

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, December 17, 2025.

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The *Beacon*'s Scott France reports that the City and County approved the 2025 to 2030 Jefferson County Homeless & Housing Services Affordability Plan on December 8. This plan will recognize the importance of each type of housing in this continuum as essential to addressing homelessness and housing instability. The document states the following: "Homelessness and housing insecurity generate trauma with consequences for the entire community. The social and economic costs include:

- Increasing risk of interpersonal violence and traumatization
- Social isolation and loss of community connection
- Worsening mental and physical health and higher risk of untimely death
- Loss of essential workforce and lowered employment opportunities
- High rates of disconnected youth
- And increased rates and perpetuating cycles of incarceration"

The plan is focused on five objectives:

- Strengthening the homeless service provider workforce.
- Promoting an equitable, accountable, and transparent homeless crisis response system.
- Prioritizing assistance based on the greatest barriers to housing stability and the greatest risk of harm.
- Preventing episodes of homelessness whenever possible.
- And seeking to house everyone in a stable setting that meets their needs.

Viki Sonntag, a Housing Task Force member and housing advocate, said that the focus for this five-year period is to lay a solid foundation for strengthening and expanding the homeless response system to successfully meet the housing needs of those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. She also stressed the need to have an understanding and objectives which acknowledge that housing service providers are frontline workers. County commissioner Heather Dudley-Nollette said that the eventual effectiveness of the plan's strategies will demand a greater standard of relationship and collaboration between the jurisdiction and service providers.

The number of homeless individuals in the county has stayed roughly consistent at about 500 since 2018, according to Audra Mumford, a member of the Housing Task Force. Mumford noted that, despite the consistency of those numbers, housing instability is increasing and affecting people at higher and higher income levels. Overall funding to operate homeless services has increased in the last few years.

Sonntag said that Jefferson County will need 8,400 new affordable housing units in the next 20 years. According to the plan, the number of people at risk of becoming homeless or displaced is many times greater than the number currently unhoused. Housing displacement refers to the involuntary relocation of residents from their homes or neighborhoods for economic, physical, or cultural reasons. It is distinct from voluntary moves and is often associated with increasing rents, which is one of the biggest factors in Jefferson County.

Each of the plan's actions outlines a way to measure timelines and successes and identifies a lead party responsible for completing the action. The scope of the plan does not address encampment policy, which must be addressed separately by the city and county.

Several public comments were pleas to avoid any repeat resemblance of the recent removal of residents at the Evans Vista encampment, with at least one commenter noting that people who did manage to find placement did not always receive the support to have that placement be a success.

Anya Callahan, who helps provide direct services to homeless people in her job at Jefferson County Public Health, suggested that the city build a low-barrier encampment that is well-managed and allows residents access to healthcare, case management, housing navigation, and other services. The Evans Vista closure experience has spurred many in the homeless services and advocacy community to champion a “No displacement without placement” policy.

The local housing situation is being squeezed, not only by the increasing demand, but by dwindling support at the supply level, mainly because of large reductions of federal funding for programs and services for affordable housing and the unhoused. Port Townsend mayor David Faber described the grant limitations as, “Thoroughly disgusting. This is going to be a difficult time as we have this really aspirational, homeless and affordable housing services plan, and face more stark headwinds than I think we’ve felt in a long time.”

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