

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Thursday, August 10, 2023 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

As the Racoon Lodge controversy with the city of Port Townsend moves toward resolution, the city has now found itself embroiled in a new animal art debacle. You may have noticed the half-painted mural frozen in its unfinished state at the Thomas Street roundabout on many trips into town over the past spring and summer. That's because Velo Cats Collective, the new bike shop that opened in May of this year in that location, received a call from the city asking them to cease their work on the mural despite the team doing their best to receive permitting for said mural. Just like with the Racoon Lodge, the decision comes down to the complex world of code enforcement.

The cooperatively-owned bicycle sales and repair business first approached the city asking if there was anything they needed to do to be above board and were informed they must follow color palette requirements for the downtown Historic District, which did not actually apply to the location. In further correspondence between the co-op and the city, Suzanne Wassmer, Land Use Specialist for the city, notified the business that their building is located within a commercial zone. The Port Townsend Municipal code for that commercial zone allows wall signs, projecting signs, window signs, and freestanding signs. Mural signs, however, are specifically called out only in the sign code section for the Historic District – and, again, this location is outside of the Historic District. The issue then went up the bureaucratic chain to the department director who concluded that mural signs are not allowed in commercial zones. A sign is defined by the code as “any object, structure or portion thereof, other than a flag or government symbol, which contains advertising and which is visible from any right-of-way open to the public.” Advertising is defined in the same section as “any display of letters, numerals, characters, words, symbols, emblems, illustrations, objects or registered trademarks which serve to call to the attention of the public products, services, businesses, buildings, premises, events, candidates or ballot propositions.” Velo Cats was told that if the mural sign did not contain advertising – for example if they remove bicycles from the mural – then it ceases to be a sign and could be approved.

The previous business occupying that very building, however, was Holly's Fine Flowers which had a mural of flowers. Robin Hill, the city's permit coordinator, noted that the city does not have any record of permits for the Holly's Fine Flowers mural, and that when unpermitted work occurs, the city is made aware via a citizen concern and then code enforcement investigates. Or when asking for permission. Velo Cats Collective is currently still figuring out the best way forward from here, which may include filling in the mural as is and blurring the bikes leaving the city a ghostly reminder of its unsightly code.

Speaking of unsightly, if you've got any styrofoam taking up space, you'll be happy to hear the Port Townsend StyroCyclers next collection at Fort Worden will be on Saturday, August 19, from 10am to noon at Battery Putnam next to Alexander's Castle at 229 Alexander's Loop. No signs will be posted, so be prepared to find them with your GPS. The StyroCyclers take styrofoam that is white and rigid and also take polyethylene foam of all colors, as well as clean and white EPS food trays. All materials must be clean and dry, and have tape and labels removed. They also want to remind the community that they can no longer take mixed packing peanuts which must now be sorted by biodegradable (the squishy kind) vs nonbiodegradable (the crispy kind) before bringing them in. Materials will be inspected at your vehicle and they can only take what is described above, as described above.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5pm Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.