

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, August 6, 2025.

Automated technology is a double-edged sword. It can be helpful in tourism, in translation, and in toll collection; it can connect you to businesses and friends and help you get where you're going. But there is a risk of becoming dependent on it, or incurring hundred-dollar parking fees when patrons haven't overstayed their time.

The Port Townsend Plaza was bought in 2022 by Hall Equities Group, a private, full-service real estate investment, development, and property management company based in Walnut Creek, California. Six months ago, the City gave conditional approval for a 50-room hotel to be built across the street from the Port Townsend Plaza, where the Sandringham building is currently located. There are only ten required on-site parking spots, leaving a deficit of at least forty spots. The Hall Equity Group was concerned that the hotel parking overflow would use the Plaza lot for their overnight guests and decided to start charging for parking ahead of time to deter them.

A few months ago, without notification or discussion with current tenants such as the Quimper Mercantile, Hall Equity Group installed signs for paid parking. The Plaza tenants had no involvement in the design, implementation, or management of the HONK paid parking system, a mobile payment system, currently in operation at the Plaza. The system requires patrons to own a smartphone, which is a barrier for elderly, low-income, and counter-cultural residents. HONK uses cameras to track cars moving into and out of the parking lot. There is no human involved in determining compliance with the parking regulations posted throughout the lot.

According to the signs, customers are entitled to 30 minutes of free parking and can extend their stay by an additional 60 minutes by validating at Quimper or other PT Plaza tenants, such as Don's Pharmacy, Ground to Perfection Coffee, Burritos Y Tacos San Juan, or Whistle Stop Toys. With an intended total of 90 free parking minutes, patrons should be able to shop and dine without concern.

Unfortunately, the system is not working as intended. Customers who did not overstay their time limit have been issued tickets. Many residents have received notices of non-compliance accompanied by \$102 parking fines. The insulted parties have taken to social media, revealing just how many are affected by the flawed system. Hall Equity did not respond to the Beacon's request to discuss solutions. Many have found the parking situation stressful. People who have received a ticket and spoken to staff at Don's Pharmacy have reported that the staff have done everything they can to help remedy the situation. Quimper has signage in the store, as well as a designated smartphone to help customers who need to add an additional free hour if they need one. They also display the QR code in the store and provide physical assistance to customers upon request.

The idea for the Quimper Mercantile started when Jefferson County's last general store closed in 2012. With the mission of creating a new general store, a volunteer board of civic and business leaders gathered to ensure local retail dollars and retail jobs stayed in the community. The resulting new Mercantile leased space in the Port Townsend Plaza downtown and opened its doors to the public on October 11, 2012.

The Quimper Mercantile has been unable to extend its lease at favorable terms beyond 2032. Pursuing other options, they are developing plans to move to a new location before the lease expires. Unfortunately, this location will not be on Water Street as there isn't a space large enough to house the Mercantile in the Port Townsend Historic District.

Some people who have been wrongfully ticketed have contacted the Washington State Attorney General's office. The more complaints formally filed with the Attorney General, the more data they will have to recognize a pattern. If a pattern is found, the Attorney General will consider taking action against the business. You can file a report manually or online at <https://www.atg.wa.gov/consumer-protection>.

Reporting on this story by Angela Downs

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Tuesday through Thursday, partnering on Wednesdays to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. This is Rachel Perkins. Thanks for listening.