

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Diane Walker, with your local news and commentary for Thursday, September 18, 2025.

Today marks the opening of the 26th Annual Port Townsend Film Festival. For more information about the parade, the food, and tickets and passes for the films, free and otherwise, visit <https://ptfilm.org/>.

Thanks to some strong easterly winds, the Bear Gulch Fire grew to almost 16,000 acres this week, generating smoke plumes that have been reported visible from as far away as Ocean Shores and Port Angeles. Fire personnel have been reduced, but helicopter bucket drops have been conducted over the Copper Creek area to help slow the fire's spread.

In other fire news, East Jefferson Fire Rescue responded to a fire beside the Cotton Building in downtown Port Townsend at around 3:30am on Tuesday morning and found a fire burning in a portable restroom on the north side of the building. The fire was quickly extinguished, but the portapotty was destroyed. Additional fire damage was noted in a window and a light fixture on the Cotton Building. City crews have been able to secure the building and the area is being cleaned of remaining debris. The cause of the fire is currently under investigation.

According to the Port Townsend *Leader*, Port Townsend officials announced at this past Monday's Council meeting that they plan to close the homeless encampment behind the Washington state Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) building by early November. The land in question is slated for the city's Evans Vista housing project, for which the city is now soliciting developers. People began camping near the DSHS building after the Jefferson County Fairgrounds encampment closed in 2021, but tensions have been running high at the camp, as Good Man Sanitation had to remove the camp's portable toilets after extreme misuse made it a safety hazard for crews to service. Amanda Grace, Good Man Sanitation's chief executive officer, said she is communicating with officials and behavioral health teams to find a solution to return the toilets as soon as possible.

The city is working with partner agencies to find a coordinated response that meets behavioral health needs and respects the surrounding community while ensuring the area is empty and folks have found shelter before cold weather sets in. According to Public Works Director Steve King, "We're not moving it. We're giving people time to connect with service providers and hopefully find a place to get help."

Dr. Susan Monarez, former head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), who was fired by Health and Human Services Director RFK Jr., testified yesterday before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, that Kennedy told her that she'd be fired unless she agreed to preapprove new vaccination recommendations from a CDC advisory panel which Kennedy had refilled with all vaccine-skeptical personnel.

Since the federal government's announcement of significantly restricted eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine, at least 13 states have joined Washington, Oregon, California, and Hawaii in taking steps to ensure broader access to that vaccine, empowering pharmacists to administer the shot and, in some cases, mandating that insurers pay for it.

In addition to working to cover vaccine deficits, Washington has also elected to backfill lost Medicaid dollars for Planned Parenthood after a court ruling last week, according to the Washington State *Standard*.

And finally, three WSDOT closings of note:

- Gardiner Beach Road will be closed today through the 29th in order to improve access to the newly reconstructed boat ramp there.
- The Hood Canal Bridge, which needs repairs to the stationary steel tracks used to roll the drawspans back and forth, will be closed to all travel for five consecutive nights from 8pm to 5:30am starting this Sunday, September 21. Plan your trips around the closures or face a 3-hour detour around the Hood Canal.
- And for those hoping to avoid ferry travel this weekend by going the long way around to the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, please note that there will be double westbound lane closures on that bridge starting 8am tomorrow, Friday the 19th, until 10pm Saturday in order to effect joint repairs under the bridge deck.

KPTZ 91.9 FM broadcasts your local news Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at noon and 5pm. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I'm Diane Walker. Thank you for listening.