



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Audit finds gaps in WA's police training compliance rates

BY SIMONE CARTER
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Washington's police accountability law — the first of its kind in the nation — requires law enforcement officers to complete mental-health and violence de-escalation training. According to a new state audit, relatively few have done so.

On Tuesday the State Auditor's Office (SAO) released its latest performance audit, which notes that the training is mandated by Initiative 940, which went on to become the 2019 Law Enforcement Training and Community Safety Act. Such continuing training is delivered and developed by the Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC).

All officers must do 40 hours of continuing training under state law, although the completion deadline hinges on their basic-academy graduation date and when they received initial certification, according to the SAO.

By 2028, veteran officers have to finish the training curriculum, yet just 16% of 7,410 such officers have logged all 40 hours as of last May, the audit found. Forty-two percent have completed at least 20 hours while another 42% have done less than half of the training.

SEE AUDIT, 4A

Whatcom County OKs sales tax for criminal justice funding

BY ROBERT MITTENDORF
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In a pair of split votes Tuesday night, the Whatcom County Council approved a new sales tax of one-tenth of 1% for criminal justice purposes and rejected a measure that would have sent the tax to the voters.

An ordinance authorizing the tax passed 5-2, with County Council members Ben Elenbaas and Mark Stremmer against it. A companion ordinance setting an advisory referendum failed 2-5, with council members Elizabeth Boyle, Barry Buchanan, Kaylee Galloway, Jessica Rienstra and Jon Scanlon dissenting.

That second vote was based on a legal interpretation of the state law that gives cities and counties the right to collect the tax if their local law-enforcement agency meets certain training criteria. A voter referendum under the law isn't allowed until 2028, deputy prosecutor Kimberly Thulin told the council during committee discussion of the measure earlier Tuesday.

"I appreciate the need (for the tax). I understand the need. I would prefer to ask permission from the voters," Elenbaas said

SEE SALES TAX, 4A



RACHEL SHOWALTER The Bellingham Herald

Sandbags are lined around the perimeter of a home in the Nooksack River flood zone on Dec. 12, 2025, in Ferndale.

FEMA to begin inspections of flood-damaged homes in Whatcom

BY HANNAH EDELMAN
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The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will soon be contacting Whatcom County residents who applied for federal individual assistance following damage from December's flooding to schedule housing inspections.

FEMA said anyone who applied for disaster assistance should keep an eye out for a call or text from a housing inspector to schedule an appointment. Applicants must be present for the inspection and be able to prove occupancy or ownership with a utility bill or copy of

a deed or mortgage with their name on it.

Inspectors will present their official FEMA identification and will never ask for money. If you are concerned about someone claiming to be a FEMA inspector, do not provide personal information and contact law enforcement.

The housing inspection will take about 45 minutes, FEMA said. Housing inspectors will look at factors such as the structural soundness of the home, whether the house is safe to live in and if the electrical, gas, heat, plumbing and sewer systems are working. They will also consider personal property losses. Eligibility for FEMA assistance will

not be decided onsite by inspectors. Applicants can expect to hear from FEMA within seven to 10 days.

Anyone whose property was damaged by the flooding and whose losses weren't covered by insurance can still apply for FEMA assistance online at disasterassistance.gov or by calling 800-621-3362.

In addition to FEMA assistance, homeowners impacted by the flooding can apply for low-interest federal disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration. Eligible homeowners can borrow up to \$100,000 to replace or repair personal property and up to \$500,000 to replace or repair their residence.

Bellingham approves timber thinning on Galbraith Mountain

BY ROBERT MITTENDORF
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Bellingham has approved a deal to cut about 80 acres of Douglas fir in a protected area of the Lake Whatcom watershed where trees are growing too close together and endangering forest health. City Council members voted unanimously Monday in favor of a contract with Janicki Logging and Construction Co. to thin part of the 148-acre North Beaver Creek Preserve on the north slopes of Galbraith Mountain.

According to the contract, the city will receive 20% of proceeds, or about \$30,000 — money that will be used to pay for adding gravel and making repairs to logging roads, Councilman Michael Lilliquist said during Monday's council meeting.

"No new roads would be built, but some of those (existing roads) might need to be improved to make this project possible," Lilliquist said.

Logging of Douglas fir is planned in an 80-acre stand of mixed conifer and deciduous trees above Lake Louise Road toward Sudden Valley. The site was once managed as part of a commercial timber operation.

"It was heavily planted with Douglas fir, a commercial species and what we're going to be doing is going in and thinning out the trees," Lilliquist said.

Trees have become too dense in the



CITY OF BELLINGHAM Courtesy to The Bellingham Herald

The North Beaver Creek Preserve, where the city of Bellingham plans to selectively log about 80 acres in an attempt to thin the forest.

tract, which was purchased in 2012 through the Lake Whatcom Land Acquisition and Preservation Program to limit development near the lake, which is the drinking water source for more than 100,000 people. It was previously part of a commercial logging operation, according to previous Bellingham Herald reporting.

Logging is planned for this summer, reducing the number of trees per acre from 250 to 150 and the spacing between trees to 18 feet from 13 feet spacing. Only Douglas fir will be cut, to allow for continued biodiversity, Lilliquist said.

Another round of thinning is possible, he said.



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