

This is KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nhatt Nichols, bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, January 29, 2025.

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Enough workers at the Food Co-op in Port Townsend have signed union authorization cards to trigger a federally sanctioned unionization vote. Co-op employees cited a critical disconnect from upper management, including unexplained policy changes and a workplace climate where some workers felt unsafe, as principal reasons that they are taking steps to join the Commercial Workers (UFCW) 3000, a union that also represents Jefferson County civil servants, grocery, and healthcare workers. Workers hope that representation will enable them to work more closely with Co-op leadership to get it back on a course consistent with its stated values. For over fifty years, the Co-op has been a welcoming food hub for Port Townsend, and workers believe their insight is crucial in preventing 'mission drift.'

Corvus Woolf, a Co-op employee of over five years who signed their union card, feels positive about the effort, saying, "The co-op is full of an incredible number of brilliant, committed, passionate people, all of whom have great ideas, and by unionizing, we will all get a seat at the table to figure out policies that work with all of us." Currently, changes to the staff handbook don't require input from staff, something that unionizing will change by making the handbook into a legally binding contract. Woolf listed paid time off, pay scale, and benefits as items they are concerned could change without a contract.

This isn't the first time Woolf has been part of a food co-op's unionizing effort; they were hired to work at the food co-op in Ashland, Oregon, while that co-op was undergoing unionizing efforts. According to Woolf, staff approached that effort very differently than staff at the Port Townsend Food Co-op have, with staff at the Ashland store speaking comfortably in public about their unionizing efforts, while staff at the Port Townsend Food Co-op feel a level of fear around talking openly about it. Woolf has noticed that, though employees are cautiously speaking about the unionization efforts in the store, organizing has produced a stronger relationship between the employees in general. At the time of publishing, Port Townsend Food Co-op management has not responded to requests for an interview.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) will hear from both sides before scheduling an election, probably in February. An NLRB agent will oversee an onsite vote, and if the majority of workers vote yes, workers and a union representative will begin bargaining with the Co-op's upper management for their first contract.

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On Tuesday, January 21, the Marrowstone Island Community Association, known as MICA, held a meeting on the proposal of a stewarded Conservation Burial Ground on a privately owned north-end Marrowstone property. Led by Erik Kingfisher with the Jefferson Land Trust, many in attendance expressed concern over the proposal. The land had been previously logged in the 1990s for Morning Tide Golf Course, requiring the addition of sand and dirt, which has irrevocably altered the landscape. The golf course declared bankruptcy and Annie Mize took ownership in 2016, intending for the public to walk and quietly recreate on the land.

The Land Trust purchased a conservation easement from Mize in 2019, so the land is permanently protected. But if Mize chose to sell, the next owner could fence it off, and the public would lose access to the meadows, running water, and pockets of old-growth trees that remain. Mize and the Land Trust have developed ideas on how to maintain this property in a way that is appropriate for public use and prioritizes the land's restoration and conservation. They were led to "conservation burial grounds" and felt like, out of the many options investigated, it was the best choice for their shared values. The health and resiliency of the environment is the

Land Trust's priority, and they intend to take a full year of land evaluation and research to ensure burial plots are the safest and wisest option.

Next steps include reports by water specialists, a habitat biology group, a geohydrologist, and a Bremerton-based Water Quality firm. The team will conduct boundary surveys and ecological studies to determine the safest areas to place human remains and focus conservation efforts on supporting wildflower meadows for the local pollinators through prairie restoration and the gentle expansion of the remaining old-growth forest. According to the Land Trust, the 12 to 15 burials a year will not only build the soil's nutrients, they will also pay for the cost of land maintenance. The permit application is now in its public comment period, and the Land Trust is actively seeking community input to ensure all concerns are addressed.

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