

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Berman with news and commentary for Tuesday, March 18, 2025.

We have a few more details about the construction of Jefferson Healthcare's new wing. According to a hospital spokesperson, substantial completion of the \$96 million project is currently scheduled for July 23, but could be a week earlier. The generator was placed last week. Yet to be accomplished is stud framing, window installation, drywall, and finishing the outside surface. The parking lot is complete but fenced areas will remain to support the larger project and the north section of Hospital Road upgrades. The obstacles include the amount of asbestos abatement and the demolition of concrete footings, both causing delays and cost increases. Portions of the new wing will begin occupancy in July. The goal is to open all the new clinics and the cafeteria in September.

As for the cost, Commissioner Matt Ready told KPTZ that the hospital was able to raise all the money from bond sales and other sources, without having to go to the public for additional funding. Hospital Commissioner Jill Buhler Rienstra told KPTZ last week that she is running for another term, attempting to continue her streak as the longest serving election official in Jefferson County. Ready is also running for another term, his third. While it's too soon to tell, most of the recent hospital commissioner races have been unopposed. Ready said that he doesn't know who is out there, but the last few elections have drawn zero interest in other candidates. Commissioner Bruce McComas, said the lack of opposition is due to the public's positive perception of the board, its ability to navigate COVID, and to offer a breadth of new services. Ready, who unseated an incumbent for his first term and was unopposed for his second, is an outlier on the board. He is currently attempting to move some discussions out of executive session and into the public eye, with topics that are of interest to the public. One such executive session is planned for today.

Ready declined to provide specifics about the topics, following the ground rules of an executive session. Without specifics, Ready said there's controversy on the board about the direction of the hospital and its leadership, a topic which he is not in agreement with the rest of the board. He said that increased public input is important, and executive sessions get in the way of this. He is frustrated by this situation and does not believe that the others on the board values transparency and public collaboration as much as he does.

In a message that was included in the Jefferson County Democratic Party's regular newsletter, local writer Al Bergstein encouraged people to raise their voices in protest against President Donald Trump's arbitrary actions. The message isn't completely directed at Democrats. It characterizes itself as a shout out to Democrats as well as Independents and Republicans who see the danger in Trump's actions: people who have lost their jobs or their retirement nest egg or have been crushed by Trump's tariffs. Bergstein asks that everyone who opposes this administration's actions speak out now, because it will only get worse if Trump is allowed to continue unchecked. The message is directed toward those who may have voted for Trump or didn't vote at all and now find themselves blindsided and unsure as to way to turn. They may not agree with the Democratic platform but, under these circumstances, they may certainly want to join the party in the fight to save democracy, Bergstein wrote. There is, of course, another side to this story. Anyone wishing to provide that side contact the station.

KPTZ 91.9 FM broadcasts local news Tuesday through Thursday at noon and 5pm. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I'm Charlie Berman. Thank you for listening.