

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant with news and commentary for Tuesday, January 7, 2025.

Whining about potholes is a common Port Townsend pastime, providing conversational fodder throughout the community. If we argue about politics we can agree about potholes. And it's easy to blame the City of Port Townsend for not fixing the problem.

But like politics, the solution to potholes isn't that simple. Port Townsend Public Works Director Steve King traces the decline of city roads back to 2000, when a voter initiative lowered car tabs and discontinued state money for road improvements. Since that time local road maintenance limped along, but only became acute in recent years when systems started to fail. The city has looked to replace the shortfall, efforts that have included a one-time fire district annexation payment in 2022 and the approval of a .3 percent sales tax increase in 2023 that will subsidize street repairs.

Sales tax revenue has the potential to supply about 1.2 million dollars annually for street repair. While this will have a visible impact, it's only a drop in the bucket. King told KPTZ that in order to claw back our streets into a state of good repair, it would take one and a half million dollars per year and would take probably 30 years to accomplish this. And by that time what we repair today will need an upgrade. As a result, Public Works is facing a two-pronged challenge: Fixing streets that are in extreme disrepair and preventing those which are in acceptable shape from deteriorating any further.

Local automotive traffic provides enough wear and tear, but large delivery and utility trucks make it worse. King said that this will be addressed on the state level with the establishment of vehicle taxes geared to weight and usage. Once in effect, delivery companies will be forced to kick in more of a share. While we are all encouraged to shop locally, King provides another perspective. Amazon and other online retailers allocate a portion of their collected sales tax to Port Townsend, while Costco and the rest of Sequim does not. So in this case, mail order shopping isn't as destructive to the local economy as going out of town.

King said that Port Townsend's streets weren't well constructed to begin with, and that repair projects are a constant game of catch-up. High-traffic roads like Sheridan, San Juan, and the bottom of Cook Avenue will get a priority, but it may take a while for them to repair lesser traveled avenues like 15th Street near my house. But several streets, like Jackman Street near the fairgrounds, have benefited from recent chip seal efforts.

There is a way to get the city's attention. On the contact us section of the city's website select "report a concern" where people can leave a message about a local pothole that needs repair, providing detailed information about its size and location. All reports are collated into a single stack, with the department addressing each one as it comes in. To submit a pothole request, go to <https://cityofpt.us/publicworks/page/report-concern-inquiry>.

As the disposition of Fort Worden's summer schedule is now up in the air, there is a possibility that Centrum's programs will relocate to Evergreen State College in Olympia. Centrum Executive Director Rob Birman told KPTZ that he does not desire to relocate outside of Port Townsend, nor does he suspect they will need to. Evergreen State College provides a backup plan. Said Birman, "I just needed to know there was an option for us. We have not closed off that option, it still exists, but our entire focus is on staying here at Fort Worden." Fort Worden tenants and stakeholders are meeting with Washington State Parks representatives this week about the disposition of tenant leases and summer programs. We'll know a lot more about this one week from today.

KPTZ 91.9FM broadcasts local news Monday through Thursday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I'm Charlie Bermant. Thanks for listening.