

Hello again. This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Thursday, February 22, 2024 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

A critical moment for the housing crisis in Port Townsend looms with the likely closing of the Jefferson County Emergency Shelter. March 31 is the last day currently funded for the shelter hosted at the American Legion Hall in Port Townsend which is operated by the Olympic Community Action Program better known as OlyCAP. OlyCAP has been facing a stark decline in funding as COVID money evaporates, and this has left a lack not only for the emergency shelter but also a funding gap for Phase 3 of the shelter OlyCAP plans to build at Caswell-Brown. I've heard rumors that an emergency shelter space may materialize in June or July, but even if that happens, it still leaves several months where the people staying in the 30 or so beds at the Legion will be without a roof.

Of course, there are still too many people living unsheltered in Port Townsend at this very moment. More than a dozen of these individuals have made a camp on a city-owned easement which sprawls onto privately owned land. I visited this encampment with the property owner over the weekend to see what it's like first-hand. Two years ago, Ozzy Anderson bought 3 parcels that border the mill property as well as the property designated for the city's Evans Vista project. When Ozzy first purchased the land, there were already two people camped there, and he let them stay as long as they agreed not to let anyone else move onto the land. That deal held until last summer when the city began its initial work on Evans Vista and the people who had been camped on the city's land moved over to Ozzy's.

At that time Ozzy was out, working on the water, and when he returned last September he found around 15 people had moved onto his land and created quite a mess. By the time I visited, Ozzy had already spent around a thousand dollars of his own money on dump runs, yet it was still a shocking scene with not only trash strewn around a nearby wetland but buckets of feces and jugs of urine tucked under trees. This was also after the Trash Task Force had already visited nearby and disposed of more than 20 buckets of human waste. Even Port Townsend Mayor David Faber visited recently and Ozzy told me that Mayor Faber was so moved by his plight that he donated \$200 of his own money to the cause.

To address this waste as well as garbage from encampments at Kah Tai Lagoon, the Port Townsend city council authorized \$30,000 at their meeting on Tuesday to pay for an environmental clean-up crew to deal specifically with waste from unsheltered encampments. At that meeting, Ozzy gave a public comment on the matter and City Councilmember Ben Thomas responded saying, "it's not unreasonable to think that a lot of those people there were previously on city property." Mayor Faber agreed adding, "I think it's pretty important that we help clean up Ozzy's property."

Of course, there's much more going on than a sanitation problem here. As Mayor Faber also said during that meeting, "Anytime we move people along who are unhoused, they need to go somewhere and we don't have a solution." Knowing first hand what can happen, Ozzy has not wanted to trespass people off of his property, but with pressure coming from his neighbors and the city, as well as fearing what will happen when the Legion shelter closes, he's been forced to tell the people camped on his land that he'll begin trespassing people on March 1.

So where will the people go? Many of the people there are in the throes of drug addiction and Caswell-Brown has strict rules against such behavior. For now. City Councilmember and OlyCAP Board Vice Chair Amy Howard noted at Tuesday's City Council meeting that OlyCAP is currently considering changing the regulations for Caswell-Brown. She also mentioned to me after the meeting that they are considering adding

capacity for more people, but she made clear that there will be no final answer on those questions for a couple of weeks.

And this is where we have to leave it – with so much hanging in the balance for so many people and no clear solution in sight. This is sadly also where I leave you all, as I will no longer be doing the local news for KPTZ in order to dedicate my time to building a worker self-directed news nonprofit called *The Jefferson County Beacon*. Expect to hear more on that soon.

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. This has been Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.