

Hello again. This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Thursday, February 15, 2024 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

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Instead of shoving as many stories as possible into the next five minutes, I've decided to go in-depth on something that I've been trying to unpack for the past few weeks. My hope is to show how the law can both knot up and untangle threads running through a number of our town's issues.

This morning's touch of snow may help us all remember the more dramatic cold snap back in January. At that time, I reported on how the Winter Welcoming Center transitioned from operating as a daytime warming center into a temporary emergency shelter operating 24 hours a day. The warming center stayed open day and night from January 11 through January 19, serving 356 total guests during that time with 110 total overnight guests.

One of those was Harold Folmsbee. Harold is a 77-year-old mechanic who suffers from both physical and cognitive disabilities, requiring a walker to get him and his small dog around. Before the cold snap, Harold was living out of a van which he parked at Kah Tai Lagoon. This is where our story begins. According to police officers involved in the matter, Harold was transported to the warming shelter on January 13 and police believed his van to be inoperable. After 2 days and no movement of the van – during which time temperatures remained freezing overnight and Harold continued to stay at the emergency shelter – the van was then tagged by police to be towed and impounded if not moved in 24 hours. When I inquired why, the police response was that: one, the van was parked over 24 hours and in a park; two, the van was taking up the only handicapped spot; and three, the van was blocking one avenue of access to the park.

Again, this was all during the extreme cold during which time many roads were iced over and people were advised not to drive unless necessary. On January 16, the REAL (Recovery.Empowerment.Advocacy.Linkage) Team – a street-outreach program operating out of Discovery Behavioral Healthcare – contacted the police requesting they not tow Harold's vehicle as he lives in it. The REAL Team also notified police that they were working to find another place to park the van and to secure funding for a tow. On January 18, police were told that the REAL Team had gotten a starter for the van and that it would be cleared out of the park.

However, that very night at around 1am on January 19, Port Townsend Patrol Officer Mussman found the van still there and decided it was time to tow. Officer Mussman is one of Port Townsend's newest cops and was still under the supervision of a training officer. This is where it gets complicated. In statements from both the Port Townsend Chief of Police and from Mussman's supervisor, they claimed the van was blocking entrance into the park to get behind the bathrooms where police were actively pursuing a suspect in the tragic missing baby case that ended the next day with the child found dead. Mussman's supervisor sent me a list of other factors for the tow, one of which was that, "tools and trash around the front of the van appeared to be abandoned as if work simply stopped on trying to fix the car." Personally, if I saw tools spread around the front of a van, I would assume someone was still in the process of working on it.

Since Harold's van was towed and the emergency shelter ended on the same day, he was forced to use the shelter at the American Legion Hall, which can be a difficult place for someone with his disabilities. One of the more important threads I learned while researching this story is that the shelter at the Legion has not extended its contract past the end of March, so come April they'll be kicking out the many people who use the Legion as a safe place to sleep.

Even with all of that, there is still something of a happy ending here. On Wednesday, I learned Harold had finally had his van returned after almost a month. He still has a court date set for February 26 to attempt to clear the debt accrued from having it impounded, but thanks to a ruling from 2019 on the Homestead Act, his lawyer

believes that can be erased. Additionally, East Jefferson Fire Rescue's CARES (Community Assistance Response) Team has been working to find a better place for Harold to stay in Bremerton. Of course, nothing is certain, as is so often the case.

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KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5pm Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays. You can contact us through [news@kptz.org](mailto:news@kptz.org). This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.