

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, October 22, 2025.

The City of Port Townsend is sticking with its plan to disband the homeless tent encampment outside the DSHS (Department of Social and Health Services) office, while a group of service providers and public servants struggle to develop viable relocation options. In mid-September, the City set a date of November 3 to close the encampment. The City has cited multiple code violations and safety concerns, and it needs the area cleared in order to begin steps towards developing the Evans Vista housing project.

Maintaining services to the roughly 30 inhabitants of the encampment is a top priority of the Behavioral Health Consortium (BHC), composed of more than 20 City and County leaders, homeless advocates, and providers. One prominent option discussed during the BHC's three meetings was to establish a permanent encampment which, according to county commissioner Heather Dudley Nollette, would require a provider to manage it.

But with the imminent challenge for those residents soon to lose their home, Commissioner Greg Brotherton stressed that they should also start looking at options for a supported unmanaged encampment as a shorter-term fix. Mayor David Faber said at the City Council Business Meeting on October 21, "moving the encampment is not morally justifiable. At the same time, we need service providers to get the campers into a suitable location."

Port Townsend City Manager John Mauro, who issued the closure announcement in September, stated at the meeting that the City could adjust the sweep date if local providers could propose and apply for a viable encampment site within the city. If the City received such an application, Mauro said they could look at that timeline and try to expedite permits. If they received a proposal that would delay evicting the encampment by a week or two, Mauro said that is something the city would consider. Acknowledging that considerable effort is being made to find solutions, Faber called for a special meeting of the Council next week to discuss relevant developments and information.

Dudley Nollette said that some providers indicated interest in encampment management, so the BHC conducted a Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping exercise to locate potential sites using some parameters including: the site must be owned by the City, County, or a faith organization, it must be within 30 minutes of the Jefferson County Public Health office at Sheridan and Sims Way; it must meet certain city and county conditions for sanctioned encampments. Finally, the group is looking for a site of roughly one to two acres in size, according to Dudley Nollette.

As the days tick by toward the November 3 deadline, BHC members are brainstorming ideas to help transition the campers. The group is exploring having their employees visit one-on-one with each of the campers to go over a list of options for them in terms of services, resources, and places where they can sleep. A drug recovery house in Port Townsend has agreed to take in a limited number of people who are in recovery. Bayside Housing Services has offered to consider one of its properties in Port Townsend as a potential site for housing unhoused people, but that would be a longer-term solution. The City has not announced any plan for how the encampment would be closed if no viable relocation options are available by the November 3 date.

Now we move from housing insecurity to food insecurity. Washington's Department of Social and Health Services said this week that if federal funding is not restored, the agency will not be able to issue food benefits after October 31. Agency spokesperson Norah West confirmed in an email to the Washington State *Standard* on Friday that this means all Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program food benefits – known as SNAP – will

stop at that time. Washington also provides state-funded benefits through its Food Assistance Program, which is open to legal immigrants who are not eligible for the SNAP program solely because of their immigration status. Food Assistance Program benefits would also lapse, West said, noting that the program must mirror SNAP.

In September, more than 540,000 households in Washington, representing nearly 930,000 people, received around \$173 million dollars in food benefits, according to the Department of Social and Health Services. The agency said in a recent presentation to lawmakers that about 15% of the state's population receives the benefits each year and that about 35% of those are children. The Department of Social and Health Services is providing status updates about the benefits on its website (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/>).

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