

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, March 5, 2025.

Regulations on Short-Term Rentals (STRs) in Jefferson County have moved closer to adoption as the County attempts to find solutions to solve a severe shortage of affordable housing, reduce nuisance issues, and maintain neighborhood stability.

Residents and government officials in Port Townsend and Jefferson County regard local housing affordability as a crisis. In 2024, the County ranked as the second-least affordable county in Washington State, with rental vacancy rates between 0% and 1%. As of the fourth quarter of 2024, the rental vacancy rate in the Puget Sound region had a rate of 5.1%, while the national rate in the United States stood at 6.9%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The Board will hear public testimony on March 17, and then on March 24, deliberate and take possible actions toward enacting new regulations. The County is likely to adopt new regulations before the one-year moratorium on new STRs expires on April 7, according to Planning Commissioner Cynthia Koan. Leading the list of recommendations is that the number of permitted STRs be capped at 4% of housing units.

The cap could grow with the number of housing units created in the county. It is the first step in regulating and will be implemented by ZIP Code, allowing for a more even disbursement of STRs throughout the county. Two master-planned communities in the County – one in Port Ludlow and one in Brinnon – will not be included in this number and will not be subject to regulation because they are legally classified as resorts.

The STR owner or operator must reside in Jefferson County and must be in the county during all active rentals. This was deemed necessary due to neighbors stating that when there is a nuisance or issue at a short-term rental, there are often vacant owners and no way to address issues immediately. All structures that were STR-permitted before the moratorium will be grandfathered in and will not have to abide by new regulations.

Finally, STRs will be inspected annually, and new permits will be valid for three years for those who do not have an owner/operator on site. The term limits will allow more people to try their hands at STRs, providing more of an equitable approach. This prevents a first-come/only-served concept and will allow for more variety. If the STR is also located at a primary residence, then there are no time limits associated with the permit.

Enforcement of these regulations will fall to platforms like AirBnb and Vrbo, where STR operators list their properties. Every listing must have a permit, and the platforms must register with the county. The number of short-term rentals in Jefferson County led to a big pool of comments submitted to the County about nuisances that short-term renters brought to these neighborhoods, such as loud parties, parking and traffic congestion, and inappropriate driving, and other behaviors. Such activity affects neighbors and other STR owners who ensure their guests do not engage in such behaviors. The regulations that the county eventually adopts will not apply to Port Townsend, which has its own regulations and short-term rentals.

The Quilcene School Board will discuss requiring scholastic youth athletes to play on the team aligned with their birth gender at their work-study meeting today at 6pm. The board previously debated removing LGBT+ books from the school library in 2024 but, after legal advice, chose not to pursue the issue further.

In a February 20 YouTube video, Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal said state protections against gender identity discrimination prohibit schools from barring trans student-athletes from teams that match their gender identity, saying, "Our state laws make clear that students get to identify and

participate in activities based on the gender in which they identify. We're going to uphold that law" If you would like to attend the school board's meeting via Zoom, you can register via the Quilcene School Board's website (<https://www.qsd48.org/District/3228-Zoom-Registration-Instructions.html>).

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