

This is KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Rachel Perkins, bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, April 16, 2025.

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Jefferson County residents strongly support a new aquatics center, according to a survey conducted by the JeffCo Aquatic Coalition (JAC), a member of the Healthier Together Initiative. Of the survey responses received from 2,591 full or part-time residents representing 5,898 people in their households, 55% rated a new public aquatic facility as "very important," while 20% rated it "somewhat important." The survey tally represents approximately 18% of the population of the county according to JAC.

Healthier Together, whose members include Jefferson County government, Jefferson Healthcare, the YMCA, JeffCo Aquatics Coalition, City of Port Townsend, Port Townsend School District, and Port of Port Townsend, conducted the 2-month-long survey to learn more about the current use of aquatic facilities in the county and gather data on what county residents desire in a public aquatic facility. Currently, the only public pool in Jefferson County is at the YMCA in Port Townsend. The Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) formally selected a location in Port Hadlock because approximately 7,000 more county residents live within a 20-minute drive of the chosen site than of the Mountain View YMCA facility in Port Townsend.

Citing the failed efforts of the City of Port Townsend to develop a funding path to build a replacement aquatics center to replace the aging Mountain View YMCA facility, Diane McDade of JAC, said, "The real issue is cost." McDade said that the JAC is pursuing a facility that would have a lap swim tank, and a warmer-water tank for children and the elderly, with a zero-entry feature for those who have difficulty using a ladder to enter the pool. She said that this type of facility could likely be built for approximately \$20,000.000, perhaps using modular building materials.

A primary reason that an effort by the City of Port Townsend to build an aquatic and recreation center two years ago failed is that its cost was considered high at \$37,000.000, and the BOCC voted down a proposal to help fund it through local property taxes. Of the survey respondents, 61.5% said that they would support an increase in sales tax of 20 cents per 100 dollars (excluding groceries and prescriptions) to fund a portion of the construction of an aquatic and recreation center in Port Hadlock, while 27.5% said they would oppose it. Eleven percent said they needed more information to decide. Reporting on this story by Scott France.

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Most people are likely aware that there is not enough affordable housing for families in Port Townsend. What you may not know is that a lack of senior-appropriate housing is one of the reasons more family-sized homes are not on the market. In Port Townsend, the median age is 59, and 41% of citizens are 60 to 80 years old. Many older residents may wish to downsize, but suitable single-occupancy cottages or studios for them to move to are not available.

Steve King, Director of Public Works, says that there are also a lot of folks in run-down housing that they are either physically or economically unable to take care of. They could sell their property, adding "fixer-upper"-priced housing to the market for families, but again, because of the lack of appropriate, safe residences for these folks to move to, they aren't able to sell. According to King, we need long-term permanent, supportive housing and permanent affordable housing. A major part of the puzzle is housing resources for the elderly near businesses; another is creating housing affordable enough for local farmers and shipwrights to be able to purchase a home. Through writing policy, the city can prioritize residential and commercial development to keep elders living in our community, in homes designed for their safety and quality of life. However, the

community has to communicate this idea as a value to the city by attending meetings, writing, emailing or calling, and starting conversations with neighbors. Reporting on this story by Angela Downs.

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