

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, February 11, 2026.

The results are in! Voters in Brinnon and Port Townsend overwhelmingly voted in favor of passing their respective school bonds. The bonds for both East Jefferson Fire and Rescue districts also passed by a large margin.

Speaking of schools, this week Scott France wrote about the early learning program in Chimacum that's providing an essential stepping stone for future kindergarteners. Children entering kindergarten at the Chimacum Creek Primary School have demonstrated readiness almost seven times higher in the current school year than in the 2023-24 school year across all six developmental and learning domains on the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills. The dramatic readiness score rise – to 83%, from 12% two years ago – may be attributed largely to changes that the school has implemented in the past two years.

Sarah Walker, the principal of the Chimacum Creek Primary School, explains that by partnering with the local Education Service District, they brought in trainers to make sure everybody knew how to prepare kids for the kindergarten readiness assessments. Instructional blocks were created that focused on play for fun as well as foundational skills in reading and math. The Early Learning program has a half-day preschool option for 3-year-olds and young 4-year-olds, and a full-day Transition to Kindergarten option for 4-year-olds. Both programs apply a play-based curriculum based on social and emotional learning.

The preschool program is supported in part by generous donations from local community partners such as the Association of American University Women and the Rotary, which allows the program to be free. Governor Bob Ferguson's proposed 2026 supplemental state budget includes significant reductions to early learning programs statewide, including a proposal to eliminate more than 1,800 slots (roughly 25%) in the Transition to Kindergarten program. That funding reduction would translate into a reduction from 29 slots in the Chimacum Transition to Kindergarten program to just 21.

In other planning-for-the-future news, reporter Rachael Nutting had a look at Jefferson County's pivotal planning effort that will shape its growth, economy and character for the next generation. The 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, a state-mandated 10-year review, has been officially extended into 2026, with a final adoption deadline of June 30. This strategic delay allows the county to concentrate resources on this foundational document while deferring the annual cycle for site-specific amendments to 2027, ensuring a clearer and more efficient public process.

The current update process aims to address long-standing challenges while preserving community values. Recent discussions among the Board of County Commissioners underscore the urgency of this work, as they rated "secure and affordable housing" a deficient 2 out of 10 and identified pressing needs in healthcare access, career pathways and critical infrastructure.

A central technical task of the update is distributing the county's projected population growth through 2045. Based on a medium growth projection from the state, planners must decide how to distribute new residents across Urban Growth Areas like Port Townsend and Port Hadlock, within Master Planned Resorts such as Port Ludlow and throughout the county's rural landscapes. This allocation directly influences decisions on future housing, transportation, and utility investments. Urban growth goals and policies within the drafted plan focus on two Urban Growth Areas, Port Townsend and Irondale-Hadlock.

The overarching goal is to direct growth into the City of Port Townsend first. The unincorporated Urban Growth Area, including Jefferson County outside of city limits, is a secondary reserve and development there must be “consistent with and support” the city's own comp plan.

Irondale & Port Hadlock Urban Growth Areas are identified as the “primary focal point for growth” in east Jefferson County. Its policies are designed to create a “compact, walkable, mixed-use community”. The most critical policy explicitly ties all urban growth and density to the construction of a sewer system, stating it “shall not occur in advance of necessary urban governmental services, particularly sewer.”

As the deadline approaches, the updated Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan will seek to balance diverse perspectives, fiscal realities, and state mandates. It needs to answer complex questions about economic development, environmental stewardship, and community well-being. Public participation is a legal requirement and a cornerstone of the process. The Jefferson County Planning Commission plays a key role, holding public hearings and formulating recommendations for the Board of County Commissioners, which holds the final legislative authority. The first full public draft of the updated plan is available for review on the county's website.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Tuesday through Thursday, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. You can submit ideas to the *Beacon* through info@jeffcobeacon.com. This is Nhatt Nichols. Thanks for listening.