

This is KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nigel O'Shea bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, October 29, 2025.

The City of Port Townsend voted in a special City Council meeting on Monday, October 27 to change the City code to facilitate an easier permitting process for establishing a supported homeless encampment. Mayor David Faber said, "We want to make sure we are authorizing the lowest possible barrier to shelters." The vote culminated a tension-filled week that began with a groundswell of opposition, voiced during the public comment session at the City Council meeting on October 20, to the City's intention to close the Evans Vista homeless encampment on November 3.

On October 23, Judge Brandon Mack of the Jefferson County Superior Court reserved judgment on an injunction set to be heard on Friday, stating that the City be "temporarily restrained and enjoined from closing, sweeping, or otherwise dismantling the Evans Vista encampment." This was in response to a lawsuit filed by Michele Goodwin, an encampment resident, to halt the encampment closure.

Since City manager John Mauro announced in mid-September, the November 3 closure date, opposition has grown among homeless services providers, encampment residents, others with lived homeless experience, and Jefferson County citizens. While most acknowledge the unsuitability of this site for an encampment, objections have mostly focused on the timing of the edict coming as winter is approaching, as well as the City's low level of collaboration with homeless residents, advocates, and providers to develop transition solutions.

Even Mayor David Faber joined the chorus of morally-based objections at last Monday's Council meeting. Faber said, "I agree on a moral basis that if there is not a solution identified, moving that encampment is not morally justified. At the same time, we need service providers to do the job of getting the people into a different location." Faber asserted that the "Council has a very limited capacity to do anything outside of nuclear options which would be incredibly destructive. We're a legislative body – a policy-making body – we're not executives in our own right."

Monday's special meeting of the City Council occurred in two parts. It commenced at the Evans Vista site so that encampment residents could more easily attend and speak in a setting that is more easily accessible and comfortable than the council chambers. Most of the local service providers attended. The second phase of the special meeting took place in the council chambers.

Many of the Evans Vista attendees who spoke asserted that disbanding the camp without a plan would severely endanger the residents, many of whom are struggling with physical or mental health issues. Blanchard Alice, who is now housed, said, "I cannot explain to you how it feels to be homeless in this town, to have anyone notice me and not see right through me. I am a business owner, a hard worker, and this happened to me while I was working 80 hours a week and employing others. This town eats people alive. If that hasn't been your experience, folks, come talk to one of us."

Holly Morgan, executive director of Olympic Community Action Program (OlyCAP), said the City's September announcement was delivered with little to no effort by the city to participate in discussions or planning. Morgan said, "These are people living day by day, doing their best just to survive. A move such as this demands the time for thoughtful planning initiated by the city and engaging not only service providers but the residents themselves and we just didn't get that in this situation. The impact on residents, providers, and advocates has been pretty stressful – when the city points fingers and alludes to the idea that providers should have already gotten these folks housed given that the encampment has been around for a period of years now it seems very disingenuous."

Morgan added that since the encampment sweep was announced, OlyCAP has sent case managers to the encampment to conduct vulnerability assessments and capture individuals' risk and protective factors. They found some of the highest vulnerability scorers they have ever seen.

A key impediment to developing a viable encampment site was a rather restrictive city code. Providers like OlyCAP and Bayside Housing Services, which owns some vacant land in town can now expedite a process toward developing a permanent encampment site. The city code change will surely be the hot topic of discussion for as long as it takes to arrive at the best possible, implementable solution. City planning director Emma Bolin said at the Council meeting that the new permitting measure will require that Sani-cans or permanent toilets be established, as well as trash facilities. There will also be rules regarding food preparation and storage. Faber said that he expects "some pretty notable backlash from parts of the community for letting homeless people live near them. I think that is a risk worth taking."

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Tuesday through Thursday, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from the Jefferson County *Beacon*. This is Nigel O'Shea. Thanks for listening.