

Local reps provide legislative update

By Katie Hayes
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Mason County's elected state officials provided a legislative update Monday as the 2021 session nears its halfway point.

"It certainly has been a scaled-down version of a typical long session," Rep. Drew MacEwen, R-Union, said. "It takes more time to pass any given bill off the House floor, because of the nuance of doing it virtually."

The Shelton-Mason County Chamber of Commerce and the North Mason Chamber of Commerce hosted the midsession update for the 35th Legislative District Monday online. State Sen. Tim Sheldon, D-Potlatch, and state Reps. MacEwen and Dan Griffey, R-Allyn, gave general updates and answered questions from attendees.

The update focused largely on trends in the Legislature. MacEwen said this session has seen far fewer bills introduced in the House than previous ones. MacEwen said 800 bills were introduced in the House this year, versus 1,800 two years ago.

Sheldon said he has seen the same trend in the Senate.

"We have heard about half the bills we would normally hear, and that's not a bad thing really," said Sheldon, adding that it forces the Legislature to prioritize its goals.

Sheldon said he intentionally was not a prime sponsor of a bill this session, because he thought the Legislature should focus on dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

MacEwen discussed the House Republicans' proposed 2021-23 state operating budget, noting it was the first time House Republicans have released their own budget in more than 10 years. Republicans have said the proposed \$55 billion budget would fund essential services without raising taxes or cutting essential services.

The budget would fund the Working Families Tax Exemption, providing a sales tax exemption for basic necessities. MacEwen said the budget also invests in behavioral health programs at the local level and provides tax relief for small businesses.

"This is a doable budget," MacEwen said.

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Climber cheer

Shelton High School cheerleader Sadie Zehm performs a routine during a football game Saturday at Jack Stark Field at Highclimber Stadium in Shelton. Sports coverage begins on A-45. Journal photo by Justin Johnson

Veteran's Village needs money

By Gordon Weeks
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The Shelton Veteran's Village will not feature 30 separate tiny homes as originally envisioned, but seven four-plexes and one duplex on North 13th Street in Shelton's Mountain View area.

Rising construction costs prompted the change in the site plan, which continues to feature a community center at the 3-acre compound, Jaycie Osterberg,

the executive director of Quixote Communities, told the Shelton City Council at its meeting Feb. 16. But Osterberg also told the council that ground cannot be broken until the nonprofit group has secured enough money to cover operating expenses.

Osterberg told council members that the Bremerton Housing Authority said it does not have enough money for vouchers to help pay for the homeless veterans project in Shelton.

"We are struggling with our

operating budget," she said.

The group's tiny homes village in Olympia usually gets \$100,000 in stipends, about one-third of the annual budget, she said. The group is working with local legislators, both Democrats and Republicans, to try to get state funding. State Sen. Tim Sheldon is a longtime advocate for the project.

In the meantime, the nonprofit group is pushing ahead. Last month, Quixote

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Library service limited, despite OK to open

By Katie Hayes
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The Timberland Regional Library system has delayed opening its buildings for indoor use, despite guidelines from the Governor's Office that eased restrictions in late January.

"Everybody is on a different timeline in terms of figuring things out with the 27 buildings," Timberland Regional Library Executive Director Cheryl Heywood told the Mason County Commission on Monday. "Sometime in March, no later than April 1, we are opening up (for) Phase 2."

According to COVID-19 reopening guidelines from the Governor's Office, libraries are permitted to provide in-person service for up to 25% of the building's maximum occupancy in Phases 1 and 2 of the Healthy Washington plan. However, Timberland Regional Library's guidelines are stricter than the state's.

Mike Faulk, a spokesperson for Gov. Jay Inslee, said that while Phase 1 did not originally allow libraries to open indoor operations, the Governor's Office updated the

guidelines Jan. 29 to allow limited indoor operations.

"We heard a lot of feedback about this, had discussions with groups impacted and were ultimately convinced we could update the guidance to allow this safely in earlier phases, assuming the guidance is followed," Faulk wrote in an email.

Currently, all Timberland Regional Library branches are only open for curbside pickup. In an interview with the *Shelton-Mason County Journal* on Monday, Heywood was not aware of the guidelines for public libraries under Phase 1 and Phase 2 are the same. When Heywood was told that fact, she responded, "Well, we received very specific ones" and again said the guidelines for the two phases are different.

In an emailed statement to the *Journal* on Wednesday, Heywood wrote, "I was aware of the Governor's Healthy Washington Phase 1 and Phase 2 guidelines, different than the Safe Start Phases the governor issued for libraries last year. Staff have had discussions about the Healthy

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