

This is KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nigel O'Shea bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, February 26, 2025.

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The Shoreline Master Plan (SMP) is under revision by the city – with the shoreline jurisdiction being Port Townsend Bay, Admiralty Inlet, Straits of Juan de Fuca, Kah Tai Lagoon, Chinese Gardens Lagoon, and 200 feet inland (including public and private property). The SMP governs the use and development of shorelines of the state with priority for environmental protection, public access, and economy. Port Townsend was the first city to adopt an SMP update under the new guidelines, setting our city workers as leaders in the initiative.

These changes will directly impact public shoreline use and recreation by the water, the Port – one of the largest employers of the city, business owners, and building caretakers in Historic Downtown – having potentially major economic implications for the community based on the small percentage holding the financial responsibility for rent and upkeep, anyone wanting to do or start business on the water, filtration and livable ecology, residents near the water and the longevity of their homes, and the response to rising sea levels, so hopefully those just behind the jurisdiction don't become the new waterfront.

City representatives Emma Bolin, Director of Planning and Community Development, Planner Jenny Murphy, and Wayne E. Carlson led the Future of Our Shorelines Open House on February 20 to discuss the SMP reboot. Community members appeared, representing business owners, residents, the Port, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, and the unhoused.

Required by the Washington State Shoreline Management Act (SMA), the City of Port Townsend must undergo periodic revisions of the SMP to ensure relevancy with laws, changing climate, city regulations, and community needs. Last updated in 2007, we are past due. While some progress was made in 2021, staffing shortages paused the program. Changes in the 2021 draft will be included but reconsidered. Most of the proposed projects so far are residential bulkhead rebuilds, and from the Port, improving their storm water filtration system and building relocation. Other requests support ongoing maintenance, which the city recognizes as a diligent and commendable act, and are grateful to the historic building caretakers and business owners.

With funding from the Department of Ecology's Shoreline Competitive Grants Program, the review efforts have a project completion date of June 30, 2025. The original scope is expanding to include streamlining permitting (as supported by Senate Bill 5290) to make permitting for efficient and Merging Waterwalk with Sea Level Rise (SLR). The city will evaluate technical and field data, regulatory constraints, and community preferences. They are open for comments and invite you to connect and attend the next meeting on March 12, where the ecological scientist on the project will give a presentation and take questions.

While attendees listened intently, they were also forthright with concerns and the need for clarity. Some expressed concerns about the ways unhoused and people with disabilities would be affected by changes to shoreline planning policy and were reassured that the ecology department was taking an inclusive stance for the unhoused and that current regulations already require modifications for disability access. The permitting process responds to the scope of each project individually. Depending on each project's need, they will be considered a Major Shoreline Substantial Development Permits (SSDP), and there will be a public hearing, or a Minor SSDP which will be considered administrative and eligible for streamlining.

The Washington House Bill (HB) 1181, a law that requires local governments to create climate change plans, is not currently influencing the SMP revisions. The SMP is planning for the far future by establishing ordinary high-water marks, which are set by surveyors to account for anticipated changes and include the maximum 100-year floodplain. The upcoming March 12 meeting will address risks endemic to Port Townsend along with

adaptation strategies for potential natural disasters. Fortunately, this important planning process is state-funded and won't be affected by federal cuts.

One particular challenge faced by those tasked with updating the SMP is the No Net Loss initiative, an environmental policy that asks developers to balance any harm done to sensitive environments like wetlands to be mitigated so that there is no loss of ecological value. This policy presents problems for the SMP because the historic downtown area was not built with environmental or global warming concerns in mind. Planners will be discussing this further with the public at the March 12 meeting.

Another aspect planners are taking into consideration is that as water rises, people may choose to abandon their properties. The city hopes to be able to address this concern in future drafts of the SMP. The city spoke to the Jamestown S'Klallam tribe for a letter of support regarding the grant, and they shared an interest in aquaculture in the 2021 revisions. The city expressed an interest in including voices from other tribes and Indigenous citizens and asked that those with additional feedback please contact the city.

Reporting by Angela Downs

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KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Tuesday through Thursday, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from the *Jefferson County Beacon*. This is Nigel O'Shea. Thanks for listening.