

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Diane Walker, with your local news and commentary for Thursday, March 19, 2026.

A Port Townsend-based group intent on re-drafting the city's Comprehensive Plan to address affordability, building height, and neighborhood density issues has seen their case move forward after a virtual prehearing conference with the state's Growth Management Hearings Board. The hearing followed a petition filed in February by Affordable Hometown Port Townsend (AHPT), a nonprofit that advocates for affordable housing and neighborhood protections. Led by four local residents – Todd McGuire, Mary McCurdy, John Capps, and John Watts – AHPT is seeking state review of the city's December comprehensive plan update, arguing that elements of the plan may not be in compliance with Washington's Growth Management Act.

The appeal centers largely on zoning changes that allow greater housing density and building scale in some residential areas. The updated plan permits more housing units on smaller lots and modifies development standards as part of an effort to expand the city's housing supply. Petitioners argue the changes could lead to larger buildings and increased density that may alter neighborhood character and contribute to affordability and displacement concerns.

During the prehearing conference, the board outlined a timeline for briefs and a hearing on the merits of the petition. Under the schedule, the city must file an index of documents that were considered in adopting the ordinance by March 23. Once that index is received, the petitioners will review it for any questions or additions.

Petitioners' prehearing briefs are due May 29, followed by the city's response June 12 with an optional reply brief June 22. A hearing on the merits of the petition has been scheduled for June 30, and a final decision from the board is expected August 19. The city has stated that the adopted plan remains in effect during the appeal process and that it intends to defend the ordinance.

According to the *Leader*, the Washington State Patrol Interagency Bomb Squad was dispatched to Glen Cove last week after a grenade was found discarded on the side of Seton Road by a property owner who was weed-whacking in the area. About an hour after the call came in last Wednesday afternoon, the bomb squad arrived on scene, secured the scene, and successfully removed the grenade, placing it in a bomb containment enclosure known as a "frag bag." Authorities were quick to note that the public was not in any danger.

Gatheringplace Port Townsend, which supports Jefferson County individuals with intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities, has just secured a \$475,000 grant from the state's supplemental capital budget. The organization plans to use the funds to begin construction on a brand-new facility behind the Port Townsend Goodwill. Gatheringplace Executive Director Linda Ferris, who was quick to thank State Representative Steve Tharinger for his support in being awarded the funds, noted that roughly double the funded amount will still be needed from area residents to complete the project.

The organization, known locally for its popular handmade dog biscuits and art-filled calendars, regularly hosts programs designed to teach life and personal development skills to its participants. Those programs are currently offered at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds, but they are looking for a more permanent home from which to operate. The city has approved plans and permits for a 3,800-square-foot building, a contractor has been engaged, and construction is expected to begin this spring. Once built, the facility will not only serve as a

multipurpose space for Gatheringplace participants, but will also be available for public events and activities sponsored by groups such as People First, Special Olympics, and Action Club.

And finally, Representative Tharinger, a Port Townsend Democrat, has announced that he will not be running for reelection, thus ending his 16-year career representing the 24th Legislative District and the North Olympic Peninsula. The announcement comes months after Tharinger, who chairs the Capital Budget Committee, announced he would be unable to attend this year's legislative session, citing medical issues requiring hospital care. Tharinger is credited with securing millions for capital infrastructure improvements across the peninsula, including the Point Hudson breakwater, stormwater, and energy efficiency projects, the Port's purchase of the Shorts' farm property, and delivering more than \$20 million from the state capital budget to the Port Hadlock sewer project in 2021.

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.