

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Jeannie McMacken reporting on Jefferson County government and Commissioner Heidi Eisenhour for Tuesday, August 10.

During the last seven months while the rest of us were in pandemic mode, Port Hadlock and Irondale resident Heidi Eisenhour was in full-tilt action mode. She took her seat as District 2 County Commissioner in January, following in the footsteps of David Sullivan who held the post for 16 years.

She found herself catapulted into a job that required her to pivot quickly – to learn the ropes, work with two new colleagues, make some tough decisions, and respond to her constituents. All at a distance and behind a mask, Zooming along. And then there was her broken fibula. Talk about trial by fire.

As the self-proclaimed "new girl," Eisenhour said she's been feeling like she's been drinking from a fire hose. This, she said, is her "new normal."

Just when she thought the pandemic was beginning to retract, last month a new round of restrictions were issued for County staff that includes masking and distancing. Self-described as a "hugger," this virus has impacted her personal style.

COVID-19 is terrible. But oddly, an upside result has been an increase in sales tax revenues. Hotel/Motel taxes have been doing quite well. This has allowed the County to award supplemental Lodging Tax Advisory Committee grants for businesses that need more funding for marketing. Tourism has been very good for Jefferson.

Eisenhour's experiences have taught her that Life is Temporary. She said the Commissioners make one decision one week and may have to remake that decision the next. There's that pivot thing again.

The housing crisis concerns her, not only for the homeless in the community, but also for the workforce. There are many job vacancies in Jefferson County – at the hospital, at the Chimacum Corner Farmstand, Finnriver, at restaurants and shops. Good wages for all, but not many applicants.

The County alone has over two-dozen open positions. The transitions are due mostly to retirements – long-term mid and senior-level employees with critical institutional knowledge are leaving. She and her Commissioner colleagues are focused on updating employment policies. They're taking a hard look at salaries by creating incentives to keep the team that's there intact, and being bold enough to find some fresh blood from the outside to enhance the County braintrust.

Eisenhour sits on 26 different committees – among her favorites: Parks and Rec and the Solid Waste Advisory Committee. She admits there are not enough hours in the day, or minutes in an hour. She said the diversity of the thousands of things she encounters is remarkable, and finds herself reading 300-page documents as homework for Board meetings while doing laundry on Sundays.

The County's biggest infrastructure project is the Port Hadlock Sewer, projected to lie just a block and a half from her property line. She says if it is expanded, she'll sign up.

Over the last two months, Eisenhour has met individually with 30 or so landowners inside the Phase One sewer boundary – those who own one lot and those who own big chunks – from the back of the school, to the library, to the folks who own the land the QFC is on, to Bayside housing and the Old Alcohol Plant. She reports that people are excited about the sewer. A lot of them have been saying they've been waiting decades for it. She admits only a few people have expressed concerns like, "I just put in the new septic system so I'm not sure I want to hook up."

She points out not one single person in the Phase One boundary has said that they don't want the sewer. She's met with people who previously said that they didn't want it, and now they're supportive. It will be affordable for folks, which was always a big question in people's minds. Funded at over \$20 million in the last legislative session, the money has to be used by 2024 which means the timeline to get it built is tight.

Eisenhour wants to work on zoning in Port Hadlock, too. She'd like to see some multi-use opportunities in commercial areas, like businesses below with residential units above. And there is interest by apartment owners who want to develop more affordable housing developments. She nixes the concept of Big Box Stores coming Port Hadlock saying parcels in Phase One aren't large enough to handle them.

Eisenhour said she doesn't have a crystal ball for how we're going to get through the next two years, but thinks Jefferson has the right team of resourceful, collaborative people to take us across the finish line.

And, there's always that pivot.

Today's news segment was written by me. This is Jeannie McMacken. Thank you for listening.