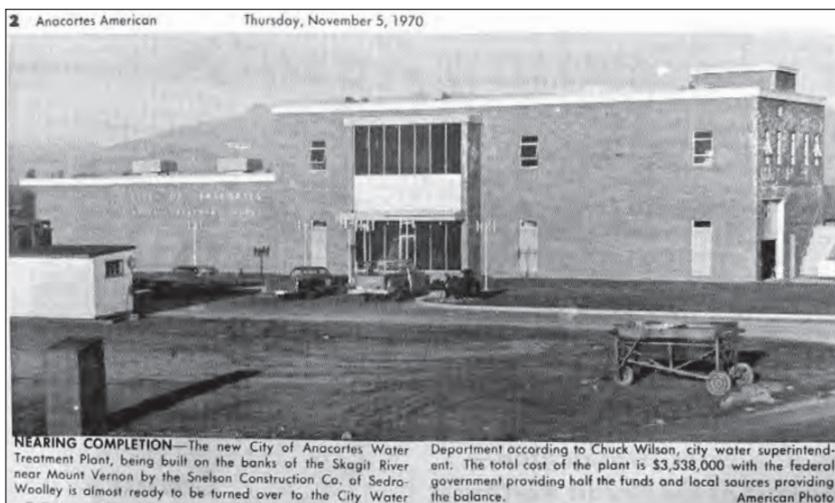
Ryan Walters, a council member since 2012, said he doesn't think he saw a cost breakdown of the project or a summary of estimates prior to testing.

"I imagine that's because it's difficult to project those costs prior to that testing," he said.

City Council member Anthony Young, who took office after the public was notified of the contamination, said he knew the city was spending money on cleanup preparation but was surprised by the total expenses to date.

"It's a lot of money, and I'm not sure how we got there," he said.

Adding up a list of invoices obtained from the city through public records requests showed that at least \$1.4 million was spent between January 2015 when the contamination was discovered to April 2017 when the public was notified



NEARING COMPLETION—The new City of Anacortes Water Treatment Plant, being built on the banks of the Skagit River near Mount Vernon by the Snelson Construction Co. of Sedro-Woolley is almost ready to be turned over to the City Water Department according to Chuck Wilson, city water superintendent. The total cost of the plant is \$3,538,000 with the federal government providing half the funds and local sources providing the balance. American Photo

of the contamination. At least \$500,000 more has been spent since then.

Miller recalled not being surprised that contaminants were found in soil and materials samples at the former plant and expected cleanup would be expensive. But the actual costs to date, which he learned in the interview, came as a surprise.

"You telling me that number, it's pretty staggering," he said.

Swetnam emailed the mayor and council this past July that she was working on a summary of charges by consultants since 2017.

Bruce McDougall joined the City Council in January 2017, four months before the public was notified of the contamination.

"It was really early on in my time on the council. I was still getting my feet wet," he said Sept. 4. He also was not aware of how much had been spent to date.

## Notifying the public

The well-publicized events of Flint, Michigan, where tainted water was blamed on deaths and stillbirths, were fresh on the mayor's mind when she received news of the contamination in January 2015.

"We didn't brief the community at the time because we didn't understand exactly what we were dealing with," Gere said. "We immediately reported it to all our state and federal agencies ... and then we started working with the experts. And as soon as we understood what we had, we notified the public."

Foster Garvey contracted with Gallatin Public Affairs in February 2016 to guide the messaging and develop a website, SafeandCleanWater.org. Notification to the

## Timeline

- 2000-2013:** Water treatment plant sampling data report no detectable levels of PCBs in city drinking water.
- March 2013:** Building of new water treatment plant completed on Riverbend Road in Mount Vernon, adjacent to the former treatment plant, built in 1970. Project cost: \$56 million. The former plant is decommissioned.
- January 2015:** Soil samples show contaminants at former plant site. Arsenic and PCBs are found in soil at the exterior concrete walls of the filtration basin, sedimentation basin and administration building. PCBs and PAHs — polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons — are found along an exterior wall of the sedimentation basin. Lead is found in paint samples from the old administration building.
- The city hires the Seattle-based law firm Foster Pepper (now Foster Garvey) for guidance.
- 2015, 2016, 2017:** The city's annual water department reports make no mention of PCBs at the former plant.
- March 30, 2017:** Intertox submits a report to the city, in which it finds low risk of cancer from exposure to PCBs at the former plant.
- April 24, 2017:** The city announces to the public that it has asked the state Department of Ecology for assistance in forming a safe strategy for site cleanup and building demolition. It is the first time the discovery of contaminants is disclosed to the public. The city launches a city website, SafeandCleanWater.com, developed by Gallatin Public Affairs, a public relations firm.
- Aug. 28, 2019:** The city and Ecology sign an order outlining how the city will address the contamination, requiring a remedial investigation/feasibility study and a draft cleanup action plan.
- March 16 to April 14, 2020:** Ecology and the city collect public comment on the preferred plan: contaminated soil will be excavated and trucked to a permitted landfill, and the sedimentation and filtration basins will be demolished. Other decommissioned plant structures that are not sources of PCBs — the former clear well and the administration building — will be demolished as needed.
- March 23, 2020:** Public meeting takes place online.
- May 4-8, 2020:** Cris Matthews with Ecology signs the remedial investigation/feasibility study.
- To come:** Ecology will select the cleanup action for public review. The public will be invited to comment sometime in early 2021, Matthews told the American in November. Once a legal agreement is made with the city, he expects cleanup will take place in 2021.

public came in April 2017.

A press release written by Gallatin went out the same day the city filed a 1,400-page report

with the state Department of Ecology requesting help in forming a site

See **Plant**, page A5

## What the city spent

According to records obtained through public records requests, Foster Garvey — acting as the city's agent — hired the following companies to do work from 2015-20. Invoices were sent to the law firm, which passed them to the city. These are the city's expenses through spring 2020; not included is Anchor QEA's work later in 2020 preparing the city's draft cleanup action plan.

- \$612,108.53: Stantec, an engineering and project management firm. "They were initially engaged to do the site testing that provided the results to understand the contaminants on the site," Mayor Laurie Gere emailed on July 27. "Their raw data was used to prepare the 1400+ page initial Remedial Investigation, which is available in full on the City's website."

- \$353,012.15: Anchor QEA, an environmental science and restoration firm. "They were hired to replace Stantec to expedite the process," Gere wrote in her email. "Anchor is a local consulting firm who took the Remedial Investigation (Report) prepared with Stantec's support, and develop a Feasibility Study to identify and evaluate cleanup options. They also performed additional site testing to fill in any gaps necessary to evaluate cleanup options."

- \$336,391.59: MWH Global, a planning, design and construction management company.

- \$282,041.17: For expert consultants hired by Foster Garvey, lab analysis and delivery of six 55-gallon open head drums.
- \$92,239.98: Intertox. "They are toxicologists, who synthesized the results generated by Stantec to characterize the risks of the compounds on the Site," Gere wrote.

- \$63,140.07: Gallatin Public Affairs, a communications and lobbying firm. Gallatin developed a website, SafeandCleanWater.org, "dedicated to providing the public information," Gere wrote. Gallatin also "helped develop an outreach plan to ensure we notified all stakeholders and helped us make sure we responded appropriately to all inquiries related to the site. They've continued to help us update our website throughout the process and inform the public."

- \$20,848.65: Friedman & Bruya, environmental chemists.

- \$7,035: Laboratory Data Consultants, data validation.

- \$650: DLH Environmental Consulting, environmental site assessments.

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Meet the babies of 2020

Inside

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A2



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## SNOW DAYS



CONTRIBUTED / KAY LARSON

It was a snowy few days across much of the state this past weekend, and Anacortes was no exception. Temperatures stayed below freezing for multiple days before warming up a bit Sunday. According to the National Weather Service, most of Anacortes received between 6 and 8 inches of snow between Friday and Sunday. For the rest of the week, Anacortes should see temperatures in the 40s along with lots of rain. See snow scenes as captured through our readers' lenses on page B1 and a full gallery at goanacortes.com.



CONTRIBUTED / CHRISTY JONES BLOUIN



CONTRIBUTED / DIANNE NORTON

## Cost of cleanups growing for city

BY RICHARD WALKER  
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The costs continue to mount in the City of Anacortes's environmental contamination cleanups.

Two things became clear in January: One, cleanup of the former water treatment plant will be more complicated and expensive than previously thought. And two, the state Department of Ecology says the city has to do new cleanup of the former A Avenue landfill because of petroleum waste found at the site, which is located 300 feet from a beaver pond and other wetlands. It's the same site where the city was considering putting in a bicycle skills training park.

How much those efforts will cost remains unknown. But the city just approved contracts worth a combined \$450,000 with an environmental engineering and restoration firm just to develop the two cleanup plans.

### Former water treatment plant

In earlier interviews, city Public Works Director Fred Buckenmeyer estimated the cost of actually cleaning up the

former water treatment plant — removing contaminated soils and materials and trucking them away — would be about \$229,000. That no longer appears to be the case.

Buckenmeyer and City Attorney Darcy Swetnam told the City Council on Jan. 25 that the final costs are still unknown, but the problem is separating the hazardous material before demolition.

The city must remove soils contaminated with PCBs, arsenic and lead that flaked off of the exterior of the old buildings; those contaminants were once commonly used in caulking, paints and other construction materials. But the city also must remove contaminated coatings from the buildings so the demolished materials can be disposed of at a regular landfill, which is much cheaper than at a hazardous materials landfill.

"If we were to box up the entirety of the old plant and send it to a hazardous materials landfill, we're told that it would be unduly expensive," Swetnam told the council. "So it's really worth being thoughtful about how we demolish those

See *Cleanup*, page A8

## Vaccines scarce as Skagit moves into Phase 2

BY QUESTEN INGRAM  
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The state has again skipped Skagit County, Island Hospital or Skagit Regional Health in its allotment of COVID-19 first-dose vaccine this week, making it two straight weeks that requests have gone unfilled.

All three did receive a second-dose supply to ensure those who received the first will get the second within the recommended time.

Laura Han, county spokesperson, said the state has not said when first doses might be available again, but that it has "signaled that allocations will get better in the near term."

Island Hospital spokesperson Laura Moroney said the hospital hopes for more first doses the first week of March. While it received none of the 500 first doses it requested this week, it is scheduled to give 193 second doses this

Friday.

In other news, Phase 2 of the Healthy Washington plan is now official for this area, bringing some relief to local businesses that have faced severe restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The change means more inside restaurant dining and more leeway for workouts in gyms and the local pool.

Just in time for Valentine's Day, Skagit County met state health metrics to move into the next phase of the state plan to help reopen safely.

Some restaurants in Anacortes, such as Anthony's, Bob's Chowder Bar and the Rockfish Grill were already offering 25% capacity via the plan's "open-air" guideline, where one or more walls had to allow airflow and meet carbon dioxide measurements.

See *Pandemic*, page A6

## Ferries staff reviews 2020, looks ahead

BY BRIANA ALZOLA  
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Washington State Ferries leaders are looking back at drops in ridership in 2020, keeping their focus on safety in 2021 and looking forward to when things may improve.

The COVID-19 pandemic meant big changes for the ferry system, Patty Rubstello, the new head of ferries, told roughly 60 attendees at a statewide webinar last week.

Rubstello was named the assistant secretary of Washington State Ferries at the end of 2020, replacing Amy Scarton, who is now deputy secretary of the state Department of Transportation.

Washington State Ferries saw a roughly 41% drop in ridership last year, which is about 10 million fewer customers.

"That's the lowest ridership we've had since 1975," Rubstello said.

The fleet saw more of a drop in walk-on passengers than those in vehicles.



BRIANA ALZOLA / ANACORTES AMERICAN

Ferries running the route between Anacortes and the San Juan Islands will stay on the winter schedule until May 9.

People are asked to remain in their vehicles when they can, wear face coverings at all times at the vessels and toll booths and to stay away from others.

Several routes, including those run-

ning between Anacortes and the San Juan Islands, will remain on the winter schedule for a while longer, meaning fewer boats are traveling back and forth. That schedule will remain in place until May 9.

Keeping the current schedule in place makes sense for now, Ferries Director of Community Services and Planning Stephanie Cirkovich said.

See *Ferries*, page A6



# Cleanup

Continued from page A1

buildings by figuring out how much of the contaminated materials need to be scored off of the outside of the buildings. And just those materials that are hazardous need to be sent to the hazardous materials landfill, with the rest being contained and disposed of another way.”

Swetnam said the site will have to be tented to keep contaminated dust out of the open clear well at the newer water treatment plant, which was built adjacent to the old site.

The city has been cooperating with the state Department of Ecology to develop a cleanup plan in accordance with the state Model Toxics Control Act.

The new water treatment plant was completed in March 2013, and the old treatment plant was then decommissioned and slated for demolition.

Public Works discovered the contamination in January 2015, notified Ecology and retained Seattle-based law firm Foster Garvey to hire contractors on the city’s behalf to determine the extent of contamination and how best to remove it.

The city did not disclose the contamination until April 24, 2017; by that time, the city had spent more than \$1.4 million on legal and consultant fees.

In a Dec. 2, 2020, Anacortes American story, council members said they had been given periodic updates on the pre-cleanup work but not a total on what had



CONTRIBUTED / DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

Under the preferred cleanup plan at the former water treatment plant, contaminated soil will be excavated and trucked to a permitted landfill and the sedimentation and filtration basins will be demolished.

been spent at that point. They were surprised that the costs by then had neared \$2 million.

Council members were more cautious on Jan. 25.

Anchor QEA, an engineering and environmental restoration firm that was first hired by Foster Garvey to do pre-cleanup work, was contracted by the mayor — with council approval — for \$370,900 to develop the final cleanup plan.

City Councilman Ryan Walters asked that the contract be amended to say “not to exceed” \$370,900 and that the City Council be advised if a contract adjustment needed to be made “so we know precisely what we’re getting into and can be assured that we’ll get the chance to edit (the contract) again if the consultant goes beyond that amount.”

### A Avenue landfill

The A Avenue landfill site is located west of the

A Avenue trailhead for the Anacortes Community Forest Lands. According to documents on the city’s website, it was an active landfill from the 1960s through the ’90s — first as a solid waste landfill, then for the drying of sewage sludge, and finally for the treatment of petroleum-contaminated soils.

In the 2000s, the landfill was closed, capped with soil and graded.

The state Department of Ecology determined in May 2009 that no further action was required at the site, which is now covered with grass and visited by wildlife.

The Parks and Recreation Department, Forest Advisory Board and Planning Commission were considering a proposal in 2019 to allow a bike skills course to be installed on the former landfill.

But Ecology’s “no further action” determination changed after investigating a public complaint about poten-

tial contamination.

Ecology found petro-

leum waste at the site

and on Jan. 22, 2020,

rescinded its “no further action” determination. Then last month, on Jan. 11, Ecology notified the City of Anacortes that the city is responsible for the cleanup and costs.

In addition to its work on the former water treatment plant cleanup, Anchor QEA will be paid \$87,500 to prepare a plan for cleanup of the A Avenue landfill site. Buckenmeyer said the cleanup will be paid for out of the city’s solid waste budget, though the costs are unknown at this point.

“Until we know what the final cleanup costs will be, it’s hard to predict what impact it will have on the solid waste budget,” he said.

These two cleanup projects are only two of several that remain to be done.



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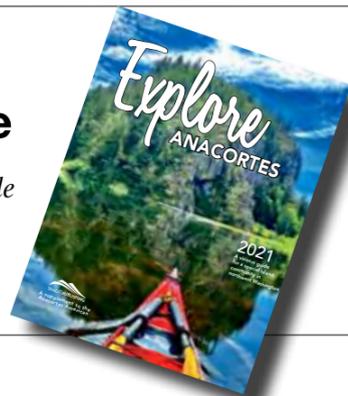


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Inside



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Anacortes' working waterfront is a hallmark of the city's history and economic success. But that work often leaves issues in its wake. Lovric's Sea-Craft took a financial hit from a January storm. But the 56-year-old marina and shipyard

faces other problems, as well. It is not alone. This is the first of an occasional series exploring some of the challenges, including environmental cleanup, on the island's working waterfront — and plans for the future.



Working Waterfront

## Vaccine allotment frustrates hospital

BY QUESTEN INGHAM  
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Island Hospital was denied any first doses of vaccine for the fourth week in a row, even as Skagit County Public Health received 600 first doses and Skagit Regional Health received a combination of 2,340 first and second doses in allotments from the state.

Skagit Regional Health's vaccination clinic also had received an extra shipment last week, meaning it was sent 3,270 doses that week, according to a Skagit Regional Health spokesperson.

Island Hospital CEO Charles Hall said Tuesday that he is asking for the community's help in calling on the governor and other state officials to advocate for an allotment that is adequate and consistent. The vaccine clinic at Island Hospital has the capacity to vaccinate over 800 people a week, he said.

"I'm extremely frustrated that we're not able to understand the state's strategy for our region,"

See Vaccine, page A4

### Reopening status check

Gov. Jay Inslee has paused all regional movement to remain in phase 2 of the "Healthy Washington" reopening plan. It will not take two-week metric data until further notice, and information regarding further phases had not been announced by press time. Updates prior to the next print edition will appear on goanacortes.com.

• Skagit County reported, as of Monday, 4,156 confirmed cases and 61 deaths. (That is an increase of 123 confirmed cases and four deaths since last Monday.)

• Island Hospital saw one COVID-19 patient admitted since last Monday, bringing the total to 43 admissions since March 2020.

• Island Hospital has had no more staff infections since last Monday. The total remains at 14 since March 2020.



RICHARD WALKER / ANACORTES AMERICAN

A derelict fishing boat is on the ground at Lovric's Sea-Craft.

## Lovric's survives windstorm, but other challenges remain

BY RICHARD WALKER  
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A January windstorm that set two vessels adrift before sinking one of them along with a floating dock was just the latest challenge for Lovric's Sea-Craft of Anacortes, which also received a state listing in 2019 as a contaminated site.

The M/V Chilkat, the former Alaska state ferry-turned-scallop tender that also was set adrift and sank in the storm near the Guemes Island Ferry slip, is gone. It was sal-

vaged Jan. 27 at a cost of \$800,000, which was paid by the state Department of Natural Resources' Derelict Vessel Removal Program. If the owner doesn't claim the vessel within an allotted time, it will be destroyed, according to Troy Wood, program manager.

Meanwhile, the Acushnet, a former U.S. Coast Guard vessel set adrift in the storm when the dock sank, was expected to have a new owner soon and be en route to a new home.

Lovric's Sea-Craft will use pro-

ceeds from the sale of the Acushnet, which was listed for \$135,000, to help defray the costs of raising the floating dock, which sank after the Chilkat punched a hole in it during the windstorm's tumult. The company became owner of the Acushnet by default after its previous owner fell behind in mortgage payments and abandoned it, general manager John Lovric said.

Other challenges remain for the 56-year-old marina and shipyard.

See Lovric's, page A8

## Pandemic, recovery focus of mayor's State of the City address

BY BRIANA ALZOLA  
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Much of 2020 was about responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, while much of 2021 will be about recovery, Mayor Laurie Gere said in her final State of the City address Tuesday, Feb. 23.

"Thank you all for what you've done this year," said Gere, who announced last month that she will not run for reelection. "It's been my honor to serve you as your mayor."

Like everywhere else, the pandemic hit Anacortes hard this year and changed the way the people here handle every aspect of their lives. People acted with kindness, which helped the community make it through the darkest days, Gere said.

"I saw fear this year, but I also saw innovation and solutions as to



SCREENSHOT

Anacortes Museum Director Bret Lunsford shows Mayor Laurie Gere around the museum during a pre-recorded segment shown in the mayor's State of the City address on Feb. 23.

how we can live and work safely," she said. "We've responded and found we are resilient. Now, we are

See City, page A7

## Group donates property to Family Center

BY BRIANA ALZOLA  
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The Anacortes Family Center just got a little bigger, thanks to a donation from a community member who wanted to help the center's mission to provide housing and support to people in need.

The anonymous donor, affiliated with The Thatcher Group, had volunteered at the emergency shelter and decided to donate land at 1311 31st St.

The property is close enough to walk from the existing Family Center campus and holds two homes, center Executive Director Dustin Johnson said. Each house has long-term tenants who will stay, Johnson said. The money from their rent payments will go toward keeping the funding going. After the tenants move out, the space will be used for more low-income housing, Johnson said.

Eventually, those houses will be replaced with a duplex or triplex as part of the center's

push for more affordable housing.

"That's quite a ways down the road. We just want to make sure we can get the most out of this property," Johnson said.

Johnson said he is inspired and touched by someone thinking about the Anacortes Family Center and making this sort of a gift.

"This will leave a legacy of (the donor's) values that will help families for generations to come," he said.

The property expands an Anacortes Family Center that currently has three other buildings, including the emergency shelter opened in 2009. That building has eight apartments, and there are nine additional units at the Family Transformation Center across the street. That building is for longer-term use, with

See Center, page A7



# Lovric's

Continued from page A1

## Contamination and violations

The state Department of Ecology notified Lovric's on July 10, 2019, that it was being listed as a contaminated site. Tests of marine sediments collected in nine sites in 2016 and 2017 revealed levels of benzoic acid, copper, phthalates and polycyclic aromatics exceeding the federal pollution standard.

According to Ecology's letter to Lovric's, a copy of which was obtained by the Anacortes American, the agency was seeking a cleanup order requiring the company to remove contaminated aquatic soils by dredging, and to remove creosoted pilings, repair shoreline armoring and improve maintenance of its marine railways.

Then on Jan. 5, 2020, a 140-foot barge that was reportedly scheduled to be scrapped began to take on water. Lovric project manager Ed Ehler and another Lovric's employee towed it to shallower water east of the shipyard, where it sank and still remains.

In June, inspectors from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration found 11 violations of occupational safety laws during a site visit, according to a report available on the OSHA website. Two violations were listed as serious.

While the online report does not provide details, the laws cited involve wearing life preservers where there is risk of drowning and working safely from platforms. Those violations yielded total fines of \$3,600, later reduced to \$1,800, according to the report.

The other violations resulted in no fines. They involved, according to the laws cited: maintenance of electrical fittings, boxes, cabinets and outlets; labeling of forklifts for maximum capacity and weight; maintaining training and evaluation records of forklift operators; providing fit testing and medical evaluations for employees who use respirators; ensuring valves on empty compressed gas cylinders are closed; and ensuring an adequate number of employees trained as first-aid providers are present each workshift.

Lovric said the company has cooperated with Ecology and is working to improve the health of the upland and marine environment at the marina and shipyard.

"We do our own samples and testing of runoff and some of the mud out in the beach to see if anything has leached out there," he said. "We have removed quite a few pilings that are not in use or don't serve a purpose, as well as an old pier." He said the company is developing a plan to capture stormwater runoff from the marine railways.

Lovric said he doesn't have a ballpark cost on the work. Ecology is allowing the work to be performed over time, and much of it can be done in-house which means the costs to Lovric's will be staff and materials.

Lovric said his company received piling removal assistance through Ecology and the state Department of Natural Resources. A program requires a developer who installs new pilings to mitigate the environmental impacts by paying to remove an equal number of old pilings from any location in the state. Through that program, Lovric said an estimated 80 creosoted pilings were removed from his marina and shipyard at no cost to



PHOTOS BY RICHARD WALKER / ANACORTES AMERICAN

A barge sank at Lovric's Sea-Craft. Company general manager John Lovric said the barge will be salvaged and the roof repurposed.



Above: The top of a barge is visible at low tide, 13 months after it sank. When the barge started taking on water, Lovric's towed the barge to shallower water east of the shipyard so it could more easily be salvaged.

Below: The Acushnet, a former U.S. Coast Guard cutter, is tied up at Curtis Wharf. Lovric's became the owner of the vessel when its previous owner abandoned it. Acushnet was one of two vessels that went adrift after Lovric's floating dock sank.



his company.

Regarding the OSHA inspection, Lovric said the findings were the result of ever-evolving regulations.

"We have a good record with no injuries," he said. "There's probably a lot of people who think we don't follow guidelines like everybody else because the yard's pretty rustic, we've got a lot of old equipment and this and that. But of course, like any other business, we have to follow what they're requiring of us."

"We do have to take our water samples every month when it rains and send them in to labs and test and see what kind of materials we're working with or what's coming off of boats and things. To have anyone think we don't follow these guidelines and do whatever we want, they're completely out in left field."

### Established in 1965

John's parents, Anton and Florence Lovric, established the boatyard and marina on Guemes Channel in 1965 at the former site of Robinson Fisheries and the Russian Cement Co.

Robinson formerly occupied the three-story, 1912 building to the west; the Russian Cement Co. — which according to information available on the Anacortes Museum

website made glue, fertilizer and fish oil from fish byproducts — had occupied the four-story, 1912 building to the east.

Anton Lovric was a ninth-generation Croatian boat builder who, while serving in the Yugoslavian army during World War II, was captured by the Nazis and spent 14 months at the Dachau concentration camp.

"I wouldn't be talking to you today if Patton's troops hadn't liberated (Dachau)," John Lovric said.

After the war, Anton became a naval architect and marine engineer and in 1960 emigrated to the United States, where he and Florence met and married.

Anton was familiar with the use of decommissioned vessels as breakwaters, so he and Florence acquired the hulk of the former four-masted schooner La Merced in 1966 for use as a breakwater on the west side of the marina. The vessel, built in 1917, had been converted for use as a floating cannery in Alaska in the late 1920s or early 1930s, according to the National Register of Historic Places.

Lovric's marina has moorage for about 40 vessels up to 70 feet in length, John Lovric said.

The shipyard to the east has a drydock, two marine railways with 650-ton capacity and 50-foot

breadth, a woodshop, steel fabrication area and a machine shop as well as moorage for larger fishing boats and other commercial vessels. The office is located in a portable building. Several other buildings house a variety of uses.

There are about a dozen employees, John Lovric said.

There's a constant hum of activity at the shipyard.

On one day in January, fishing boats were being worked on or were being secured for winter. The 70-foot, two-masted halibut boat Woniya was on the rails for hull work and other maintenance. Under a covered work area, the historic two-masted sailboat Varua — built in 1942 for noted author and circumnavigator William A. Robinson — was on blocks, stripped down for a full restoration. Divers were in the water, preparing that sunken dock to be raised.

But there were challenging signs, too.

The 140-foot barge that sank in January 2020 is still there, its top visible at low tide. Florence Lovric, who serves as company president, said Feb. 13 there are plans to salvage it soon. John Lovric, added: "It's hard to say a timeline on that. We're dealing with one thing first, but we keep (the Department of Natural Resources) updated on what's going on."

Nearby, west of the old Russian Cement Co. building, another barge has sunk. It was used as a covered, open-air woodshop, John Lovric said. The barge will be raised at some point and scrapped, and its metal roof — visible above the waterline — will be repurposed, he said.

Throughout the property, there are abandoned trucks, a dilapidated portable building on a trailer and old machinery. A fuel tank from a Navy jet rests atop the metal roof of an open structure, above a rusted industrial truck with flat tires. The tank, called a drop tank, resembles a torpedo and bears the marking VA-196 — for Attack Squadron 196, which has been homeported at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island since 1966.

A Kenworth refrigeration truck at the bottom of the road leading to the marina says "Western Cartage Inc." on its door. According to the Washington Secretary of State's office, the Seattle-based company dissolved in 2008.

"A family friend brought it and was supposed to have left it for a short time," John Lovric said. "I don't want to say we're stuck with it, but he kind of parked it there long term."

And the La Merced — described in 1990 by the National Register of Historic Places as having the appearance of "a well-tended, laid-up hulk that retains her lines, form, and evidences a high level of preservation" — is sloughing pieces of its century-old hull into the water below.

### Magnet for dreamers

Family pride runs deep here. John Lovric points out that he and his siblings are 10th-generation boat builders, and the old Robinson Fisheries building houses a 22-foot motor sailor that their grandfather started and they finished.

Moorage and haulout

fees are lower here than at other marinas and boatyards, Florence Lovric said. That may have made their yard a magnet for boat owners with big dreams but small pocketbooks to match.

Some owners "don't understand what it costs to maintain a boat," she said.

Her son, John, added, "Someone thinks they can own a boat or go live on a boat for cheaper, but they're not maintaining the boat underneath themselves. Certainly, moorage is a fraction of the cost of living in a house, but you have to put money into your boat. There's been boats we've had to pull out of the water and dismantle because they were going to sink on us. A lot of people don't have a good idea of what it takes, so yeah, (we) do kind of get stuck with it. ... It becomes an expense to us."

The barge that sank in January 2020 in shallow water had been abandoned at Lovric's by its owner.

Lovric's became owner of the Acushnet after that owner didn't pay his moorage fees. The recent listing price of \$135,000 does not reflect the cost of running a 213-foot ship that was historically manned by a crew of 75.

The Western Challenger, a 128-foot fishing boat, is tied up at the dock and stuck there by regulations. According to court documents available on the U.S. District Court database, its owner bought the Canada-flagged vessel with assurance from a Seattle-based consultant that he could get it reflagged in the U.S. so it could participate in U.S. fisheries. But the consultant "declined," according to court documents, to provide the Coast Guard with the calculations he used to document Western Challenger as a 191-ton vessel, rather than as a 227-ton vessel as formerly documented.

The Coast Guard declined to certify the vessel. So it sits at the dock. Several pieces of ice sheeting, a protective layer of ironwood planks, are missing from the side of its hull; grasses are sprouting on an upper deck. Florence Lovric said the boat's moorage fees, however, are paid.

John Lovric said the rusted vehicles and equipment scattered on the property don't pose an environmental hazard.

"Most of those things would be empty of fuel," he said. "It's mostly older equipment that maybe served its purpose for us, and then it got parked and there it is. It hasn't been a huge right-away concern (for us) to do anything with it."

A lot of that old stuff represents the late Anton Lovric's commitment to repurposing, such as acquiring the La Merced for use as a breakwater and using a section of the old I-90 floating bridge for use as the outer dock.

"My dad, coming from Croatia, didn't have a lot of money," John Lovric said. "Years ago, he'd gone to some auctions and found he could buy a lot of things for a pretty small dollar. Some pieces of equipment he bought with the idea of repurposing them and getting them going again, and in some cases, it didn't happen or they got used for their purpose and he didn't need it anymore. It was a lot of different times back then."

As for now, John Lovric said, "We have a lot more regulations to follow nowadays. But we've been in business for 55 years. A lot of businesses can't survive for five."

— Staff writer Questen Inghram contributed to this report.



**Guide explores area agriculture**

*Inside*

**Readers share photos of life on island**

*YourFidalgo B1*



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FILE PHOTO

Wyman's Marina, shown here being demolished in 2013, is one of the sites the Port of Anacortes cleaned up.

## Port, Ecology partnership led to \$64 million in site cleanups



**Working Waterfront**  
BY RICHARD WALKER  
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Kathy Pittis remembers what the central waterfront area was like before the cleanups.

Industries that had long provided jobs that fed local families and paid mortgages had left a mark on the environment. Bulk fuel had leaked from underground fuel storage tanks and supply lines. Log storage, lumber milling and pulp milling had left behind metals, petroleum hydrocarbons, PCBs and dioxins in upland and in-water soils.

Now, when Pittis and her family walk the esplanade at Cap Sante Marina or visit Seafarers Memorial Park, "it makes my heart sing."



CONTRIBUTED / PORT OF ANACORTES

Eelgrass is returning to the nearshore at the former Scott Paper Mill site, which is now the home of Seafarers Memorial Park.

Cap Sante is a vibrant place, with restaurants and maritime-related businesses. The marina participates in the Clean Marina program, a voluntary program run by many states in coordination with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association

that encourages environmentally sound operating and maintenance procedures. At Seafarers Memorial Park, eelgrass is thriving and provides habitat for surf smelt and other critters.

Pittis witnessed the change as a port staff

member and, later, as a port commissioner — not only the environmental transformation, but a change in the relationship between the environment and how business is done along the waterfront.

*See Port, page A8*

## District aims for more time in class

BY BRIANA ALZOLA  
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Gov. Jay Inslee announced March 25 that Washington schools can follow new, less restrictive Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines about students in schools.

The CDC guidelines say that schools only need to put 3 feet of distance between desks in classrooms, a reduction from the previous guideline of 6 feet.

That would mean students in schools for more in-person hours during the week.

"We are really excited that our state is moving in this direction," Anacortes School District Superintendent Justin Irish said. "Not only are we working on a plan this year, but we will have plenty of opportunity this summer to figure out what school will look like in the fall."

Hopefully, restrictions continue to ease, Irish said.

The 6-foot buffers are still required during meals, activities and in common areas.

According to the Anacortes School District, staff is working to implement changes as soon as possible.

Right now, the district is looking at all grade levels and is working on figuring out when changes may be put into effect, Irish said. A lot depends on staffing challenges and having enough support staff and bus drivers to be able to have more students in schools at a time.

"We are working as fast as we can," Irish said.

Changes in the school day could mean changes in when school starts and ends to accommodate bus routes.

The district has a major challenge right

*See Schools, page A7*

## New director of state parks comes from Anacortes

BY QUESTEN INGHAM  
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Anacortes-raised Peter Mayer took over this month as director of Washington State Parks.

As head of the agency, he'll oversee about 1,000 employees and 124 state parks that saw an increase of 1.5 million visitors from 2019 to 2020.

Even more people might go to parks to re-engage with family and friends as the pandemic subsides, Mayer told the American. He hopes to be ready for them.

"We have seen the incredible popularity and increased attendance to our state parks. We feel they play a big role in improving us physically and emotionally," Mayer said.

He also wants to get more youth into the parks through employment opportunities and outdoor education programs.

Mayer had an early start in parks work. In the second grade, he would help set up before

his soccer games at Storvik Park and eventually was given keys to open and clean the restrooms.

"It was my first experience being entrusted with responsibility," he said.

As Mayer completed his education, he worked his way up through the ranks at Anacortes Parks and Recreation, from working on maintenance crews to managing Washington Park. He graduated from Anacortes High School in 1987.

Mayer and his wife still have family and friends who live in Anacortes.

"I give a lot of credit to Anacortes Parks and Recreation for getting me exposed and enabling me to having some growing responsibilities maintaining Storvik Park. It really grew into something that's led to where I am today," he said.

Mayer has a master's degree in parks and recreation administration from Washington State University, where he also completed his undergraduate studies.

*See Parks, page A4*

## Inslee, other leaders talk climate change during visit

BY QUESTEN INGHAM  
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Gov. Jay Inslee visited Anacortes on Tuesday to speak in support of two climate bills currently in the state Legislature.

Joining him at Seafarers Memorial Park to speak in support of the bills were Swinomish Indian Tribal Community Chairman Steve Edwards, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Executive Director Matthew Hepner and Michelle Simmons of Silfab Solar, a solar panel company in Bellingham.

"As we are defeating COVID-19 with science, confidence and action, we have to take similar action against the climate crisis, and we know that we can do this," Inslee said.



QUESTEN INGHAM / ANACORTES AMERICAN

Gov. Jay Inslee holds up an orca ornament given to him by Port of Anacortes Commissioner Kathy Pittis as he speaks on addressing the threat to orcas from climate change.

pollution to a virus, and said it is contributing to the demise of salmon and

orcas, as well as increasing wildfires throughout the country.

Inslee then called on

*See Climate, page A7*



# Port

Continued from page A1

“For a long time, the thinking was you provided jobs or you did what was good for the environment,” she recalled March 22. “It felt like the two were never married. Now, it’s not one or the other. You can provide jobs and be good environmental stewards.”

All told, the Port of Anacortes has overseen \$64 million in environmental cleanups over the past 12 years. Port officials credit the cleanups to partnership building between the port, the Department of Ecology, the parties responsible for the contamination and sometimes some sleuthing.

Part of the cost of environmental cleanups in the state are paid by the responsible party’s insurance carrier, according to Port of Anacortes Executive Director Dan Worra. Even if the party responsible for the contamination no longer exists, the party’s insurance carrier is still liable.

“You can go back and find these historical policies and get them paid for,” he said.

Part of the cleanup cost is covered by the Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA), which is fueled by a tax on hazardous materials brought into the state and directs the investigation and cleanup of contaminated sites.

“The state taxes the import of hazardous material into the state, like petroleum — which we need — and that tax funds all these environmental cleanups through the MTCA,” Worra said. “All of these potentially hazardous materials

coming into the state pay the tax, and that tax is used to fund cleanups throughout the state. The Port of Anacortes has been a large beneficiary of that.”

So have the responsible parties. Cleanup of the former Scott Paper Mill site cost \$33 million, Worra said. The Port of Anacortes contacted the historical insurance carrier. The Department of Ecology funded half of the cleanup through the MTCA; the insurer paid \$16.5 million.

“All of that money from Ecology through MTCA, and the liable parties through their insurance, is coming to town, is being spent in town, is creating jobs and creating places that can have wonderful uses,” Worra said.

“At Dakota Creek, the in-water cleanup 10 years ago that’s been completed, they operate and have ships in that little bay there. And at Cap Sante, there’s Anthony’s — that’s 70 jobs because we did that cleanup. And there’s that great waterfront that’s perfect for walks and attracts visiting boaters and people spending money in the community,” he said. “All that money to clean it up, and then great business and jobs come to town. It’s just a wonderful program.”

Port Commissioner Joe Verdoes said the involvement of a public entity like the port has been critical to the program’s success.

“The first stage is attorneys and finding the original people of responsibility,” Verdoes said March 22. “Obviously, it takes a fair bit of negotiation, and it takes a bit of trust. The original parties recognize their responsibility, but they don’t want to get caught in a boondoggle where they’re

### Want to learn more?

— Visit [PortofAnacortes.com](http://PortofAnacortes.com) and [ecology.wa.gov/Spills-Cleanup/Contamination-cleanup/Cleanup-sites/Puget-Sound/Fidalgo-Padilla-baywide](http://ecology.wa.gov/Spills-Cleanup/Contamination-cleanup/Cleanup-sites/Puget-Sound/Fidalgo-Padilla-baywide)

writing a blank check to somebody. They want it solved, and the Port of Anacortes has a really good rapport with the Department of Ecology on handling these things and doing it efficiently and in a timely manner.”

### Ecosystem recovery

The partnership between the port and Ecology has created “tremendous opportunity” for the area’s economy and the environment, Verdoes said.

“Just look at the leveraging of dollars that have been used to return lands to productive use here for jobs — in addition to the fact that it’s the right thing to do for the environment,” he said. “The most dramatic example is the Seafarers Memorial Park area.”

Verdoes, a commercial fisherman since 1993, recalled being out on the water while cleanup of the former Scott Paper Mill site was underway.

“I would go out fishing during the day while they had that dredge out there, and it stank,” he said. “You held your nose because what they were picking up and putting in those barges was not good stuff. Now, it’s just a model recreational area. It’s become a place that people love in Anacortes.”

The ecosystem has rebounded in the in-water area at Seafarers Memorial Park as well,

# Waterfront cleanup sites

• **The Anacortes Port Log Yard site** at 718 4th St. is owned by the Port of Anacortes. It was leased until 2004 for log rafting and the transfer of logs from water to upland sorting and handling areas on Pier 2. Soil and sediment samples collected by the Port found contamination from benzene derivatives and other chemicals. The Port is working with Ecology on a cleanup action plan.

• **The Dakota Creek Shipyard site** has been used for industrial and shipyard activities since about 1879. The Port of Anacortes acquired the property in the mid-1940s and since 1977 has leased it to Dakota Creek. Some 38,000 tons of contaminated sediment were removed by dredging over a 4.65-acre area. An additional groundwater monitoring well is proposed to be installed.

• **Quiet Cove**, on O Avenue between Second and Third streets, is owned by the Port of Anacortes. It was historically the site of a bulk fuel terminal and storage facility. Arsenic and petroleum hydrocarbons were detected in groundwater; hydrocarbons and heavy metals were detected in soils. The Port of Anacortes removed buildings and pavement at its expense because the port was liable for those but not for contamination related to bulk fuel and storage. The port is now identifying the location of harmful chemicals and will conduct a study of cleanup options. A timeline for a cleanup action plan will follow.

• **The Cap Sante Marine site**, between 11th and 13th streets east of Q Avenue, was acquired by the Port of Anacortes in 1956; it operated as a boatyard, marina support area and offshore fueling facility. In 2007, underground storage tanks, supply lines and 9,888 cubic yards of contaminated soil were removed. Groundwa-

ter is being monitored.

• **The former Shell Oil Tank Farm site** was acquired by the Port of Anacortes in 1929 and leased to Shell Oil Co. from 1930-1987 for use as a bulk fuel storage and distribution facility. Tanks, pipes and structures were removed when the facility was decommissioned, and contaminated soil was removed to a depth of 15 feet below ground surface. The site is now a vehicle and boat trailer parking lot. Groundwater is being monitored.

• **The Scott Paper Mill site** was home to a lumber mill and later a pulp mill from 1925 to 1978. Detected in soils, groundwater and nearby marine sediments: metals; petroleum hydrocarbons; polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs; polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs; and dioxins/furans. The cleanup covered approximately 25 acres and included excavation and removal of 93,000 cubic yards of contaminated upland soils; dredging and removal of 54,000 cubic yards of contaminated aquatic soils; and planting of eelgrass.

• **The Wyman’s Marina and Wholesale Supply site**, owned by the Port of Anacortes, was historically used for lumber milling and shipbuilding operations, then as an 80-berth marina with fueling, dry dock plus maintenance and storage facilities. Operations ceased in 1998, and underground storage tanks associated with marine fueling were decommissioned and removed. Petroleum hydrocarbons, heavy metals and pesticides were detected in soil samples. About 7,600 square feet of overwater structures and more than 400 tons of contaminated soil were removed from 1998 to 2014. Then 17,800 square feet of intertidal habitat and 8,500 square feet of riparian/salt marsh habitat were created.

and is now macroalgae, riparian and surf smelt spawning habitat.

“We replanted a whole bunch of eelgrass (shoots) and had benchmarks on how many plants were supposed to multiply and grow. We passed the 10-year benchmark before year five,”

he said. “It just goes to show you that we have such a viable ecosystem out in the water that if you remove these contaminants, things just take off.”

Several sites in Anacortes are targeted for cleanup and/or monitoring by the state Depart-

ment of Ecology as part of the Puget Sound Initiative, authorized in 2005 by the Legislature and then-Gov. Christine Gregoire to improve the health of Washington’s inland marine waters and shoreline habitat. Work is completed or underway at some of them.



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The first round of election results were not available at press time. Check [gorskagit.com](http://gorskagit.com) for updates.



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## BACK TO SCHOOL



PHOTOS BY BRIANA ALZOLA / ANACORTES AMERICAN

It was a cheerful morning outside of Mount Erie Elementary School on Monday, as staff, including Principal Kevin Schwartz, above with second-grader George Armas, and teacher Kim Hoofnagle, right, welcomed students back into classrooms for the first time since March. Students in kindergarten to third grade went back to their classrooms this week, with students in fourth and fifth grades to join them Nov. 9. Schwartz said he was excited to see students back at school.

Balloons adorned several trees outside the building, placed by the PTA as a way to celebrate students' return to school. Masked parents, students and staff members walked students to their classrooms but weren't allowed inside. Anacortes School District Superintendent Justin Irish also stopped by to greet students.



## Final days for old Anacortes fish plant

BY RICHARD WALKER  
[rwalker@goanacortes.com](mailto:rwalker@goanacortes.com)

The nearly 130-year-old waterfront building at Fifth Street and K Avenue is sagging, its sides collapsing as it enters its final death throes.

It will be demolished soon, its story relegated to newspaper archives, museum files and old-timers with long memories.

But what a story it has to tell.

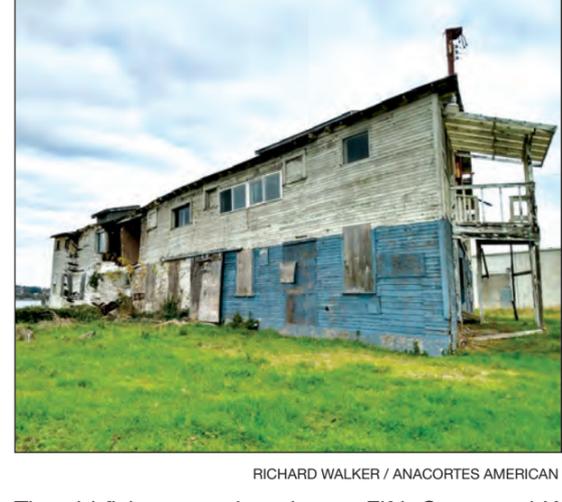
The building is all that remains of what was, at its founding, the first codfish processing plant north of San Francisco. Many of the untreated pilings — eroded by time, tide and critters — were driven by Capt. J.A. Matheson when he built the processing plant in

September 1891.

By October, the former Provincetown, Massachusetts, sea captain's schooner, Lizzie Colby, arrived from the Bering Sea with its holds full of cod, ushering in an era of fish curing and fish canning that would provide jobs for hundreds and fuel the economy of an infant city, according to news stories at the time in the Anacortes American.

"Every ton of fish added to his present capacity means more money for labor, more business for the city, more business for steamboat and railways and a help to the town," the Anacortes American reported on Jan. 12, 1905, when

See *Fish*, page A6



RICHARD WALKER / ANACORTES AMERICAN

The old fish processing plant at Fifth Street and K Avenue is set to be demolished soon.

## City gets new line for water treatment

BY QUESTEN INGHAM  
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As a line that carries water to serve tens of thousands of people in the region turned 50 years old this year, the City of Anacortes made an investment.

Rather than replace the aging raw water line, which carries water pumped from the Skagit River to the Anacortes Water Treatment Plant on River Bend Road near Mount Vernon, the city added a second line and a new clear well.

The second line will ensure that water can continue to be treated and distributed when the first one, built in 1970, needs maintenance or repairs.

"It provides redundancy," Fred Buckenmeyer, Anacortes Public Works Director said as he and several other city officials watched the new line being installed last week.

Multiple cranes held up the 1,950-foot-long water line as it was being assembled and slowly pulled underneath the Skagit River. The project began this summer and is expected to be finished within a few months.

The new clear well will temporarily store two million gallons of the chlorine-treated water to ensure proper disinfection. The water will then be distributed to cities including Anacortes, Oak Harbor and La Conner, as well as the Swinomish Indian Reservation, the Shell and Marathon oil refineries and Naval Air Station Whidbey Island. Serving over 60,000 people in all, the city treatment plant is a major provider of water in the region.

The new water line will also provide water through intertie connections to the Skagit Public Utility District when needed, such as



QUESTEN INGHAM / ANACORTES AMERICAN

The new raw water line was held up by multiple cranes as it was being pulled through a tunnel dug beneath the Skagit River on Tuesday, Oct. 27.

See *Water*, page A4



# Plant

Continued from page A1

Matheson expanded his processing plant and added another schooner to his fleet.

Profits from Matheson's codfish processing plant enabled him to buy a block of commercial buildings on P Avenue (now Commercial Avenue); start a local mining company and, with Anacortes American founder Douglas Allmond, found the city's first water company. He also bought and improved a hotel at the foot of Commercial Avenue, according to stories in the American archives.

Matheson wasn't the only one who would find prosperity in fish processing. By 1922, other companies would be operating 11 canneries and curing plants along Guemes Channel, according to a 2011 essay on HistoryLink.org. But Matheson's processing plant was the first. And while Matheson's old plant will soon be demolished, his fingerprint is still evident in Anacortes.

Matheson, his wife Josephine and daughters Flora and Catherine lived in the two-story Victorian home at 1201 Fifth St. Matheson lived there from 1899 until his death in 1938, and the house is on the Anacortes Historic Walking Tour.

The Matheson Building still stands at the northwest corner of Eighth Street and Commercial Avenue, two lots from the Wilson Hotel.

Matheson's descendants still own 316 Pine St. in Mount Vernon, which Matheson purchased in 1922 and was home to Skagit County's first courthouse.

## Future unclear for site

Retired mariner Bruce Baglien was at his boat slip at Anchor Cove Marina the weekend of Oct. 24 when he heard a portion of the west wall of the Matheson building collapse. He said he's watched the building slowly deteriorate and was concerned enough about the building's condition a year ago that he contacted the city.

Baglien said the building poses a risk to public safety. People have long entered the collapsing building, leaving behind evidence of their visit, from graffiti to needles. In addition, debris from the building is getting into the channel, he said.

Matheson's descendants sold the old processing plant, land and tidelands in 2008 to Jerrel C. Barto, a Southern California oil company owner and land developer who that year also bought Rosario Resort on Orcas Island. Planning Director Don Measamer said Thursday that Barto was given notice "about a month ago" to fence the site and demolish the building. Measamer said Barto was out of town until Nov. 2 but expected to get the site fenced after he returns.

Demolition first requires permits from the state Department of Ecology, Department of Fish and Wildlife and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Once obtained, the owner can obtain a demolition permit from the city, Measamer said.

The American left a message Thursday for Barto at his Signal Hill, California, office. His contractor, Nels Strandberg of Strandberg Construction, called back later on Barto's behalf.

Strandberg said the



RICHARD WALKER / ANACORTES AMERICAN

Capt. J.A. Matheson's codfish processing plant (pictured above, now) through the years: In 1901, 10 years after it was built (below); later, in an undated photo (middle photo below), after an expansion. Warren Gilbert, Matheson's grandson, said in 2008 that the building currently at the site was built before 1900 and was remodeled and updated through the years. Bottom: An employee, name unknown, of the Matheson codfish enterprise unloads codfish from the company schooner the Lizzie Colby in this turn-of-the-century photo. The man in the bowler hat at right is believed to be Capt. J.A. Matheson.

## Timeline

**1891:** Capt. James A. Matheson, owner and master of a codfish schooner in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, moves to Anacortes to build a plant to process cod caught in Alaska. He buys block 135, between J and K avenues, from the Oregon Improvement Co. and begins construction on a wharf and processing plant in September. His schooner, Lizzie Colby, arrives Oct. 14 from the Bering Sea full of cod.

The building has packing on the first floor and storage on the second. Matheson's grandson, Warren Gilbert, said in 2008 that the fishermen would filet and salt the fish on board the schooner. When the boat was full, they would sail back to the Anacortes plant where the fish were portioned into one-pound sections and packaged.

**1893:** J.A. Matheson Codfish Salting, Drying, Curing and Packing House begins shipping packaged cod to Hawaii, the Anacortes American reports on Aug. 17.

**1899:** The Lizzie Colby returns from the Bering Sea with 185 tons of cod, the Anacortes American reports on Sept. 11.

**1897:** A Sanborn Fire Insurance map documents the curing and packing house's growth. In an updated map, the wharf has expanded northward and contains pickling vats, fish-cutting vats, storage areas and a warehouse. A small smokehouse, storage building and fish drying yard are shown on the upland portions of the site.

**1904:** The Lizzie Colby returns from the Bering Sea with "200 tons of fine fish," the Anacortes American reports on Aug. 18.

**1905:** Matheson enlarges his wharf and plant, the Anacortes American reports on Jan. 12. He adds a 352-ton schooner, the Fannie Dutard, to his fleet. Expansion of his plant doubles the capacity to 500 tons.

**1914:** Apex Fish Co., a cannery located to the west of Matheson, buys Matheson Fisheries for \$25,000, the Anacortes American reports on July 23. The acquisition makes Apex, according to that company's boast at the time, the second-largest fish processing business in the world. Apex processed 50,000 fish in one day that year.

**1915:** Matheson reenters the industry, leasing — and ultimately buying — his old property back from Apex. His two schooners return from the Bering Sea with a combined 395,800 fish, more than half the Anacortes codfish fleet's catch for the season, the Anacortes American reports on Sept. 9.

**1935-1970:** Matheson's processing plant building is unoccupied but remains in Matheson family ownership.

**1938:** Matheson dies on June 13 at age 89.

**1970s-2000s:** Matheson's grandson, Warren Gilbert, rents the property to a succession of seafood processors who dry and pack eels and sea cucumbers.

**2008:** Gilbert Family Properties sells the site and 15,713 square feet of tidelands to Jerrel C. Barto, a Southern California oil company owner and land developer, who that year also buys Rosario Resort on Orcas Island.

**Today:** Matheson's fingerprint is still evident in Anacortes. His Victorian home at 1201 Fifth St. is on the Anacortes Walking Tour. The Matheson Building still stands at Eighth Street and Commercial Avenue. His descendants still own 316 Pine St. in Mount Vernon, which Matheson purchased in 1922 and was home to Skagit County's first courthouse.

— Sources: Anacortes American archives; 2008 Environmental Site Assessment by GeoEngineers, a firm with offices in Bellingham and Seattle

site will be fenced within two weeks; permits are being sought from the required agencies. Once demolition occurs, the site will be vacant land for the first time since Matheson drove his first piling in September 1891.

What's happens next is more complicated.

Barto would like to build four condominiums there, but development is complicated by the city's zoning and shoreline regulations. The site is zoned light manufacturing; under city zoning, condos would be allowed with a conditional-use permit. But regulations



CAPT. MATHESON'S COD FISH PLANT ANACORTES WASH.

LANCE BURDON

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are more restrictive near the shoreline, and conditional-use permits — and construction of condominiums — are not allowed.

The city is updating its Shoreline Master Program, and Strandberg hopes the regulations will be made compatible "so we can actually do something nice there someday."

Any use under current shoreline regula-

tions "would have to be light manufacturing with a shoreline component," Strandberg said.

"If you look at that property, unlike the other properties that are zoned properly — which are (Anchor Cove) Marina, Shannon Point Seafoods, the Port of Anacortes — they've all got their docks, piers and they're completely developed. We've got a giant mudflat that goes

out 300 feet and we're also squeezed geographically."

The site comprises about an acre of uplands and 15,600 square feet of tidelands wedged between Anchor Cove Marina and Trident Seafoods.

"We're on the waterfront, but practical, light manufacturing use of the waterfront is next to impossible," Strandberg said.