



Your Independent Hometown Award-winning Newspaper

# LA CONNER WEEKLY NEWS

VOL. 14 • NO. 35

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2021

www.laconnerweeklynews.com

\$1.25



A BRIGHT NIGHT ON THE CHANNEL – Saturday brought dozens of boats all lit up and with some place to go: They were in the Swinomish Yacht Club's lighted boat parade. More photos and the story behind the first La Conner boat parade some 50 years ago on page 9. – Photo by Nancy Crowell

## Locals question Center Street apartments

By Ken Stern

In a two-page memorandum to La Conner's town council Dec. 6, planner Michael Davolio provided a status update on the proposed 20-unit apartment development at 306 Center Street. This followed 12 correspondences from residents by the Dec. 1 deadline in response to the town's November public notice of preliminary determination of non-significance. A thirteenth letter came Dec. 8.

Davolio noted council members "have been inundated by comments from residents regarding this proposal."

To briefly summarize comments, artist Maggie Wilder shared her concern that a "rich and diverse community (is) disappearing. Already there are few artists who can afford to live here." She fears a future where "La Conner became inhospitable to children, pets, Little Leaguers, grandparents, artists and writers."

Bruce Cornwall finds it to be "a partial city block with questionable zoning that is in an established residential area despite how it is defined in statute or comprehensive plan. This location is appropriate for four homes at best; it should be defined that way."

Gerald George is concerned that the cars from a "20 unit apartment complex pose a significant risk to seniors" walking from the La Conner Retirement Inn to Pioneer Market and the library.

Georgia Johnson raised detailed concerns about petroleum contamination, sharing her history of living across the street. She also challenges the six vacation rentals that "confronts a hotel environment right up against a residential neighborhood," noting "the Town Comprehensive Plan has something to say about this under 6A-7, 'protect residential zones from encroaching commercial use.'"

Gary Nelson also calls for testing based on the site's history with "large capacity fuel tankers," and expresses concerns about excess parking and the threat a 35 foot tall building will have to life and safety, including firefighters who would respond to the site.

Jerry and Linda Schull note the "4-inch water line installed in 1958 will not be sufficient along with the sewer system in the area."

Amy McFeely wants oversight that "demand(s) a development that will truly enhance the aesthetics and quality of life of this neighborhood." Her concern is that "the sheer size and density of this building will overwhelm the existing neighborhood. Meeting code does not equate to appropriate scale."

Linda Talman's 11-page letter finds the "applicant has not submitted 'complete applications' for the master permit or conditional use permit – the determination of completeness should be withdrawn for both applications and the applicant should be directed to submit new applications with complete information in order to proceed with the project"

(continued on page 6)

## Tracking Rainbow Park clearcut event history

By Ken Stern

Many Shelter Bay residents' responses are critical of the Shelter Bay board of directors paying \$92,513 in fines and penalties against the Shelter Bay Community, Inc. and Steve Swigert, a resident and board member, for Swigert's clearcutting trees in Rainbow Park in September 2020. The Shelter Bay Town Hall group is considering lawsuits and recalling board members. Their research, and the documents provided for the Swinomish Planning Commission appeals case, many from the Shelter Bay board, track the sequence of events and Swigert's role.

Here is a summary of actions and decisions. In April 2020 the Shelter Bay Community's Greenbelt Committee was planning to clean up the area at Rainbow Park and the adjacent Track J.

Ric Henderson was approved to be project manager by the Shelter Bay board for Rainbow Park repairs that July. Steve Swigert's greenbelt maintenance permit was approved in August, with the minutes capturing "make it clear to the homeowner that no Firewise work is to be done or removal of trees," by the Greenbelt Committee.

Five days later the committee denied Swigert's view restoration request for his Samish home above the park. The committee noted its plans to have Firewise work done at the park and "believes this will improve the homeowner's view."

Committee chair Carole Miller conducted a walk-thru with Henderson on Aug. 31 and discussed trees that could be cut and not cut and to have it done by a licensed and bonded tree service and monitored.

(continued on page 7)

## Boat parade lit up La Conner Saturday evening

By Ken Stern

What must have been a record crowd came to La Conner's boardwalk Saturday evening to watch over two dozen boats invited and organized by the Swinomish Yacht Club cruise slowly up the Swinomish Channel in the annual lighted boat parade.

There were smaller boats and larger boats, together in a combination of rainbow colors from green and red through blue and, of course, white. There were all kinds of blown up lawn ornaments, from deer to Santas, snowmen and more. Music came from some boats, yells and shouts of "Merry Christmas" from others, including one child's voice. "God bless us, everyone" was not heard.

Folks shouted back from the boardwalk, sometimes as small groups in

unison. Many waved on their own or in response to waves and honking from the channel.

Last year there was no official boat parade, but still people came, almost all of them masked in the first year of the coronavirus pandemic. This year, mostly unmasked people were cheek to jowl on the railing and as many as four deep in the section from Hellam's Vineyard to Nell Thorn.

Yes, the wine tasting rooms and restaurants alike were packed, including Waterfront Café, typically closed in the evenings.

The first boat passed the lighted tree in Gilkey Square at 6:13 p.m. The last boat passed Calico Cupboard at 6:35 p.m. People started for their cars immediately, crowding the boardwalk and First Street.

Those that left first got out of town faster. For everyone else, including locals, they were stuck in bumper to bumper traffic during La Conner's annual post-boat parade traffic jam. At 7:05 p.m. vehicles were at a stop across from the post office in a line that stretched east to the roundabout. It is not known how late it was when traffic again flowed freely.

La Conner was once again a lucky place to be, as by 4 p.m. the weather defied the forecast: The rain stopped, the skies cleared to high scattered clouds and the stars shared the darkness with a half moon.

It was perfect weather and a great night for a parade of any kind. Folks streamed into La Conner in the afternoon and slowly crawled out that evening.

## David Franklin leaving helm of Shelter Bay

By Bill Reynolds

Longtime Shelter Bay manager David Franklin dropped a metaphorical bomb of his own on Pearl Harbor Day with the surprise announcement of his resignation as manager of the local residential community.

In his Dec. 7 missive Franklin announced he is stepping down Jan. 28 from the high-profile role he has filled here for eight years.

Franklin, with more than two decades experience in community and resort management, wrote that he is "leaving

Shelter Bay for a new opportunity and a new chapter in my career."

Franklin told the Weekly News on Monday, he is headed north, to Whatcom County.

"Given my age," he quipped, "what looks to be my last stop on my career journey will be at Semiahmoo Residents Association in Blaine.

Franklin has been the face of the community and involved in numerous infrastructure projects, policy initiatives and intergovernmental negotiations since December 2013.

"I have grown personally and in my

career," Franklin said in an open letter to the community's residents. "I have been fortunate enough to enjoy the overwhelming support of the board, committees, staff and community members.

"This," he stressed, "is something that not all community association managers can say and for this consistent source of encouragement, I will always be thankful."

Franklin was literally tested by fire early in his lengthy Shelter Bay tenure.

Seven boats moored at Shelter Bay Marina were destroyed and six sank when a blaze with flames shooting up to 50 feet in the air swept through the J-Dock area in February 2014. Several other boats were damaged – losses were initially estimated north of \$1 million – but, fortunately, no one was injured.

Franklin was the go-to source for the region's media that covered the fire and earned high marks for assuming a cool, calm posture during its stressful aftermath.

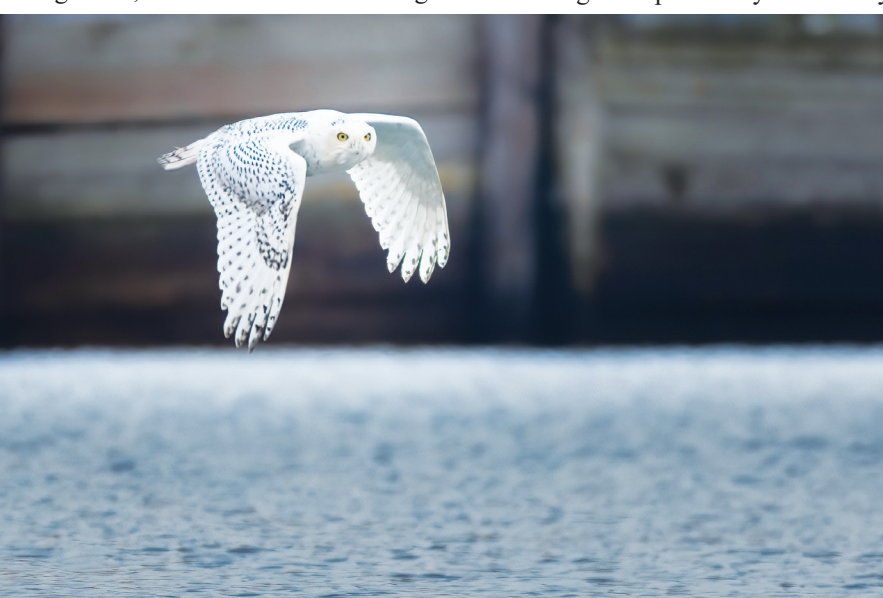
"There were no injuries," he told the Seattle Times in the hours immediately following the fire, "just a lot of broken hearts for those boats that were lost."

Franklin assured the Times, Weekly News and other media outlets that a plan was already in place to determine both the full extent of damage and possible environmental impact of diesel fuel that leaked into Swinomish Channel.

On the latter point, Franklin was particularly well-suited. He had graduated from Western Washington University with a degree in environmental science and economics.

"It really wasn't a decision," he said of his eventual career path. "It was more

(continued on page 6)



ONCE IN A GREAT WHILE – It is that time of year when birders in our area are sometimes treated to a rare visit from a snowy owl. Due to their rarity, unless one appears in a place like the Queen Anne neighborhood of Seattle, as one did last year, locations of these visitors are generally kept quiet to prevent harassment for the birds, which are recovering from a very long journey from their home in the Arctic. This one appeared for a few days in Whatcom County earlier this month but has since moved on to places unknown.

– Photo by Nancy Crowell