

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, October 9, 2024 beamed in from the *Jefferson County Beacon* for KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

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As conflict continues at the Port Townsend Food Co-op, employees are asking for a greater voice through a unionizing effort. In a draft of a letter leaked to *The Beacon* written by the Food Co-op Workers and Member-Owners Union Committee, the employees expressed their desire for a union to ask for greater accountability and to have their voices heard. The letter asks their colleagues to authorize UFCW Local 3000 to represent them in collective bargaining.

UFCW 3000 is the largest union in Washington state, with over 50,000 members across various industries, including grocery and retail. For the unionization effort to move forward, 60 percent of the more than 100 employees at the Port Townsend Food Co-op must sign on to initiate the official voting process.

The committee's letter emphasizes the lack of a democratic system to represent worker interests. Only one board seat is allowed to be held by a staff member and that individual is excluded from voting on issues related to employees. The letter outlines specific concerns, citing instances where workers' voices have been disregarded or, as they say, "actively silenced." The workers are calling for a co-operative that fosters democratic engagement, where staff have input on decisions affecting day-to-day operations, products, and broader organizational values.

Another one of the issues brought up in the letter is equity. Cameron Jones, a former board member and co-director of Black Lives Matter Jefferson County (BLMJC), was working to establish an Equity Committee when he was removed from the board in late July. His removal has further fueled tensions, with BLMJC calling for a boycott of the Food Co-op. The Co-op's governing documents include a commitment to equity. However, some employees feel that this policy is not being upheld, particularly when it comes to management's treatment of marginalized workers.

General Manager Kenna Eaton said that Jones was removed for violating the Co-op's Board Process Policy, which requires directors to act with civility and kindness. The exact actions leading to his removal have not been specified, but tensions between Jones and Eaton escalated over complaints regarding the treatment of a transgender employee. When asked whether he would support a unionizing effort, Jones said he would personally be there to support any picketers, but as a nonhierarchical organization, Jones said he could not speak on behalf of BLMJC, which would have to decide as a group.

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In other news, the Olympic Housing Trust, or OHT, is making strides to address the housing crisis in Jefferson County. OHT's mission is to create and maintain permanently affordable housing, with its current focus on the Dundee Hill Project in Port Townsend which I've reported on for KPTZ in the past.

Kellen Lynch, head of fundraising for OHT, highlights the historical exclusivity of Port Townsend, which he says is baked into its core. Lynch argues that the community must confront this exclusivity to ensure that people from diverse backgrounds and income levels can live and thrive in Port Townsend.

The community land trust model OHT uses traces its roots to the Civil Rights movement, specifically a 1960s effort to secure land for Black tenant farmers in Georgia who were being forced out of their homes to prevent them from voting. In the case of Dundee Hill, OHT was gifted five city lots by Pete Von Christierson, a longtime Port Townsend resident. Two of the lots will be developed into townhomes, while the remaining lots

will preserve a community garden. The development will include three-bedroom and two-bedroom homes, accommodating up to 15 people.

OHT aims to serve individuals and families earning up to 80% of the area's median income, or about \$58,000 for a household of two. Eligible buyers must be first-time homebuyers and residents of Jefferson or Clallam County for at least one year. To make the Dundee Hill project a reality, OHT has now raised \$1.15 million, but it still needs an additional \$85,000 from local donors and \$300,000 from foundations. Lynch is hoping the community will step up and support this effort, noting that state and foundation funders look for local buy-in before they commit.

OHT's other major project is the Chimacum Commons, a collaboration with Jefferson Land Trust to create housing for food system workers. The Chimacum Commons project is still in the planning stages, and OHT is seeking feedback from the community to ensure that the development meets the needs of local farmworkers.

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