

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, April 24, 2024 beamed in from *The Jefferson County Beacon* for KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

Our top story this week is that longtime local entrepreneur Heather Dudley-Nollette plans to announce her candidacy for the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners this week. A Democrat, she is currently the only declared candidate for the District 1 seat. This comes one month after incumbent Commissioner Kate Dean's surprise retirement announcement. Dudley-Nollette said that she'd had the urge to go back to work for the government in some capacity ever since she moved to the community 17 years ago. Before moving to Port Townsend, she had worked for the King County Office of Management and Budget.

In response, Commissioner Dean said she's "really excited about Heather's candidacy." Dean went on to name Dudley-Nolette's experience and knowledge of housing and permitting as well as understanding of how the county works, adding, "I feel a lot better about leaving the position knowing that Heather is running." Dudley-Nollette now serves as Bayside Housing's deputy executive director and expects to use that experience to address the local housing shortage.

A linked priority is providing adequate mental health services. Government agencies can find housing for an individual, but that won't succeed if they have untreated mental health and substance issues, she said. In addition to Bayside, Dudley-Nollette has worked with the economic development group Team Jefferson, and co-founded the CoLab. She is also an actor, having appeared in several local theater productions. Her local roots go back to the late 1800s. She is descended from Lucinda and Loren Hastings, one of the earliest Port Townsend families. And politics is in her blood, Loren Hastings was one of Jefferson County's founding commissioners.

While the democrats have found their fit, the Olympic Community Action Program – better known as OlyCAP – is currently searching for someone to fill the position of Executive Director. The previous executive director Cherish Cronmiller stepped down in February after a turbulent four-years in the position, and a new permanent director has yet to be found. Cronmiller joined the organization in February 2020, just before the pandemic changed everything. She rode out a surge in revenues during the worst years of lockdown, but with that COVID funding now gone, so is she.

The nonprofit has had to navigate a number of other staff changes as well, including the transfer of Robin Pangborn, the previous shelter manager for the Caswell-Brown Village on Mill Road and the Jefferson County Emergency Shelter at the American Legion Hall. Pangborn's transfer happened just a few months before Cronmiller's departure. Funding for the Legion shelter then became something of a scramble over the last few months, only to have OlyCAP announce an end to its contract for that shelter at the end of June.

Housing Director Kathy Morgan, who has been stepping in to help coordinate the shelters in Pangborn's absence, is also set to leave the organization in a few months as she fully steps in the role of executive director of the Olympic Housing Trust. OlyCAP is also missing a financial director, and according to Board Vice Chair Amy Howard needs an almost entirely new housing team.

At the same time as these staff shifts and revenue losses, inflation has further compounded problems. Last summer, the now defunct executive director announced a project was fully funded to break ground on an emergency shelter and permanent supportive housing complex adjacent to Caswell-Brown. At the time, Cronmiller said it would be completed in the summer of 2024, but work has yet to begin.

Interim Executive Director Tammy Lidster has stepped in for Cronmiller and said that after funding was awarded to the project, OlyCAP chose a general contractor, the job went out to bid, and then inflation hit, creating a funding gap. On top of inflation, another hoped-for grant fell through. The County applied for a grant for off-site utilities coming into the project but did not get awarded, which increased the gap to \$2.5 million.

The organization hopes to find a permanent executive director soon so that it can begin solving all these issues. To that end, executive firm Herd Freed Hartz has been hired to aid that search. The hope is to have candidates selected for the position within the next three months.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. You can submit ideas to The Beacon through info@jeffcobeacon.com. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.