

This is Casey Dolan with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, November 22, 2023 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

The Board of Jefferson County Commissioners have decided to not support a “pool tax” as a way of funding a new pool facility in Port Townsend. This past Monday, commissioners requested that the project’s steering committee, the Healthier Together Initiative, find other ways to fund the project, possibly with a more localized tax rather than a countywide sales tax. The Healthier Together Initiative is a joint effort between Jefferson County, the City of Port Townsend, Jefferson Hospital District, Port Townsend School District, Olympic Peninsula YMCA, Jefferson Aquatic Coalition, and the Port of Port Townsend.

According to the *Peninsula Daily News*, the steering committee issued recommendations for the construction of a new \$37 million aquatics facility located at the Mountain View Commons site. The recommendations also included a commitment to raise \$17 million through state, federal, and private grants while continuing the City of Port Townsend’s \$400,000 annual subsidy paid to the current pool and raising \$20 million in bonds. The Port Townsend City Council approved those recommendations last week, but the county had also suggested the creation of a Public Facilities District (PFD) – a countywide taxing district that would then enact a two-tenths of 1% sales tax to help pay for the facility.

Commissioner Heidi Eisenhour said she had concerns about the efforts to raise \$17 million in grants and donations and noted that if the tax were to pass, the county would be contributing more to the pool than it did to homelessness and affordable housing or mental health.

The steering committee had also considered the creation of a municipal parks district (MPD), which would have its borders drawn around a primary service area. Once an MPD is created, a \$0.20 per \$1,000 property tax levy would be enacted for the next 20 years. Both kinds of taxes would have to be approved by voters, but an MPD would require two votes to pass – one to create the district and another to enact the tax. With a PFD, county commissioners could vote to create the district and assign its board, and then the district would put the tax on the ballot in a special election. But once an MPD is created, voters would have to approve the new property tax by a supermajority vote, whereas a sales tax under a PFD would require only a simple majority.

The trial date for former Olympic Medical Center emergency room physician Josiah Hill of Port Angeles has been rescheduled for the third time from January 22 to June 24 with a status hearing on February 2. Hill is charged with multiple counts of indecent liberties and one count of second-degree rape. As reported in the *Peninsula Daily News*, he has pleaded not guilty to all charges and is free on \$200,000 bail. Hill’s defense attorney, Jared Ausserer, asked Judge Simon Barnhart of the Clallam County Superior Court for the reschedule because there had been a delay in a Pierce County trial in which he is involved. Michele Devlin, Clallam County chief criminal deputy prosecuting attorney, and Clallam County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Matt Roberson agreed to the change. They said they had big trials coming in early 2024, which pushed the date for Hill’s trial later into the year.

At least six women have come forward alleging that Hill sexually assaulted them while they were in his care as an emergency department physician at Olympic Medical Center in Port Angeles.

In a controversial move, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have proposed saving the endangered northern spotted owl by shooting more than 400,000 barred owls in Oregon and Washington over a 30-year period. This would include their habitat in the Olympic Peninsula. The *Capital Press* reports that the USFWS considered moving or sterilizing barred owls, but concluded salvation for the spotted owl must come from a 12-gauge shotgun. More than 20,000 barred owls would be shot the first year, according to USFWS's plan. Thereafter, 13,400 to 17,400 would be killed each year for 30 years.

Without removing barred owls, the spotted owl may disappear from the Northwest, according to a draft environmental impact statement on the plan. The northern spotted owl was listed as an endangered species in 1990. To preserve owl habitat, timber harvests were reduced. The barred owl emerged more than a decade ago as another threat. Barred owls eat more species than do spotted owls. With more food available wherever they are, barred owls have greater population densities and crowd out spotted owls.

KPTZ 91.9 FM broadcasts your local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I'm Casey Dolan and I thank you for listening.