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THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Bellingham considers citywide 20 mph speed limit

BY ROBERT MITTENDORF
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A three-year effort to improve traffic safety across Bellingham by lowering speed limits 5 to 10 mph is headed to the City Council for a vote Monday.

Council members will be considering an ordinance that sets the default speed limit on all streets to 20 mph unless otherwise posted, meaning slower speeds in most neighborhoods, on many collector and arterial streets and in the downtown core.

"The proposed ordinance reflects a data-driven, context-sensitive approach to speed management that aligns with updated federal guidance and the city's safety goals. Extensive technical analysis, stakeholder coordination, and Transportation Commission support provide a strong foundation for implementation. Adoption of this ordinance will enable the city to proactively reduce crash severity, improve safety for all users, and advance Bellingham's traffic safety objective of eliminating fatal and serious injury crashes citywide," according to a Public Works Department summary of its efforts to collect information and craft an ordinance.

A traffic consultant called the Transpo Group helped with a three-year study that resulted in the new ordinance.

Walk and Roll Bellingham, which advocates "for people who travel by foot or by human-powered rolling," told The Bellingham Herald that it expects that the new ordinance will force the fastest drivers to ease up on the gas pedal, reducing injuries and deaths. "The data is striking: your chance of surviving getting hit by a car doubles when speeds drop from 30 mph to 20 mph," Walk and Roll board member Jamin Agosti said in an email. "Setting 20 mph as our city's default will save lives. It also gives city engineers what they need to design streets to safer standards — and when streets feel safe, people use them. People walking to local businesses, kids biking to school, families taking an evening stroll. That's the kind of city Bellinghamsters are asking for loud and clear and this proposal brings us one step closer."

In recommending the new speed limits, Public Works officials said they stopped relying on the traditional 85th percentile rule to set speed limits and instead sought guidance from the "City Limits" report prepared by the National Association of City Transportation Officials.

"Recent updates to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, however, require practitioners to consider a broader set of factors, including roadway context and the presence of vulnerable users when establishing speed limits," the Public Works report said.

Over the past decade, the total number of crashes on Bellingham roads has declined, but their severity has risen, according to data from the Washington State Department of Transportation:

- Bellingham had 750 crashes in 2025, including four fatalities and 22 with

SEE SPEED LIMIT, 3A



JACK BELCHER/The Bellingham Herald

BIKE Bellingham founder Sarah Burch has created three bike tour routes through Bellingham, each with its own theme.

BIKE Bellingham offers free GPS-guided tours

BY JACK BELCHER
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A Bellingham woman has established themed bike routes along standout locations in and around Bellingham, and her program is live just in time to celebrate National Bike Month.

Sarah Burch created and launched BIKE Bellingham on April 28 with three different routes, each with its own theme: Quirky Quirks, Treemendus

Trees and Gretchen's Murals.

Burch hopes to add more routes to the program over time. She already has ideas for 30 more themed routes, including a Cats and Dogs theme and an Indigenous Arts theme. The first three routes have 47 points of interest between them and highlight 23 businesses, organizations and individuals.

"I just want to draw awareness to the community and all the cool things that exist here in Bellingham," Burch told The Bellingham Herald.

Since creating the program, Burch said she has heard back from a handful of organizations in town looking to collaborate on themed routes. She is also excited to hear from the community on possible points of interests along routes as well as themes. Burch can be reached through the BIKE Bellingham website.

Burch has been working with the city of Bellingham and recently the city

SEE TOURS, 4A



JULIA HAWKINS/jhawkins@bellinghamherald.com

"Severance" creator Dan Erickson, left, and Rich Brown, chair of the Western Washington University Department of Theatre and Dance, discuss the Apple TV+ show during a Q&A session Friday at the WWU Performing Arts Center. Erickson graduated from WWU in 2007.

'Severance' creator discusses how WWU inspired his work

BY JULIA HAWKINS
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Western Washington University graduate Dan Erickson, the creator, writer and producer behind the Apple TV+ original show "Severance," visited his alma mater Friday for a celebration of distinguished alumni.

Erickson, who graduated from Western in 2007, was on campus to accept an alum award alongside other notable WWU grads Allison Lührs, David Swanson, Lee Whittaker and Nancy Hoff and her family. Before he accepted the award, Erickson paid a visit to the school's Performing Arts Center,

where he had a discussion with Rich Brown, chair of the WWU Department of Theatre and Dance and participated in a Q&A session that was open to the public.

It was the first time Erickson had visited the campus since "Severance" had become to the most watched show on Apple TV. Two seasons have aired, and the series' third season is expected to be released sometime next summer.

"It's incredible. It's the most surreal thing in the world. I will say being back here (at Western) makes it more real," Erickson told The Herald. "It's

SEE SEVERANCE, 3A

Bellingham forms panel to improve landlord-tenant ties

BY ROBERT MITTENDORF
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Bellingham is seeking local residents to be part of a short-term panel on landlord-tenant relations, hoping to promote understanding between the two groups and possibly help shape future policy.

City Council members voted unanimously to create such a "work group" Monday night and discussed it in a committee meeting earlier that day. A work group differs from a permanent advisory board because it has a limited scope and length of service.

"A lot of our conversation this afternoon was about our hopes for the makeup of this work group and that we get some representative and diverse folks to apply to be on the work group," Council President Hollie Huthman told the Planning Committee. "The more people that are interested in this work group, the more people that apply, the richer this work group will be."

Mayor Kim Lund said that she hopes that the work group can help ease tensions and foster understanding.

"We're trying to acknowledge where we are falling short, how we can make actionable improvements that are leading to better outcomes for renters in our community right now," Lund said. "Let's acknowledge that we're

SEE PANEL, 3A



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Boat building program for county's troubled youth navigates uncertain future

BY BONNY MATEJOWSKY
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A modest navy warehouse sits amid clusters of cacophonous construction sites and the churning waters of Thea Foss Waterway.

To the average person, the blue structure is just another boating depot along the Tacoma Tideflats.

But for the juvenile offenders who enter its doors, it's something more.

Its desks, filled with wooden opportunity, power tools buzzing, and snugles from resident therapy dog Leo are a welcome escape from the conflict that's defined their adolescence.

And for many, it's enough to steer them away from a life behind bars.

This is Tacoma Community Boat Builders, an organization providing mentorship to youth in the justice system through a combination of old-fashioned carpentry and modern mental health mentorship.

For over a decade the program has introduced nearly 2,000 juvenile offenders to woodworking and maritime activities as an alternative to traditional juvenile punishments. But despite their success, TBB staff worry that funding issues and uncertainty within the Pierce County Juvenile Court could lead the program into dire straits.

FROM SUPER YACHTS TO SUPERVISION

Prior to founding TBB, Paul Birkey made a name for himself in the maritime community with Belina Interiors, a company that designed and built luxury interiors for super yachts.

But after decades in the business, that life wasn't enough for him. He wanted to give his arsenal of tools and building equipment to the community. Juvenile offenders seemed like they needed it most, Birkey said.

He called the Pierce County Juvenile Court with his idea, unsure if it had any merit.

When the late Superior Judge Tom Larkin picked up the call, Birkey's pitch



Sara Zier, left, a member of Tacoma Boat Builders board of directors, Shannon Shea, center, executive director of Tacoma Boat Builders, and Paul Birkey, the founder of Tacoma Boat Builders, stand for a portrait outside of the organization on Friday, April 24, 2026, in Tacoma, Wash.

met with fervent enthusiasm.

"He just came alive, practically came through the phone," Birkey said. "I didn't know it until actually some years later, Judge Larkin was the vanguard of transforming the way that we deal with youth that are in trouble."

Along with Tacoma Community Boat Builders, the court partners with other outside-the-box programs from the Youth Serving Agencies Network to provide a variety of options to fit a young adult's needs.

Pierce County began that shift in strategy in 2003, and the results led to fewer youth being placed in juvenile detention over the following years and fewer young people being charged with a crime in the first place. In 2016, Judge Larkin told The News Tribune that the county had one of the most progressive juvenile courts in the country in part because former Juvenile Court Administrator TJ Bohl and his staff ran it like a successful business.

Pierce County also outperforms state youth reoffense rates after involvement in the justice system, with a recidivism rate of 27% over a year.

Since Tacoma Community Boat Builders' first cohort of students arrived in 2014, nearly 2,000 students from across Pierce County have partic-

ipated in the program.

While Birkey and other volunteers brought the woodworking skills, Shannon Shea, a former ethics professor and researcher at the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education in Mexico City, appointed as the executive director of TBB, handled the social service aspects. They also brought on child psychologists trained in working with troubled children.

"My background is in trauma, and human engineered trauma in particular," Shea said. "My big question is about what it takes for a person to be restored and [...] thriving post-trauma. And recovery from trauma is a very intensive thing that doesn't always work with formalized therapy."

'THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOING TO PRISON OR NOT'

Despite the name, the participants don't typically build boats. The programs run once a week for eight weeks, which is too tight of a timeframe for beginners to put together an entire watercraft.

Instead, participants choose from a catalog of wooden crafts, from cutting boards to fidget spinners to heart-shaped boxes for their sweethearts. Some even come with their own project ideas, which staff happily accommodate.

Years ago, one of their participants who lived in a chaotic group home with kids with behavioral issues built an "unbreakable" coffee table. He'd seen far too many instances of arguments in the TV room ending with someone thrown into the central table, smashing it to pieces.

"He would literally throw himself down on it to see if it would break," Shea said. "It was such a proud moment for him to put that into the van and take it back up there, and then come back and be like, 'Hey, there was a fight last week, and it didn't break.' And you know that home cycles through here and as always, and that table remains."

The building sessions are intermixed with meetings where mentors and child psychologists can work with kids one-on-one, giving them the individualized attention they need.

Students also spend time on riding on boats in Commencement Bay, a quintessential Tacoma venture that many kids have never experienced before.

Once youth finish the two-month program, they have the option to return for weekly meetups aimed at continuing the sense of community past participants built.

"I think there's not a lot



Al Zantua works on welcome figures for Quileute Tribal School's new school building on Friday, April 24, 2026, in the workshop of Tacoma Boat Builders in Tacoma, Wash. Zantua, a former principal at Quileute Tribal School, has been working in the space since the fall.

of kids we turn around 180 degrees, but I do think that if you change a course by a few degrees, it's the difference between going to prison and not," Birkey said.

The benefits of Tacoma Boat Builders and other programs part of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative expand beyond the at-risk youth who cycle through, said Sara Zier, a member of TBB's board.

"The reality of some young folks' lives is that there is a lot of fighting and violence in the home," Zier said. "Having that singular experience of success, doing something that's skill-based that you didn't know you could do before, ultimately this is what prevents community-based violence."

'FINANCIAL UNCERTAINTY'

Despite Pierce County's nationally recognized success, leadership changes in Juvenile Court and allegations of abuse at Remann Hall, the county's juvenile detention facility, have rattled community organizations.

Bohl, the administrator for Pierce County Juvenile Court and chair of the state's JDAI steering committee, as well as the court's probation manager, Kevin Williams, were let go in April. Reasons remain unclear.

In the midst of the administrative chaos, delays in grants given to juvenile intervention programs such as TBB worry its leaders.

The latest financial awards from two important sources, Pierce County's Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account and the Youth Violence Prevention Program, still haven't been announced.

Since the previous rounds of funding ended in December 2025, the near 5-month delay is creating an ever-widening gap in dollars for TBB, Shea said.

In an email to The News

Tribune, Human Services Communications Manager Kari Moore explained that process for dispersing Violence Prevention Dollars was delayed in part, "due to ongoing uncertainty surrounding federal funding." There were also errors in the evaluation process that contributed to the delay, she added.

In years past the funding decisions were made before the county's biennial budget was set, putting providers in "financial uncertainty," Moore said. If the final budget ended up being less than the amount originally anticipated, it could force contracts with programs to be reduced or even be canceled.

Moore echoed similar reasons for the delay in PSTAA dollars. The funding available is lower than what the county predicted, which added a 30-day delay in award decisions as the county refines its projections, Moore said.

Shea has had to get creative with TBB's money by eating into savings, conducting emergency fundraisers, reducing hours and laying off employees.

A year ago the nonprofit had 11 employees. Now, it's down to seven. An emergency fundraising campaign has generated \$92,000, not enough to address all of their problems.

"All it does is buy us a little more time before we have to stop," Shea said.

Reflecting on over a decade of working with juvenile offenders, Birkey is concerned about the program's survival if the funding lapses continue.

"This has become a unique kind of asset for Tacoma, and if it were to go away, it's not something you can just go turn the lights back on," Birkey said. "It would be gone. And that would be a loss."

Information from News Tribune archives is included in this report.

5 dead, including 2 teen suspects, at Calif. mosque shooting

BY KAREN KUCHER, TERI FIGUEROA AND CALEB LUNETTA
The San Diego Union-Tribune
/The Tribune Content Agency

SAN DIEGO

Three people were fatally shot at an Islamic center on Monday morning, and two teenage suspects were found dead of apparent self-inflicted gunshot wounds in a vehicle nearby, San Diego police said.

The report of an active shooter at the Islamic Center of San Diego came in around 11:40 a.m. local time. Officers found three dead men in front of the center, one of whom was a security guard there.

The men were identified Tuesday as Mansour Kazihah, Nader Awad and Amin Abdullah by the local chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

San Diego police Chief Scott Wahl told reporters at a briefing that the two alleged shooters were found dead inside a vehicle a short distance away from the mosque. The suspects—ages 17 and 19—apparently

had killed themselves, Wahl said.

After leaving the center, Wahl said the two shooters apparently had fired at a landscaper working in the area. That man was not injured.

Officers responding to reports of that shooting found the vehicle with the dead teens inside.

Wahl called the attack "every community's worst nightmare."

The fatal shooting is being investigated as a hate crime, and the FBI is involved in the investigation. "Because of the Islamic Center location, we are considering this a hate crime until it's not," Wahl said.

Wahl said all the children who were attending a school at the site were safe. "And I'll tell you what got me—watching the kids come running out, just thankful to be alive," he said.

Wahl said law enforcement officers from around the region rushed to the location after someone called 911 to report an active shooter at the Islam-

ic center. The first officers arrived within four minutes, the chief said.

After seeing the bodies of three people in front of the building, the officers went into the mosque and the adjacent school. About the same time, police received calls from people hearing active gunfire a couple of blocks away. Officers responded and found a landscaper who said he had been fired at but was uninjured.

Officers were then called to nearby Hatton Street, where they found a vehicle in the middle of the street with two bodies inside, dead from apparent self-inflicted gunshots. He said no officers fired their weapons during the incident.

At an afternoon news briefing, Wahl said he didn't have any details to release about the circumstances that led to the shooting. He also expressed admiration for the response of his officers and those from other agencies, calling it "the most dynamic and impressive response" he's seen in his career.

"We have every single police officer available throughout our county that dropped what they're doing. They did exactly what they're trained to do," he said. "Run toward gunfire."

The Islamic Center is the largest mosque in San Diego County. It is home to the Al Rashid School, which offers courses in Arabic language, Islamic studies and the Quran.

The center holds five daily prayers and a variety of educational talks and seminars at the site. On its website, the center says it works with other mosques in the region to sponsor and hold events for the local Muslim community.

The center's imam, Taha Hassane, told reporters he was outraged that someone would target a place of worship. He said the mosque and all other places of worship "should always be protected."

"People come to the Islamic Center to pray, to celebrate, to learn ... This is something we have never expected," he said.

"We're all shocked. We're all scared," said Shrooq Barbakh, a member of the mosque. She also talked of being targeted. "When you wear a hijab in this world, they all attack you."

FROM PAGE 1A

TOURS

posted a video of the Tree-mendus Trees route on social media.

The routes run 5 to 25 miles with 10 to 20 points of interest and are designed to be easy enough for a casual rider. There are truncated versions of two of the routes—Quirky Quirks and Grethen's Murals—for people who don't have enough time to complete the full route.

Burch made the routes to work with the smartphone app Ride with GPS. The subscription is covered by the BIKE Bellingham program and is free for users. The app navigates bike riders along the route, taking them to each point of interest along the way.

Burch said she is funding the program with her own money and time so others can experience the joy she feels when she rides through the city. While she created the program to be free to riders, people can support her efforts through her website.

Around 2011, Burch quit her job, got rid of her

belongings and sold her house, and lived as a nomad traveling on her bike, she told The Herald.

"I spent the summers traveling by bicycle predominantly in North America. During that time I led bicycle trips and bicycle tours, weeklong itineraries for bike companies, and I also led my own tours," she said.

One of her bike tours led her from Montana to British Columbia, before she headed south and landed in Bellingham. She fell in love with the city and eventually decided to put down roots about two years ago and bought a house.

"Even though I settled down here in the community, I still am very passionate about exploration and bicycles," she said. "I was trying to figure out for a while how I can find my place here in the community, and then it just hit me, and I was like 'well duh!' I should be designing bike tours to connect people with the place where they live."