

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Thursday, August 24, 2023 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

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The Olympic Peninsula Narcotics Enforcement Team, or OPNET, our local drug task force on the Olympic Peninsula, is being defunded by state officials. As first reported by Newsradio KONP, the funding, which comes from the U.S. Department of Justice in the form of the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant, (or Byrne-JAG) makes up a large portion of operations for several drug task forces, including OPNET in Clallam and Jefferson Counties. For the past 30 years, the grant money, around \$3 million per year, comes to our state and is distributed by the Washington Department of Commerce. OPNET's cut of that is \$180,000, which makes up about 75% of their operating costs. But OPNET just received their last check from Commerce, which is supposed to be enough to get them through June of next year. After that, there is no other source of funds to keep the task force operating.

As it is, so much fentanyl and so many other drugs are making their way into our communities that Clallam County is on pace to set an all-time high for overdose deaths, as Clallam County Prosecutor Mark Nichols described, saying, "We've exceeded the entire number of fatal overdoses that we had all last calendar year. I think we're going to wind up, probably in the mid-40s. And the hope is that we don't hit or exceed 50 people who lose their life due to illicit drug use in this community. That's really a crisis-level epidemic problem that we need to be directing more attention to. And the drug task force is a huge part of that effort."

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Speaking of local law enforcement and drug response, the Jefferson County Sheriff's office has shared a message concerning tomorrow's start of the THING festival. Originally posted to social media, the Sheriff's office wants the community to know that if you feel different, you drive different. This weekend a dedicated team of local deputies, officers, and troopers will be conducting extra patrols with a mission to ensure the safety of our streets. Whether people plan to indulge at THING or "unwind with weed in your private backyard," the Jefferson County Sheriff's office would like to remind everyone to be responsible. Use a sober driver or make use of rideshare options. Or not, in which case they add, "maybe you'll meet one of our dedicated law enforcement professionals or, worse yet, regret a decision made or a life lost. Stay safe, party responsibly, and help us keep our roads free of danger."

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And just as a flood of festival-going tourists arrive to enjoy all that THING and Port Townsend have to offer, the Olympic Peninsula Visitor Bureau is embarking on a process to develop a long-term Tourism Master Plan to thoughtfully consider how the tourism economy could grow in a way that ensures tourism remains a vital economic driver while also enhancing our residents' quality of life. The goal for the Tourism Master Plan is to create a five-year roadmap for the Olympic Peninsula region, providing the framework for inclusive, values-based, responsible tourism development and promotion that ensures balance between the needs of residents, businesses who rely on visitors for their livelihoods, and the visitors who experience our community. To that end, the visitor bureau invites the community to participate in this process by completing a survey, which will take approximately 15 minutes. That survey can be found at

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OPRESIDENTSURVEY?fbclid=IwAR3jg02B\\_6nwAnJwGyd5lSzfkEvsC1bRHws1GwxvQcJzxXQ6nFZSBIAYBH0](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OPRESIDENTSURVEY?fbclid=IwAR3jg02B_6nwAnJwGyd5lSzfkEvsC1bRHws1GwxvQcJzxXQ6nFZSBIAYBH0).

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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](mailto:news@kptz.org). This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.