

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

Peggy Webster, who recently transitioned from working for the Housing Fund Board to OlyCAP, shared a rundown facts and figures for the *Beacon's* housing column this week. She started by noting that in Jefferson County, around 100 people are unhoused, a figure based on the annual Point-in-Time count, which reported 79 unhoused people in 2023. She also made clear that this is an undercount as it excludes people “couch surfing” or in substandard housing. I’ll add that it also does not include people who do not want their locations advertised as I’ve heard from volunteers who participated in the count that they were not allowed to include numbers of people without getting that information. Webster did note that participation barriers include agreeing to be part of a government database.

Currently, there are about 140 beds in shelters and transitional housing in Jefferson County, all of which are full. A project to add shelter beds at Caswell-Brown aims to replace existing beds at the American Legion. Webster noted that this project, which is still not fully funded, is realistically 3 to 5 years away from being operational. At present, there is nowhere for the unsheltered to go.

For those in shelters or transitional housing, those options offer short-term solutions, providing 45 days of security in shelters and up to 2 years in transitional housing. Permanent supportive housing is needed for many individuals and families, Webster said. I’ll add that Gary Keister of Bayside Housing & Services told me that organization has a waitlist of 80 people as of last Friday.

Jefferson County has approximately 230 units for the elderly and 38 for those needing supportive services. These services include child care, employment assistance, and counseling, among others. Wait lists for these units are a minimum of 2 years. Bayside is developing a project to add 18 units for the non-elderly needing intensive supportive services, that should be operational in 18 to 24 months. Another project, Vince's Village, could include up to 90 units of housing, but Webster said that project is 5 to 6 years from being operational.

Let’s follow the state of roofs overhead with what kind of food is available to local bellies. *Beacon* board member Erin Channis offered up an op-ed this week discussing food systems in the wake of the QFC/Safeway merger. Before going on about the food system, capitalism in our diets, and the glory of the fertile valleys we inhabit, Channis noted that her bias lies heavily with small farmers and retailers working against corporations. After all, she works for a local grocery store (the Chimacum Corner Farm Stand), her friends are farmers, and on a small scale, so is she.

Channis began with Wendell Berry’s revolutionary quote, “Eating is an agricultural act.” How does our consumption become an act of agriculture, and how can we change that act from complacent, uninformed, or arrogant into one of compassion and community? Where does your food come from? 22% of all fresh water usage in the United States goes to food that is wasted – meaning not eaten, not fed to animals, and not composted back into the soil. That’s right, nearly a quarter of our water is spent growing food that will be incinerated and thrown into plastic bags in landfills. Of that fresh water, it takes 1,847 gallons on average to produce a single pound of beef (that’s enough to provide drinking water for a year for roughly 32 American adults). And 20% of all greenhouse gas emissions that come from our food system are a result of “food miles” – how much of the world your food traverses before it gets to you.

We are fortunate, Channis said, to live in an incredible area with dedicated lovely farmers and ranchers. She added that there is no shame in shopping at a chain grocer. We are all just surviving out here. We've got four independent grocery stores in the area: Aldrich's, the Food Co-op, Chimacum Corner Farmstand, and now the return of the Nordland General Store.

Or how about the ever-raising price of eggs so often in the media? Going one step further, Channis encourages you to get your hands on some poultry. She noted that you can get 28 eggs a week from five quail in a space the size of a rabbit or guinea pig cage. Their eggs taste like chicken eggs, and they don't make much noise, with roosters only making a chirping trill here and there instead of a chicken-like crow. Of course, she's biased – Channis raises quail.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays, 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.