

State legislative district borders may change

NEWS A3

Bigs wins and missed chances

PREP ROUNDUP, SPORTS B1

STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

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Council OKs an interim leader

City approves parks, traffic, zoning plans

By PEGGY WENDEL
pwendel@scnews.com

In a split vote, the Stanwood City Council on Thursday confirmed City Engineer Shawn Smith as interim city administrator.

Council members Steve Shepro, Sid Roberts, Judy Williams, Darren Robb and Timothy Pearce voted yes. Rob Johnson and Dianne White voted no.

Mayor Elizabeth Callaghan tapped Smith to fill the position vacated by former City Administrator Jennifer Ferguson. The city and Ferguson agreed to part ways as of Monday, Sept. 20.

The city has employed Smith as city engineer/assistant public works director since January 2016. In March 2020, his title became city engineer/capital projects manager, a new position that prioritizes capital improvement projects, plans reviews and inspections.

Johnson asked, “What process was followed to choose him; what other candidates were considered?”

Callaghan wouldn’t divulge her methods, but said she didn’t interview anyone else.

“It’s within my ability to hire and fire. He’s qualified to do the job and could move seamlessly into the position,” she said.

■ SEE CITY, A5

‘A walking miracle’

COVID survivor focuses on recovery after long journey to stay alive



EVAN CALDWELL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

Karen Henderson plays the piano in front of collages made by family to show support for surviving COVID.



SUBMITTED

Karen Henderson was in the ICU at Providence Regional Medical Center in Everett for 33 days this past winter.

By EVAN CALDWELL | ecaldwell@scnews.com

Karen Henderson asked a simple question. She was in pain and could barely speak. She couldn’t move her arms or legs. But she could see her husband Michael Henderson there in the hospital room. “What day is it?” the 64-year-old asked her husband of 45 years.

The last thing Karen could remember was watching the presidential inauguration on Jan. 20 in the Intensive Care Unit at Providence Regional Medical Center in Everett.

She started feeling sick Jan. 10 and tested positive for COVID-19 six days later. It had become pneumonia, but the couple couldn’t find any area hospitals willing to take her. At the time, 93.1% of Snohomish County hospital acute care beds were full.

After consulting with doctors, they decided to closely monitor Karen’s condition at home and treat it like battling a tough flu.

It worked for Michael, 67, who had also tested positive and recovered after about 10 hours of feeling ill.

But Karen exhibited what has become

common COVID-19 symptoms: fever, cough, stabbing pain in the chest and trouble breathing. While at home, her blood-oxygen level was steadily dropping over several hours: 80 ... 70 ... 60.

Early on Jan. 20, Michael reached over to Karen.

“She was ice cold and not breathing,” he recalled, voice laden with emotion. “I had to shake her to start her breathing again.”

Then it happened again and again and once more while in the car en route to Providence. She collapsed in the parking lot.

The next thing Karen remembers is asking what day it was.

“March 3,” Michael said. “It’s March 3.”

■ SEE COVID, A9

Josephine plans to expand

Independent living facilities to be built in Stanwood, Smokey Point

By PEGGY WENDEL
pwendel@scnews.com

Josephine Caring Community has changed course in its expansion plans to support an aging population.

Instead of building a new facility out of the floodplain, Josephine plans to stay put and add a new building in Stanwood. In addition, it plans to build an independent living facility with 80 apartments at Smokey Point.

The Stanwood project is going through an approval process with the city for conditional-use and flood development permits to allow a new building on 4.66 acres zoned multi-family residential.

CEO Terry Robertson said construc-



COURTESY JOSEPHINE CARING COMMUNITY

An artist rendering of an aerial view looking from the southwest to the northeast of Josephine Caring Community’s planned expansion.

tion could start in the next year or two. Josephine’s expansion plan in town calls for a nearly 51,000-square-foot building with 32 memory care apartments and 20 independent living apartments. Each area would have a garden courtyard and parking on the ground level.

The addition is east of the existing facility at 9901 272nd Place NW, Stanwood. Heritage Park is to the east, and the city plans to eventually expand the park to the north on property recently purchased from Josephine.

■ SEE JOSEPHINE, A6

COVID

► FROM A1

'We made three mistakes'

Like many others, the Hendersons began the pandemic being extremely cautious.

They shed coats and boots outside before entering their home. Karen would shower immediately after work as a clerk at the Stanwood Post Office. And guests wore masks when visiting their home.

But, like many, their level of seriousness faded some over time. Vaccines were on the way, but weren't available yet.

By late December 2020, they welcomed a group into their home to visit unmasked. Days later, two called to say they tested positive for COVID.

"We made three mistakes," Karen said. "One: We let people into our house who were not wearing masks. ... Two: We started feeling sick and didn't get tested right away. ... Three: We waited too long to go to the hospital."

All three are common mistakes, health officials said.

The week Karen and Michael tested positive, so did about 850 others in Snohomish and Island counties, according to data from each county's health department.

In January, Karen, who has no underlying health conditions, was one of 106 people admitted to hospitals in Snohomish County with COVID, according to Snohomish Health District data.

While she was in Providence, at least 51 died from COVID in the county.

"Ten people went into the ICU that day (Karen was admitted) and only two came out," said Michael, pausing to collect himself. "She's a walking miracle. A miracle."

'We just don't know'

Karen lay in the Providence ICU for 33 long days.

She was in a medically induced coma. A ventilator fed oxygen into her weakened lungs through a tube in her neck.

Doctors seeking more information on her condition and the condition of her lungs tried to move her to get a CAT scan, but each time she was transferred to a portable ventilator, she stopped breathing.

"Doctors kept saying, 'We just don't know,'" Michael said. "It was still fairly early in the pandemic, and they didn't know all that much about the virus."

The virus effects people in different ways, and COVID doesn't have consistent or reliable markers that help doctors predict what's going to happen to a person, health officials said.

The couple's son, Christopher, guided his father through procedures, tests, treatments, drugs and more.

He's the middle of five adult children and a medical officer in the U.S. Air Force with triage experience in emergency room settings.

"He could talk their language," Michael said.

But with little change after three weeks and a fear Karen already had brain damage, doctors started asking them tough questions.

"Feb. 9, 10 and 11 were the hardest," Michael said.

"They wanted to remove her from life support. They had other people they thought they could save."

Michael fended off the inquiries, but by day 28 of the coma, they began to discuss end-of-life options.

"They needed the ventilator," he said.

No visitation

All of this happened without Karen's family, including her husband, being

"They wanted to remove her from life support. They had other people they thought they could save."

— **Michael Henderson** on what some doctors were saying while his wife was in a coma in February



Karen and Michael Henderson show the calendar they used to track Karen's battle with COVID.



Karen Henderson participates in three days of physical therapy a week in hopes of a full recovery.

able to see her.

Pandemic procedures barred everyone from the ICU.

Since Michael had been tracking and documenting Karen's vitals, he initially tried to follow her into the ICU, but was stopped and forced to leave by hospital security.

Providence staff provided access to hour-by-hour vitals, which Christopher was able to decipher and distill for his father. But visits were off limits.

Should Karen's condition worsen, Providence officials told Michael they would call and allow him about 30 minutes to get to the hospital.

But the trip from their home on north Camano would take 45 minutes if traffic was light.

"So I started sleeping in my car in the hospital parking lot," Michael said. "I did that until the cops kicked me out, which happened twice. Then a hotel room a few times."

But for the most part, Michael did not sleep much. He measured his sleep in 15-minute chunks instead of hours.

Sometimes it was cold in the car, but he didn't want to leave his wife. It eventually took a toll. Michael said he was incoherent at times when talking to family or neighbors.

Meanwhile, as the days blurred together, the family and medical professionals were running out of options. Michael, Christopher and some of Karen's doctors then considered trying an experimental drug therapy, called EB05, from Edesa Biotech, a Canadian firm.

They thought that even if Karen died, someone might benefit from the knowledge gained from trying the drug — an anti-inflammatory for the lungs. EB05 is still in Phase II/III of its clinical study, which is examining how it hinders a receptor that can trigger inflammation that causes acute lung injury activated by COVID and influenza viruses.

"We were in online church and a member, who also works at the hospital, said 'please help Karen Henderson and all her treatments be effective.' And right then — they didn't even say amen yet — right

a University of Washington COVID study, where doctors who treated her share notes with medical professionals worldwide in an effort to better understand the virus and its various impacts.

Six months after waking up, she is still working on some basics.

"I just try to come up with something new to accomplish each day," Karen said. "Sometimes I push myself too far. I've made mistakes, but I just have to keep listening to my body and take baby steps. I know it's going to take a while."

Karen has played the piano since she was 5 years old. Growing up in a German household, music was very important. She also learned to play the violin, guitar and organ. She would accompany German and Swiss choruses that were under direction of her father.

"Music has been a big part of my life," Karen said. "That is why I am trying to play the piano again."

Now it takes on new importance.

"The piano has been key in building back dexterity," she said.

She was finally able to play the piano again for the first time on Aug. 22.

"The piano is good therapy," she said. "I started with one finger, and now I'm at two fingers."

Karen goes to physical therapy three times a week, making progress each time. The nerve damage that paralyzed her arms and legs is slowly healing — at the rate of about 2-3 millimeters per day. At that rate, they hope she could have full nerve function return by August 2022.

She worked as a clerk at the Stanwood Post Office, and they wanted her back, but she just can't fathom how. She is mentally and physically exhausted after playing the piano for a few minutes. She needs several naps a day to recharge. Instead, she's retiring.

However, she plans to eventually restart college with hopes of obtaining a degree that would enable her to work as a substitute teacher down the road when she's feeling better.

"I want to give back, to help people," Karen said.

Thanks and frustration

"The community here has been amazing," Michael said. "Friends, family and strangers — absolute strangers who we have no clue who they are — have donated to the hospital bill, brought us food, gave us a wheelchair. Amazing."

The hospital stays — so far — have cost nearly \$900,000. Karen's insurance will cover about 90% of it. That still leaves them with a bill of at least \$90,000.

Michael and Karen are frustrated that so many people are treating COVID like it isn't a big deal.

"If you feel sick, don't wait. Go get tested," Karen said. "It's been frustrating seeing people not take this seriously, not getting vaccinated. To me, I don't understand how it became political."

Vaccines were just starting to become available when Karen fell ill, but are available to nearly everyone now.

"Karen's situation is avoidable. We've been on a mission to get that into people's thick heads," Michael said. "People who may have had a light case can still get this variant. We can end this pandemic if we all wanted to."

"The stubborn ones are keeping this virus alive. No one should have to go through what Karen endured."

ANCHOR OF HOPE COMMUNITY CHURCH

PO Box 764, Stanwood • 425-320-8273
(A Church of the Lutheran Brethren)
Meeting at the Stanwood Sons of Norway Hall
next to Wells Fargo Bank
9:30-10:15 a.m. Bible Class • 10:30 a.m. Worship Service
Russ Krause, Pastor

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8313 Park Dr. Stanwood • 360-629-2252
Steven Casteel Pastor
Sunday School - 10 a.m. • Morning Service - 11 a.m.
Sunday Evening Service - 6 p.m. • Wed. Bible Study - 7 p.m.

CAMANO CHAPEL

867 S. West Camano Dr., Camano Island • 360-387-7202

8:30 a.m. Indoor Traditional Service in Heritage Hall,
9:00 a.m. Indoor Contemporary Service in the Worship Center,
11:15 a.m. Outdoor Service

View Online: www.camanochapel.org

CAMANO LUTHERAN

Highway 532 at Heichel Rd. Camano Island
360-629-4592 Church
Sunday Worship
In-Person Worship is Open to Everyone
10:00 a.m.

www.camanolutheranchurch.org

CEDARHOME BAPTIST CHURCH

29000 68th Ave. NW, Stanwood • 360-629-9771
Dylan McFadden, Worship Director
Janna Dyck, Cedarhome Kids Director
Julie Olson, Nursery Director
All-Ages Sunday School - 8:45 a.m.
Worship Service - 10 a.m.
Youth Group (Grades 6-12) - Thurs. 6:30 p.m.
www.cedarhome.org

CEDARHOME SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

28505 68th Ave, NW, Stanwood
360-629-2441
Pastor Don Bryan
Saturday Worship 10:45 a.m.
Saturday Bible Study 9:30 a.m.
Spanish Services in the Blue Church
www.StanwoodSDA.org

MABANA CHAPEL

3871 South Camano Drive, Camano Island • 360-387-6431

Greg Summers, Pastor
Sunday School - 9:45 a.m.
Worship Service - 11 a.m.
Mon. Bible Study - 7 p.m.
www.mabanachapel.org

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Our Saviour's Luther Church

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Alex Abdallah, Director of Student and Family Ministries
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10:30 AM Contemporary Worship - Fellowship Hall
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(Signal limited to area surrounding church building)
10:30 AM Sunday School and Youth
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606 Arrowhead Road, Camano Island • 360-387-2600
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www.riveroflife.cc

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Child Care 9 a.m. - Noon & Adult Forum 9:20 - 9:50 a.m.
Wednesday Eucharist 10 a.m.
www.staidancamanoisland.org

ST. CECILIA CATHOLIC CHURCH

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P.O. Box 1002 • 360-629-3737
Father Jan Lundberg, O.C.D
secretary@saintccc.org
www.stceciliastanwood.org
Saturday Vigil Mass - 5 p.m.
Sunday Mass - 9 a.m. & 11 a.m.
Faith Formation Office - 360-629-4425

TIDELANDS

A New Worshipping Community
of the Presbyterian Church
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Sunday - 10 a.m.
www.tidelands.church

 **GROWING FORWARD**
Part 4 of a 4-part series

CHARTING A PATH

‘Now’s the time to participate’ in helping to guide and shape the area’s future

By EVAN CALDWELL
and PEGGY WENDEL
ecaldwell@scnews.com

The way that cities and counties plan for growth started from a simple frustration. “I was already stuck in (Seattle) traffic, and you had 500 new apartments. I said, ‘I wonder who’s planning that? Who’s coordinating some of that?’ And the answer was ‘no one,’ as I looked into it,” Joe King, a Democratic state Representative from Vancouver and Speaker of the House from 1987-93, told the Washington State Oral History Program in 2007.

So King dialed up Mary Margaret Haugen, then a state representative from Camano Island.

“(King) called and said, ‘I want a Growth Management Act,’” said Haugen, who served as chair of the Local Government committee during the 1990 Legislative session.

She got to work helping draft the bill that would become the state’s Growth Management Act.

In the late 1980s, the state was growing so rapidly, Haugen said. Before the GMA, “cities and counties didn’t talk to each other,” she said. “One would allow growth and the other wouldn’t. Big developments would go up and school districts were overwhelmed with kids. Kids in Mount Vernon had to go to school in Sedro-Woolley, because their schools were overloaded.”

Overwhelmed municipalities descended upon Olympia every January seeking money to fix their infrastructure problems, she said.

“We took the issues apart and sent them to other committees, then brought them back to my committee to pass it on to rules and then to the floor. I became a lead on the bill,” Haugen said. “We wanted a bottoms-up approach.”

■ SEE PATH, A8

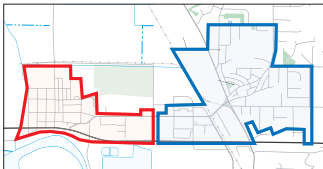


COURTESY JEFF HAGGLUND

A new housing development in north Stanwood backs up against farmland in this drone photo.

ONLINE POLL

This week’s question at **SCnews.com**: Will you participate in Stanwood’s comprehensive plan update?
See results from last week’s poll on **Page A8**



MORE
See maps of how Stanwood city limits have expanded over the years
PAGE A8



In our final installment of our “Growing Forward” series, we explore the state’s Growth Management Act and the plan to decide what the Stanwood-Camano area should look like in 10, 20 or 30 years from now.

Part 1 examines the area’s population, demographics and housing trends.

Part 2 looks at the area’s traffic and efforts underway to alleviate congestion and make streets safer.

Part 3 offered reactions, opinions and viewpoints from a variety of people about the past, present and future of the Stanwood-Camano area.

Read the entire series at **SCnews.com**

INSIDE

Stanwood Planning Commission hears about proposal for new 114-home development in north Stanwood

PAGE A3

Court issues injunction against owner of Camano encampment

By EVAN CALDWELL
ecaldwell@scnews.com

The courts stepped in this past week in the latest attempt to force a Camano Island man to comply with a long list of county code violations.

Island County Superior Court Judge Carolyn Cliff issued an injunction against David Muresan on March 14, attempting to compel him to work on issues regarding septic systems, junk vehicles, trash, construction and illegal dwellings, among other items.

The injunction comes after the county sued Muresan on Dec. 30, taking the long-running matter to Island County Superior Court. In addition to addressing public health and safety code violations, stop-work orders and hearing examiner decisions, the county also seeks to enforce accrued fines, penalties and attorneys’ fees and costs.

Muresan told the Stanwood



ISLAND COUNTY

An image from Island County from an inspection of David Muresan’s property on Camano Island in 2021 showing area’s tenants live.

Camano News in early January that he intended to fight the lawsuit. He reiterated to the newspaper last week that he intends to fight the injunction.

“I will ask for review, and later I will appeal,” he wrote in an email to the newspaper.

■ SEE COURT, A5

Court

■ FROM A1

Muresan’s response to the county’s previous orders has been his proposed so-called “Needy-People Initiative,” which would allow landowners to build small houses, septic systems, electrical installation without permits and with free inspections. No government entity has adopted it.

Muresan, however, follows his initiative on his own property, regardless of its legality.

“I ask the judge to approve or to order (the) county to approve my Needy-People Initiative,” Muresan wrote in response to the injunction.

He provides a place for the poor to rent for \$150-\$600 per month with utilities included, he wrote in an email to the Stanwood Camano News. He said he currently has 14 tenants at his property, including two children. Muresan wrote that he needed to collect rent money in order to pay for the required improvements.

“I ask the judge to allow for this case a trial or a jury trial,” Muresan wrote. “They expressed desire to testify, about their condition in court, as the laws allows them, before (being) evicted on the streets as homeless again.”

The county placed a lien of \$36,741 on his property in October 2020 after a hearing examiner ruled for the county following a public hearing. Since then, a \$500 per day fine has brought that to about \$300,000.

Muresan’s 5-acre parcel on Crestview Drive features a three-bedroom house and a detached garage converted into a space with at least seven makeshift rooms. He collects rent from tenants housed throughout the property, including from rooms built in a garage, trailers, campers and tents.

Since at least 2014, neighbors have formally complained to the Country Club homeowners board and to various county departments of problems arising from illegal tenants, dwellings, junk vehicles, trash and sewage on the Muresan property.

Island County Sheriff’s Department records show calls from the property itself for deputies to respond to incidents of domestic violence, child welfare, theft and medical emergencies.

Multiple county departments have tried for years to bring Muresan into compliance with county code to no avail. Island County officials then began working to take the matter to court.

The injunction orders Muresan to comply with 11 main directives, including to stop renting and collecting rent for any building, structure, vehicle or tent on the property; removing or bringing up to code plumbing, electrical and septic violations; and allowing county officials onto the property.

Island County Prosecutor Greg Banks said no county officials have been on the property since late December, but because of the injunction the county plans to send inspectors onto the site as part of the initial work.

“The Superior Court order gives this a little more force than just a directive from the planning department,” said Banks, adding that the county plans to return to court with more requests to clean at the property, including vehicles and junk piles.

If Muresan ignores the injunction orders, a judge

TIMELINE



ISLAND COUNTY

An image of David Muresan’s property on Camano used by Island County officials to document code violations.

History of the Camano Island property at center of dispute

The problems and legal case have been building for years at the 5-acre parcel on Crestview Drive owned by David Muresan. The county’s legal process is shown in documents that outline attempts by the county to bring Muresan into compliance with Island County code. In addition, changing county personnel and the pandemic slowed the process.

2014 — A next-door neighbor contacted the health department, describing piles of debris, cans, bags, trailers, vehicles and a growing dump area on Muresan’s property.

2016 — Neighbors complained that Muresan was burning garbage, giving off black, foul-smelling smoke. Complaints continued through at least 2020.

2018 — Several RVs, trailers and other portable structures were used as long-term residential dwellings by renters who typically pay in cash, according to the county’s legal documents.

September 2018 — The county sent Muresan a violation letter, telling him to remove the junk. Muresan answered that there were no violations. Code enforcement officer John Brazier told him to vacate occupants from the garage. Later that month, Muresan informed Brazier that he moved the tenants out and would clean the property. A month later, Muresan asked for a month’s extension.

Dec. 21, 2018 — The county health department issued a sewage failure notice on Muresan’s septic system, which was meant only to serve the house but also served tenants in a converted garage. Muresan was ordered to end all illegal rentals within 90 days and get an annual septic system inspection. Muresan continued building.

February and March 2019 — The county building inspector issued two stop-work orders, posted on the property, warning that failure to stop is punishable by a fine and imprisonment. December’s 90-day order expired, yet Muresan was still constructing additions and renting units.

April 2019 — Muresan met with county officials to discuss the feasibility of building up to 54 tiny houses for the homeless on his property. Before the meeting, Muresan told the Stanwood Camano News that county action prompted his plan to build tiny houses for the homeless. The county health department gave him and his renters 90 days to move out of the garage or be fined \$250 per day. “I had the idea at that moment and wrote the homeless initiative to build houses,” he said.

June 2019 — A neighbor formally complained of “a pungent smell” that they believed was the septic. Bob and Deb Christopher wrote, “we are smelling the effects of David’s failing septic system ... from our own backyard.” They have since moved. The Health Department issued a violation notice for alterations to the drain field, ordering Muresan to get permits and make repairs.

April 30, 2020 — As the COVID-19 pandemic began, the county planning department issued a second enforcement order for Muresan to stop all illegal land use activities and issued a \$1,000 penalty, explaining how it could be reduced. If he didn’t comply, he’d be fined \$500 per day while in violation.

May and June 2020 — The county took actions that led to a public hearing before a hearing examiner, with Muresan’s appeals being denied at every step. The county focused on violations of unpermitted living quarters. The hearing examiner ordered Muresan to cease his illegal conduct and pay a \$500 fine. He was ordered to notify his tenants to vacate within 21 days. Again, Muresan appealed and the examiner denied. Muresan continued at least into September 2021 to advertise rentals on Craigslist for rooms for \$600 per month.

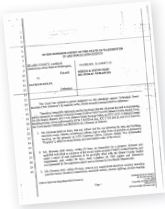
Oct. 20, 2020 — The county auditor recorded a lien on the property for \$36,741 in unpaid fines, costs and accrued interest, which were then delinquent.

June 2021 — After the county departments exhausted attempts to get Muresan to comply, they turned it over to the county prosecutor. The department prepared the case for Superior Court.

Dec. 23, 2021 — Island County filed a lawsuit. Muresan was served Dec. 30.

March 14, 2022 — Island County Superior Court Judge Carolyn Cliff issued an injunction against Muresan, detailing 11 main orders that he must address or face the possibility of contempt of court.

ONLINE



Read a copy of the injunction with this article at **SCnews.com**

can impose a wide range of enforcement measures including imprisonment for contempt or additional liens. The court could also grant the government authority to go in and clean the property.

“The burden is on Mure-

san to fix these issues either by himself or through a contractor,” Banks said. “If we spend county money, we would ask for a judgment or lien on the property to recoup our costs.”

Island County Commissioner Janet St. Clair said she is pleased the process is moving forward, and she plans to help connect the tenants with other resources.

“We will be working with them (the tenants),” St. Clair said. “There are options for relocation costs and options. We will work with those residents.”

Local COVID rates low

By SC NEWS STAFF

COVID cases and rates stayed low again in recent days.

In the most recently available data, there were 53 confirmed COVID cases in the Stanwood ZIP code from March two weeks ago, according to data released Tuesday, March 15, from the Snohomish Health District data. That’s the

fifth straight week of cases in the double-digits after averaging 360 cases a week during the previous six weeks.

In Snohomish County, the two-week case rate fell to 106 infections per 100,000 residents — the lowest since July 2021.

Updated Snohomish County data was not available at press time Monday. Camano recorded 12 new cases last week —

down from 17 a week prior, according to Island County Public Health data as of March 18.

In Island County, the case rate decreased to 61 infections per 100,000 residents from March 2-17.

The Stanwood-Camano School District recorded nine cases from March 9-15 — up slightly from seven during the week prior.

Snohomish PUD Safety Message

DON'T GET SCAMMED!



Scammers are increasing efforts to get your money!

They are pretending to be from the PUD to get you to pay fake bills.

We do not call to threaten disconnection if you don't make an immediate payment. We don't ask for financial information over the phone. Verify your PUD account status with our Customer Service team or sign up for MySnoPUD to check it on your own.

425-783-1000 (M-F, 8a to 5:30p, excluding holidays)
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Restoring *the* River

It’s a long, complicated path forward for endangered salmon in the Stillaguamish



PHOTOS BY EVAN CALDWELL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

Above, the Stillaguamish River empties into Port Susan Bay near diked farmland that will soon be restored into more estuary space.

At right, the Hamilton smokestack is seen from this bay, a recent project that turned an 90-acre spinach farm into estuary land. Young salmon, like the one seen at right in the Harvey Creek Fish Hatchery near Arlington, have already been spotted living in the newly created estuaries near Stanwood.



By EVAN CALDWELL | ecaldwell@scnews.com

Twice a day, murky, brackish water creeps into miles of muddy estuary channels, bringing nutrients — and hope — with the tides. Converting diked farmland at the mouth of the Stillaguamish River back into this type of natural landscape is a pivotal element in restoring endangered salmon runs to their former glory, according to local and state scientists.

But it’s just one ingredient in a long and complicated recipe for success. “It’ll take time, and it’ll be tough,” said Shawn Yanity, chairman of the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians. “People expect results now. And while you’re looking at up to 20 years to see salmon recovery, serious damage could be done in just a few years if we’re not careful.” Beefing up the Stillaguamish River’s salmon runs will require diverse stakeholders from up and down the valley to find common ground on myriad issues. It will require determination and, ultimately, government funding to achieve.

Some funding was recently earmarked for that purpose. Of \$3.6 million in National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program funding awarded in February to projects in Washington, \$1 million will support an estuary restoration project along the Stillaguamish River. It will be the latest in a string of local habitat restoration projects, such as Leque Island and this bay near the north fork of the Stillaguamish River, and areas of the Skagit River delta.

■ SEE RIVER, A3

INTERACTIVE MAP: See details about several of the area’s recent salmon habitat projects with this article at [SCnews.com](https://www.scnews.com)

Stanwood widens search for new city hall, police station

City Council may consider buying an existing building

By PEGGY WENDEL
pwendel@scnews.com

The Stanwood City Council and staff have paused plans to build a civic campus on the hill and are taking a closer look at new sites for the city hall and police department. In a special Stanwood City Council workshop Thursday, the council heard new information and zeroed in on options, including two new sites — existing buildings in town with renovation possibilities. To better research options, the city



CITY OF STANWOOD

Two options for city buildings near Church Creek Park are among the handful of possibilities for a new City Hall and police station in Stanwood. See more designs with this article at [SCnews.com](https://www.scnews.com).

in February hired Mackenzie — a firm that provides many services in the field of architecture, engineering and land use planning. Stanwood first hired Mackenzie in June 2019 to plan a civic campus near Church Creek Park and Stanwood High School.

In February, the mayor and some council members were unsure of this direction. They asked the firm to delve into alternatives before continuing with a pricey new complex on the hill.

■ SEE STANWOOD, A5

River

► FROM A1

The growing effort is movement in the right direction, but experts said it isn't enough to boost local salmon populations to historic levels.

Meanwhile, other challenges loom. Climate change, urban sprawl and new pollution sources add to the already long list of obstacles for salmon recovery.

"We're the ER room for salmon right now," said Heather Cole with the state's chapter of The Nature Conservancy, a global environmental nonprofit.

A HATCHERY STOP-GAP

While habitat remains limited, hatcheries are helping to support young salmon.

Jason Griffith recently dipped his steady hand into the cold water of a rearing tank to cup a small, silvery chinook.

"This guy will double in size in an estuary," said the fisheries biologist for Stillaguamish tribe.

But for now, that little fish and 200,000 of its brothers and sisters grow in green tanks at the Harvey Creek Hatchery north of Arlington.

The hatchery raises around 600,000 coho, 250,000 chum, 200,000 summer chinook and 150,000 fall chinook each year. They're released into the Stillaguamish River with the hope they survive the years-long life adventure down the river, out to sea and back up the river to spawn.

In the 1970s, hatcheries started popping up with hopes of combating a precipitous decline due to overfishing, Griffith said. But they are more of a stop-gap than a silver bullet.

"The thought was that without some drastic action, there was a good chance salmon runs could go extinct," he said.

However, those hatcheries cannot preserve the species alone.

"Think of hatcheries more like a tool, than the solution," Griffith said.

Hatchery fish, at least on the Stillaguamish River, are largely used to supplement remaining wild populations.

"Too many fish can overwhelm habitat capacity," he said, adding that hatchery fish are typically a bit larger and can shoulder out the wild fish.

When wild chinook return to the Stillaguamish to spawn, some are collected and moved to the Harvey Creek Hatchery or the Brenner Creek Hatchery upstream on the upper Stillaguamish River to help diversify the salmon population's genetic pool.

Still, around 500 chinook returned to the Stillaguamish River in recent years, down from compared to historical annual estimates of about 30,000, according to historical estimates. Those low numbers sting for the local tribe.

"Chinook are a very big part of our history and way of life," Yanity said. "We use that food to feed our soul. It's a huge part of our diet historically. Without them, our culture is at risk."

In the 1980s, the tribe also placed its community fishery on hold, limiting the annual chinook catch to about 30 for ceremonial purposes. The thinking was that if people just stopped fishing for a few years, the salmon populations would rebound.

"Some think the easiest solution is to just stop fishing," Yanity said.

The road to recovery isn't that simple; fishing limits are just another tool.

"Salmon don't have a voice, so we're the voice for the salmon," Yanity said



PHOTOS BY EVAN CALDWELL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

Highway 532 runs through Stanwood, at left, and along a branch of the Stillaguamish River. Treating stormwater from Stanwood streets before it flows into the river is one of the many steps needed in restoring salmon runs. Also part of the puzzle: adding estuary lands like the recently completed Leque Island restoration site, bottom right, and the zis a ba site, center.



Heather Cole of The Nature Conservancy, cups a young salmon in the Harvey Creek Hatchery in Arlington on March 26 as Shawn Yanity, chairman of the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians, looks on.



Congressman Rick Larsen points out a flock of birds while touring the Leque Island estuary restoration project on April 1. Larsen, who sits on the Congressional Estuary Caucus, said estuary projects like Leque Island 'should be a very important part of our thinking when discussing infrastructure.'

over the hum of electric water pumps in the hatchery. "We need salmon. Without salmon, this is a dead river."

'A DIFFERENT CROP'

Supporting salmon in the wild requires space and food.

That's why, in 2017, workers tore through more than 2 miles of dikes protecting a former 90-acre spinach farm across the Stillaguamish River from Stanwood's iconic Hamilton smokestack.

The effort opened the door for the river and the rising tide to pour water into miles of pre-dug channels, where small salmon can now take refuge as they grow and prepare for their ocean voyage.

"People should think of these estuaries as farmland, too," Yanity said. "The salmon use them to grow and transform for saltwater or freshwater transit. It's just growing a different crop."

The restoration site — known as zis a ba, the name of a former Stillaguamish tribal chief who lived there years ago — is already home to a host of wildlife. Scientists have observed the young salmon at the site, using it as intended.

"These marshlands are really productive as the tides

are flooding. Salmon have a place to hang out, picking off the food coming and going from the marshes. It's like a buffet," said Griffith, the fish biologist. "They're just eating and growing all the time."

The estuaries produce a wide range of food for salmon, including shrimp, zooplankton and aquatic insects.

The restoration of zis a ba and neighboring sites — the Leque Island to the west and Port Susan Bay Preserve Nature Conservancy to the south — is a good step, but there's still not enough estuary space for a salmon rebound.

That means the reversal of diking, which walled off about 4,000 acres of estuary habitat from the 1800s to 1955 in the lower Stillaguamish, must continue, a coalition of conservation groups said.

Since 2012, a mix of tribal, government and nonprofit partners bought former farmland and restored 488 acres of it to estuary land in the lower Stillaguamish.

An estimated 2,000 more acres are needed to help salmon numbers substantially increase. It could take 10 years or more to create enough estuaries, which are also critical for trapping sediment and protecting

from storm surges. The estuaries are also a key to fighting climate change by efficiently locking away carbon, according to emerging research.

With the \$1 million grant, the Stillaguamish tribe can take the next steps toward acquiring 537 acres of diked farmland near the mouth of the Stillaguamish River. That will be in addition to 248 acres the tribe already purchased.

Griffith said once the full 785 acres is under tribal ownership, planning will begin to move back existing dikes.

"It's a long game," he said. "And getting estuary space is not enough; there are other challenges ahead."

STOPPING POLLUTION

One of those challenges is stormwater pollution.

At the base of the Hamilton smokestack, a jarring, unnatural warning sound fills the still air.

"Here it comes," warns Kevin Hushagen, Stanwood's Public Works director.

The noise signals the imminent arrival of a stream of stormwater unceremoniously gushing out of 48-inch pipes.

Water that collects on downtown Stanwood streets

is funneled into Irvine Slough, which parallels the south side of Highway 532 and leads to the pumps at the base of the Hamilton smokestack.

"These pumps are running more often just to keep the slough low enough" to allow stormwater to gravity-drain into the slough, Hushagen said.

That stormwater can carry a potpourri of potentially hazardous materials into the slough, then the river and estuary. Recent research showed even chemicals from tire particles can be highly lethal to salmon.

In a study released last year, University of Washington Tacoma researchers found a toxicant, called 6PPD-quinone, leaches out of the particles that tires shed onto the pavement. The particles then wash into storm drains and into rivers. Even small doses quickly killed coho salmon in the lab.

"We are more aware now of the effects of toxic chemicals on fish," Griffith said. "A lot of stormwater compounds are not good compounds. But this has become an emerging threat we didn't know about, and we need to get ahead of it."

Partnerships are needed to solve these problems.

Nonprofits including The Nature Conservancy are building coalitions to tackle such obstacles throughout entire watersheds.

Locally, the nonprofits worked for years with the Stillaguamish tribe, the city of Stanwood, Washington Farmland Trust and the Snohomish Conservation District. From the work of these partnerships, Stanwood later this year will build a new pump to take stormwater from west downtown to new treatment equipment before it reaches the river. A similar new pump is in the design phase for the east end of downtown.

"I think people have understood for a long time that stormwater is a problem," Griffith said. "The problem is that dealing with stormwater is expensive."

Projects like Stanwood's stormwater treatment equipment are the types of initiatives unlikely to happen without groups working together, he said.

"About 20 to 30 years ago, we were all doing smaller-scale projects," he said.

"The big projects have the potential to affect quite a lot — drainage systems, roadways, cities. If we want to do these big projects, we have to broaden the coalition and

make sure everyone's concerns are designed around and heard upfront and then move forward together."

COLLABORATION NEEDED

While salmon are often the starting point for estuary restoration projects, they aren't the only beneficiaries.

Not far from the Stillaguamish tribe's next project location, U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen, D-Washington, recently peered through a spotting telescope, spying on a sandpiper and dozens of other bird species that now call a restored Leque Island home.

"It's not just about salmon restoration; it's about habitat restoration and flood control and so much more," said Larsen of Everett, who sits on the Congressional Estuary Caucus.

In late 2019, the dikes were removed from Leque Island between Stanwood and Camano Island, converting former farmland into a 250-acre salt marsh.

The effort, 15 years in the making, was funded by a mix of grants and help from nonprofits, the likely recipe needed for future restoration projects.

"This boils down looking at the entire river system," said Cole, The Nature Conservancy's Puget Sound community relations manager. "We need to put all these puzzle pieces back together. How do we put it all back together to promote healthy rivers, floodplains and farmland?"

Programs have emerged such as Floodplains by Design — a public-private partnership led by the state Department of Ecology, nonprofit The Nature Conservancy and the Puget Sound Partnership, a state agency leading the region's collective effort to restore and protect Puget Sound.

The Nature Conservancy and Floodplains by Design are spearheading the request for more state and federal money to accomplish a long list of environmental projects in the state, including in the Stanwood-Camano area.

The benefits range from include helping salmon, flood prevention, erosion control and even helping the endangered Southern Resident orca. And those with an eye toward the fish said the momentum — and investment — must continue.

But it's way too early for a rosy outlook, experts said.

"We're cutting it too close right now," Yanity said of the low salmon numbers in the face of a growing array of obstacles. "It could be devastating if the wrong step is taken."

He knows it can be a tough sell to the general public — spending all this time and money without immediately seeing an improvement in numbers.

"But every little thing makes a difference," he said.

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Local shops get creative ahead of holidays

Area retailers combating supply chain squeezes, pandemic

By MARY JENNINGS
For the Stanwood Camano
News

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“By being persistent in my efforts, I was able to find new products,” said Traci Smith, owner of the Picnic Pantry, a specialty kitchen and gift shop in Stanwood. “While it’s been a lot of work and a lot more hours than usual, I feel confident in having a great supply of unique, quality gifts for the entire season.”

Smith and fellow Stanwood-Camano businesspeople were able to lean on their flexibility to find products over the past few months.

The global supply chain is being hit with a multitude of problems — factories closed due to COVID-19 surges, a lack of containers, backups at ports and warehouses, and a shortage of truckers — prompting smaller retailers to cast wide nets to get goods.

“Being the buyer and owner of a small gift shop allows me the flexibility to order from any suppliers that I choose,” Smith said. “As the year progressed and I could see keeping my shelves stocked was going to be an issue, I just kept ordering product.”

■ SEE SHOPS, A15



Saving the bell

The historic Camano City schoolhouse will soon ring again



PHOTOS BY EVAN CALDWELL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

Ed Bednarczyk, a vice president of the Camano Schoolhouse Foundation, inspects the refurbished bell and its new tower that will be lifted onto the historic 1906 building in early 2022.



CAMANO CITY SCHOOLHOUSE FOUNDATION

The Camano schoolhouse seen in this undated historic photo with its bell in a tower.

By EVAN CALDWELL
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That will change early next year. “It’s the crown on the schoolhouse,” said Ed Bednarczyk, a vice president of the Camano City Schoolhouse Foundation. “It’s symbolic; bells are just symbolic. It’s a sound that will return back to this community and certainly be heard out on the water.”

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house, calling students to and from class until 1936 when the district consolidated with Stanwood, and all students were bused to town.

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The bell was taken to the nearby Camano Chapel.

“They were probably just looking for a safe nearby place to stash it for a bit, but it ended up being forgotten about,” Bednarczyk said.

■ SEE BELL, A12

Island County officials declare state of emergency after storm

Rep. Rick Larsen tours damage

By EVAN CALDWELL
ecaldwell@scnews.com

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A blast of tropical moisture that dumped rain for days, causing flooding and mudslides throughout the region, also whipped up powerful westerly winds that toppled trees, knocked out power to thousands and fueled a damaging storm surge.

“The damage was stunning to me,” Island County Commissioner Janet St. Clair said. “The north side of the island was hammered.”

The Island County Commissioners



EVAN CALDWELL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

A storm surge pushes ocean water into homes at Utsalady Bay on north Camano Island during a weather event that hit the region on Nov. 15 causing widespread damage and flooding.

on Nov. 16 voted to declare a state of emergency, which could open access to Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance.

On Friday, U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen,

D-Washington, and St. Clair toured damage on the west and north sides of the island.

■ SEE STORM, A4

Bell

► FROM A1

The historic building sat mostly quiet until the Camano City Schoolhouse Foundation bought the site in 2012. Around the same time, the foundation received a call from the Camano Chapel.

“Camano Chapel had the bell for — they don’t even know how long,” Foundation Treasurer Chuck Durland told the Stanwood Camano News in 2016. “They think since the beginning of the church. They had been moving it around from closet to closet for 65 years.”

By 2016, Tami Douglas had found boxes in their family’s 1911 Camano house from her great-grandfather, who had once been superintendent of the schoolhouse. She found his notebooks, filled with careful cursive and more than a dozen postcards from teachers. And, on the front of one of those postcards, a photo of the schoolhouse — with a belltower.

For the foundation, that photo was the missing link. It was proof the schoolhouse once had a belltower.

While initial fundraising efforts and donations were aimed at restoring the building, the foundation members always envisioned the triumphant return of the bell. The crown jewel atop the schoolhouse.

“It took time to raise the money and secure donations, and the pandemic slowed us down, too,” Bednarczyk said, referencing COVID restriction limiting the group’s ability to host fundraising events. “We had hoped to have



PHOTOS BY EVAN CALDWELL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

At top, Ed Bednarczyk inspects the new remotely controlled striker inside the bell. Above, the inside of the Camano City schoolhouse remains decorated and ready for events in the historic 1906 building, hopefully in early 2022, schoolhouse foundation officials said.

this done two years ago, but we can move forward now thanks to generous donors.”

The project ramped up Sept. 15 when crews hauled in new beams to

reinforce the existing schoolhouse so it can withstand the weight of the bell and its tower.

Meanwhile, David Pelletier, a principal architect at Pelletier + Schaar in Stan-

wood, donated his time to help design the belltower — mostly based on a few surviving historic photos and from other historic Camano school buildings from that era.

“Camano has changed a lot over the years, so it’s nice to help preserve something,” said Pelletier, who has also helped with past Camano Schoolhouse projects. “Things can eas-

Schoolhouse lighting

Saturday, Nov. 27, 6 p.m.

Camano Island’s historic 1906 at 993 Orchid Road, Camano Island will be adorned with thousands of white lights for drive-by viewing. Lights for the tree and school house will be switched on every evening until midnight through New Year’s Eve. Camanoschoolhouse.com

ily get forgotten about.”

Next, a company is set to reroof the schoolhouse. Then a crane will raise the bell and its new tower — weighing about 1,700 pounds — into place, likely in early 2022, Bednarczyk said.

The foundation hopes to host a celebration at the schoolhouse in spring to mark the return of the bell. “To ring in spring,” Bednarczyk said.

James Androuais, owner of McShane Bell Co. in St. Louis, Missouri, came to help with the installation, complete with automated equipment that allows the bell to be programmed and activated remotely from a smartphone.

Androuais said the bell doesn’t display a date it was made, which was common 120 years ago with the more economically cast iron construction.

The tentative plan is to set the bell to ring on a regular basis — maybe clanging out three rings once a day — and more on special occasions. In addition, LEDs will illuminate the bell and its tower in any color of the rainbow for whatever the occasion.

“When you hear that sound,” Bednarczyk said, “it warms the soul.”

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On Friday, U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen,

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■ SEE STORM, A4



At left, the storm surge and winds pushed boats, driftwood and debris into homes on the west side of Camano Island during the storm on Nov. 14-15. Above middle, one of the many trees that fell over power lines Nov. 15 also blocked North Camano Drive near Maple Grove Road. At right, the aftermath of the storm was revealed Nov. 16. Many boats, bulkheads, boathouses and property were damaged in the weather. See more photos at SCnews.com.



Storm

► FROM A1

“In my 56 years, I haven’t seen many storms that have caused damage like this throughout north-west Washington,” Larsen said.

He and St. Clair urged property owners to document damage, which is a key part of the requirements to unlock FEMA aid.

The storms featured several wind gusts of more than 50 mph, according to the National Weather Service. But the highest sustained winds came along with a high tide.

That combo of forces created a storm surge that inundated low-lying areas and tossed boats and driftwood into yards and structures. Bulkheads were ripped from their cement anchors, decks were dismantled and buildings sustained water damage.

The county’s state of emergency declaration also kick-started the process of Public Works officials doing a damage assessment of county roads and property, St. Clair said.

“They’re busy,” she said last week. “We already have seen so much damage from the wind and the waves.”

The winds and high water also whacked Warm Beach area, including swamping Kayak Point Park and damaging its iconic pier.

Much of the region was without power for several hours Nov. 15, and some people had no power for more than two days.

“The damage out on Camano Island was severe,” Snohomish PUD spokesperson Aaron Swaney said. “The island got hit really hard this time around and was in some of the worse shape our crews have ever seen it post-storm.”

In all, the storm knocked out power to about 65,000 customers, the majority of those outages were customers in Stan-



The Skagit River, seen here on Nov. 16, floods the area near Conway and Fir Island, north of Stanwood.



At left, a fallen tree damaged a garage in the Lost Lake neighborhood. No one was injured. The tree was one of at least 27 reports of large trees down that were received by Camano Island Fire & Rescue during the 24 hours of the storm. At right, U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen (center) tours storm damage Friday in the Madrona Beach area of west Camano Island.



wood, Lake Goodwin and on Camano Island.

Swaney said PUD crews spent most of their time and effort on Camano Island.

“More than half of our resources were spent on Camano on jobs that were complex and time-consuming,” he said. “The typical storm crew job takes between 2-10 hours. In the

aftermath of this storm on Camano, we had multiple jobs take over 30 hours. Some of the jobs had multiple jobs within jobs.”

In all, 15 PUD line crews, 16 two-man servicemen crews and six tree crews were working on the island.

There were also reports of clogged culverts prompting creeks and ditches to

overflow. There were also calls to emergency services about downed powerlines triggering small fires.

The combination of power outages and blocked roads also prompted the Stanwood-Camano School District to close school on Nov. 16.

The bulk of the storm’s moisture veered to the north, sparing the Still-

aguamish River from a major flood. The river topped out at 14.8 feet in Arlington later on Nov. 12 — lower than forecasters feared and lower than the crest of a flood in late October.

In downtown Mount Vernon, a floodwall — completed in 2018 — survived its first major test last week, preventing potentially devastating downtown

flooding.

The Skagit River crested at 36.9 feet early Tuesday morning — the second worst flooding in Mount Vernon since 1990, when the river crested at 37.4 feet, according to historical record.

On Friday, U.S. Sen. Patty Murray visited with local and state officials and FEMA representatives to discuss the success of the project.

In 2005, Murray helped secure \$200,000 in federal funds to study flood protection in downtown Mount Vernon.

“I did not know that years later I would be standing here and see a downtown that was saved because of this wall behind me,” Murray said in remarks to the press.

However, it was the low-lying areas outside of town that suffered the greatest impacts.

Even with river levels dropping, flooding was still occurring in fields at lower elevations. It may take weeks for the water to fully drain out of some fields.

Some farm animals were also lost to the flood, said Don McMoran, director of the Washington State University Skagit County Extension. He declined to provide details for confidentiality reasons.

He said many animals were relocated to higher ground, in part thanks to Skagit County’s animal rescue plan.

McMoran said the levee system helped keep the Skagit River mostly within its banks.


“I’m very pleased with our diking (district) commissioners, and pleased with improvements they made to the diking system since 1990 (flooding),” he said.

More than 6 inches of rain fell in parts of the North Cascade mountains.

Though the storms have passed, weather officials warned of landslide risks.

Near the Canadian border, Sumas city officials said hundreds of people were evacuated, and they estimated that 75% of homes had water damage in a soaking that reminded people of the November 1990 flooding when two people died and there were more than 2,000 evacuations.

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