



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

New fire authority could cost homeowners \$1,000 yearly

BY ROBERT MITTENDORF
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A new regional fire authority would cost the average homeowner about \$1,000 a year in new fees and taxes, according to details released this week by the city of Bellingham, which is seeking to spin off its Fire Department into a separate agency

with its own taxing abilities. In exchange for that \$1,000, however, Bellingham homeowners could see a huge savings because money that’s now spent on the Fire Department could be used in other ways. A separate firefighting agency could mean lower fire-insurance rates, cleaner parks, expanded library hours and a return of mothballed police units such as the traffic division, city officials have said

in several meetings over the past week. City officials have said an election to form the new fire authority could be held as early as February. “And equally as important, it generates funding we can reinvest to restore, maintain, and improve so many other city services and assets — like expanding library hours, restoring police capacity for traffic enforcement or building a new multi-

generational community recreation center,” Mayor Kim Lund said in a Sept. 28 memo to the City Council. If the fire authority vote fails, however, Bellingham residents will likely see reduced library hours, less maintenance of parks and trails, and possibly layoffs and other budget cuts.

SEE FIRE AUTHORITY, 3A

Pierce County’s lawsuit to shift liability rejected

BY PETER TALBOT
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A judge dealt a major blow Friday to Pierce County’s effort to shift liability to the state for hundreds of millions of dollars worth of legal claims that allege probation and detention officers sexually abused children in the care of the county’s juvenile detention facility. Thurston County Superior Court Judge John Skinder dismissed Pierce and Snohomish counties’ lawsuit that asked him to declare Washington exclusively liable for those cases and obligated to defend counties. Skinder said the counties were trying to have him make a decision that would broadly affect cases throughout the state. Dozens of lawsuits against Pierce and Snohomish counties alleging sexual assault of a minor are pending in state and federal courts, and Skinder said he recognized that the counties are struggling with the fact that there are financial realities to the lawsuits. Pierce County reported in court documents that it faced exposure to settlements or judgments potentially exceeding \$690 million for claims of sexual abuse of minors detained or under probation services at Remann Hall. It has already paid out millions of dollars to settle claims alleging abuse there from the 1970s to the 2000s. County officials have said the surge in legal claims is a result of the state Legislature and Washington Supreme Court lifting or expanding the statute of limitations on those types of cases in recent years. Snohomish County said its exposure potentially exceeded \$87 million for similar claims arising out of Denney Juvenile Justice Center in Everett. Skinder said he didn’t believe he could make a ruling based on the way the counties’ case had been filed, drafted and created. He said there are many reasons for that, but he specifically

SEE LAWSUIT, 3A



CHEYENNE BOONE Cheyenne Boone/The News Tribune

Spooky props and actors dressed in costumes and makeup are hidden in the trees along the mile long trail at My Haunted Forest at Grand Farms in Vaughn on Oct. 23, 2022.

Six spooky spots to visit for Halloween

BY KARLEE VAN DE VENTER
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For years, the tiny Washington town of Bucoda has celebrated spooky season by transforming into a Halloween destination. With weekly events including a

haunted house, casket races, costume contests, zombie race and more, the tradition attracts hundreds of visitors each October. The Thurston County town even gets a new name for the month: Boo-coda. However, Halloween festivities were recently canceled for 2026 after the town government dropped its sponsor-

ship, and the future of Boo-coda remains uncertain. So where can Washingtonians go for a Halloween transformation? Here are some spots across the state that get macabre makeovers each year:

WHERE ARE HALLOWEEN-THEMED ATTRACTIONS IN PIERCE COUNTY?

Zoo Boo Head to the Zoo Boo for a decorated zoo experience, with costumes encouraged at the **Point Defiance Zoo** in Tacoma. Some of the many limited-time

SEE HALLOWEEN, 12A

Bellingham Hockey Club opens inaugural season

BY JULIA HAWKINS
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Inside the Bellingham Sportsplex Area on Civic Field Way, there’s a new, bright-yellow door in the back that opens into a locker room for Bellingham’s new hockey team. The Bellingham Hockey Club began their inaugural season on Friday, Sept. 11 and celebrated a 6-5 win against the Island Hockey Club. The team is buzzing around Canada, playing their first season as a team. The Hockey Club is the first American club to play in Junior Prospects Hockey League as a part of an expansion. The league’s regular season runs wraps up at the end of October. “We’ve established an idea of our team identity, but finding the consistency in executing it has been our biggest challenge so far,” Head Coach Vic Pereira told The Herald in an email. “To date, I don’t feel as though we’ve put together a complete game, which is as much on the coaches as it is on the players.” “It’s very hard for a first-year team. We don’t know what to expect, and we don’t have any type of rapport,” Assistant Coach Jason Lim added.



JULIA HAWKINS The Bellingham Herald

The Bellingham Hockey Club practices at the Sportsplex Arena. Based in Whatcom County, the club is the first American team in its league.

Players range from 14 to 18 years old, and some come from other areas of Washington, including Wenatchee.

SEE HOCKEY CLUB, 12A



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