

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Diane Walker with your local news and commentary for Thursday, December 19, 2024.

The Port Townsend *Leader* tells us East Jefferson Fire Rescue (EJFR) responded to a report of a fire at the Port Townsend Paper Mill early on Tuesday morning this week. Arriving crews found smoke venting from the roof on the northwest side of the main building. Upon entering the structure, they saw visible flames running the ceiling over the dryer sections of the Number 2 Paper Machine. Mill personnel had begun initial containment of the fire, and EJFR crews were able to extinguish the remaining burning materials quickly. No significant structural damage was noted, and there were no reports of injuries. The fire is being investigated by the Jefferson County Fire Marshal.

According to the *Peninsula Daily News*, on Monday of this week a Port Townsend man was injured following a collision on State Highway 20 at Eaglemount Road. A Subaru Forester waiting to turn left from westbound Highway 20 onto Eaglemount was struck by a Dodge Ram pickup that was also traveling westbound, the State Patrol said. The driver of the Forester was not wearing a seat belt and was transported to Jefferson Healthcare with injuries. The driver of the Dodge Ram, who was wearing a seatbelt and uninjured, was cited for driving while dangerously distracted. The Subaru was totaled, but the Dodge only had minor damage and was driven from the scene. Neither drugs nor alcohol were involved, the State Patrol said.

The *Peninsula Daily News* reports that at Monday night's council meeting, city staff and council decided that the City of Port Townsend will continue to contract for cleanup and provide portable bathrooms and dumpsters to a homeless encampment located in a city right of way near the Department of Social and Health Services building. The city's 2025 budget will now include a \$25,000 contract with Leland Construction for on-call cleanup services and \$12,000 for portable bathrooms and dumpsters.

According to Emma Bolin, the city's planning and community development director, the encampment is the latest residence for people who were previously living at the fairgrounds. When the fairgrounds closed, a lot of those people were not eligible to go to other shelter sites in town due to drug use or restraining orders, or because they have pets. Bolin's department requested funds from council earlier this year for an on-call cleanup and abatement crew, and the city funded \$12,000 for the crew to remove trash from the wetlands, and also allocated over \$8,000 to provide portable bathrooms and dumpsters.

"What we don't have budgeted is staff time," Bolin said. "This year alone, about 15% of the city staff spend one week per year just doing encampments abatement." City staff time and expenses cost the city \$42,700 in 2024, according to an agenda document. The work requires equipment from streets to move trash, Bolin said, but expenses also are incurred in paying for dispatch and police response, as the encampment is the most geographically heavy response area.

Ozzie Anderson and Scott Swantner, who own property adjacent to the encampment, provided public comments at Monday's meeting. Anderson said he is glad the conversations are taking place at the city, adding that the portable bathrooms have helped with human waste, but the dumpsters are less successful. Still, he said he's glad that the waste management option is there.

Anderson fishes in Alaska during the summer. “I came home to 15 people living on the property, new trails, trees getting cut down, campsites, fire pits, and endless amounts of waste,” Anderson said. “I had to personally evict everyone. They did comply. I’m just really discouraged that every time I go to Alaska I come home and have the same giant disaster on my property.”

Mayor David Faber said, “It’s a terrible problem to be homeless, a terrible problem for our community that we have so many members of our community who are homeless. It seems to be getting worse all the time.” He added that because homelessness is fundamentally a housing problem and addressing housing is a long-term problem, there’s no quick solution, and no place to put the homeless either.

KPTZ 91.9 FM broadcasts your local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can contact to us at news@kptz.org. I’m Diane Walker. Thank you for listening and have a great weekend.