

SOUTH WHIDBEY RECORD

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South Whidbey schools levy set for February ballot

By KIRA ERICKSON
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The South Whidbey School Board is seeking a replacement levy that decreases the property tax rate.

Voters will have the chance to weigh in on the proposed enrichment levy on the ballot this February. If passed, the educational programs and operations levy will replace the current levy of the same name, which

expires at the end of 2022.

The current levy rate, for 2020 through 2022, collects 95 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value annually, providing over \$4 million a year in funding for programs and services not funded by the state. These include extracurriculars, athletic programs, field trips and some employee benefits.

Assistant Superintendent of Business and Operations Dan

Poolman recommended a decrease in the levy rate to school board members during a meeting Nov. 17. He suggested a three-year levy that will collect 55 cents per \$1,000 in 2023, 51 cents in 2024 and 48 cents in 2025.

As a result, this will bring in \$400,000 to \$600,000 less per year than the current levy.

“That’s a substantial difference,” Poolman said. “Rather than asking for more every

year, we’re actually asking for a lot less than we asked for last time, whether you look at the amount or the rate.”

He added that the school district could ask for more, but it would not be able to be collected because it is limited by state code.

The Department of Revenue is estimating that property valuation will increase in the coming years. Because of this escalation in value, Poolman ex-

plained, the rate of the levy must decrease dramatically.

Student representatives attending the board meeting agreed that the enrichment levy is vital in funding things furthering education such as field trips.

Board members wholeheartedly supported Poolman’s recommendation, which he agreed was the “most aggressive” of all the options he presented.

Langley mandates employee vaccines

By KIRA ERICKSON
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All city employees of Langley will soon need to follow a new vaccination rule that has been set in response to the pandemic.

Members of the city council approved a policy requiring all employees of the city to either provide verification of vaccination against COVID-19, or to be tested on a weekly basis and wear a mask at all times.

At a city council meeting Monday night, Councilmember Dominique Emerson led the charge for the new personnel mandate, saying there is a need for the public to be safe when interacting with city staff.

The others were divided, however, on whether the council should establish the policy or if it would be under purview of the mayor. Councilmember Peter Morton suggested that the mayor’s emergency powers could be reinstated and used as they were during the beginning of the pandemic.

“I think that Langley really set the stage and led the defensive activity about COVID when it first came out,” he said.

Councilmember Thomas Gill disagreed and said he

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Photo by Kira Erickson/South Whidbey Record

South End “picker” John Norris examines the lock of an old toolbox he recently acquired from a Whidbey resident who was moving off the island. The old lock, which could potentially be 100 years old, bears an “S” insignia that is eerily similar to the Seattle Kraken logo.

Picker finds a toolbox full of Pacific Northwest history

By KIRA ERICKSON
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Over the years, South Whidbey resident John Norris has found a number of curious items in storage lockers around Whidbey.

His latest discovery may not be as exciting as a human skull or a 17th century cannon — both are former finds — but it is a bona fide piece of Western Washington history that could be over 100 years old.

Recently, while helping a former Clinton resident move out of his home, Norris found a weathered toolbox containing custom-made tools that had been hand-forged for a plywood worker who was employed at a mill in Olympia

during the first half of the 20th century.

“It’s a rare find,” Norris said. “It’s something that you’ll never find. He was a special guy who had special-made tools and I rescued it from the dump. That was going to be history gone.”

The worker, Luther Tallent, was born in 1904. When he was a young man, he moved from Tennessee to Olympia. He was a hand patcher at a plywood mill owned by the Washington Veneer Company, which no longer exists today.

According to his son, Luke Tallent, he was responsible for patching any knot or defect that would show up in the plywood. Luther would make a football-shaped patch with the edges of two curved chisels, paste some glue in and add

a new piece of plywood to fill the hole.

It was a job that likely became mechanized in the post-World War II era.

“The minute I saw those, being a picker, I’m like, ‘Oh, I need to find out where those belong,’” Norris said of the tools. He procured them from Luke, who was looking to downsize on his possessions as he prepared for his move off the island.

Norris contacted the Olympia Historical Society and is currently in negotiations with members of the society about donating the tools to its museum collection.

Collections Manager Susan Goff said she was able to find records indicating that

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Parks and Rec District will ask for levy lift

By KIRA ERICKSON
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The South Whidbey Parks and Recreation District will be asking voters in February for an increase in its maintenance and operations levy.

Commissioners for the park and rec district’s board chose the highest amount of three options for a four-year replacement levy. If passed, it will be effective starting in 2023.

The commissioners settled on a tax rate of 22 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. Other options proposed were 20 and 21 cents.

Although difficult to predict just how much revenue the levy will bring in, Executive Director Doug Coutts had estimated last month that 22 cents would bring in \$1.3 million if based on this year’s property values.

The current levy, which ex-

pires at the end of 2022, charged property owners 20 cents per \$1,000 of assessed properties in its first year. The levy amount increased by 1% each year.

At the parks and rec district’s most recent meeting on Nov. 17, Commissioner Matt Simms led the discussion about choosing the levy rate.

“To me, that’s the fundamental decision that we make in a time like this: Do we keep

doing a great job of maintaining the existing infrastructure, or do we allow some bandwidth to expand services and programs and park facilities to people we don’t currently serve today?” he asked the other commissioners.

Coutts agreed that was the heart of the issue.

“I never want us to be in the position where we have to go to the voters and say, ‘We need

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Photos by Kira Erickson/South Whidbey Record

South Whidbey resident John Norris goes through an old toolbox that represents a piece of Western Washington history. The tools inside it belonged to a mill worker, and could potentially be over a century old.



Photo courtesy of Washington State Archives

A historical photo shows the Olympia industrial area on the waterfront, including the Washington Veneer Company, which was founded in 1924.

HISTORY

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Luther began working for the Washington Veneer Company in 1940. A few years before that, he worked at a similar operation that ended up being acquired by the Washington Veneer Company.

The Washington Veneer Company was sold to the Georgia-Pacific Corporation in 1948 and all mills owned by it were closed down by 1969. Luther may have been a plywood worker there until the 1950s or 1960s.

“He worked there as long as I could remember, until Georgia-Pacific closed up the plant,” Luke said of his late father, who passed away sometime during the 1980s.

Today, a farmers market occupies the site where the former mill in Olympia once stood.

The Washington Veneer Company was started in 1924 by Ed Westman, who, years earlier, had been successful in starting a rival plywood company by the name of Olympia Veneer Company. He was persuaded to resign from his role at Olympia Veneer Company

in order to start the new plywood company.

A couple was married atop the towering Washington Veneer smokestack as a publicity stunt in 1929. A cameraman captured footage of the big event, which can still be viewed today.

Plywood was a desirable material for building homes and fulfilling wartime needs.

The handmade patching tools Luther used were likely either made just for him or were passed down from the plywood worker who did the job before him. The tools contain no maker’s mark and could potentially be over a century old. Norris observed that despite their age, they are still razor-sharp.

“I would imagine at that time that a set of tools would have been pretty expensive,” Luke said.

Later in his career, Luther developed an allergy to the patching glue. He started doing other jobs at the plant, including adjusting the saws.

“He liked working with wood and he liked working with his hands,” Luke said. “Other than that, it was a way to provide for the family.”

Other items in the toolbox include a hammer, a horseshoe and handmade nails a few inches long. The box is affixed with an old lock that has a “S” insignia on it that is eerily similar to the new Seattle Kraken logo.

“It would be a sin to use them for anything else,” Norris said of the tools. “They are worthless in the eye of a new beholder, in 2021. Back in the day, they were priceless.”

Goff expressed excitement about adding the tools to the Olympia Historical Society’s museum collection. The society is currently in the process of establishing a museum location to display the tools, alongside other artifacts that tell the industrial history of the state’s capital.

Luther Tallent’s plywood tools will be the first of their kind in the new museum.

“There are families who don’t think about sharing this wonderful wealth of information of things,” she said. “It’s really great.”

Luke agreed that he thought a museum would be a fitting final resting place for his father’s tools.

“Maybe I’ll get down there someday to see it,” the octogenarian said.

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