

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Diane Walker, with your local news and commentary for Thursday, April 16, 2026.

The Jefferson County Board of Commissioners has voted unanimously to keep Parks and Recreation programs operating through the end of 2026. Despite a projected budget shortfall of roughly \$1.3 million, they've chosen to delay budget cuts that could affect high-use sites like Memorial Field and North Beach Park and have directed county staff to prepare a levy lid lift proposal that could go before voters as early as August. According to the *Leader*, County Assessor Jeff Chapman said a potential 15-cent levy lid lift could generate roughly \$1.5 million annually for parks and recreation, costing the owner of a median Port Townsend home about \$7 a month, though commissioners have not finalized a proposal rate. The proposal is expected to be developed in the coming weeks, with commissioners intending to adopt a resolution later this month in time to meet a May 1 deadline for inclusion on the August ballot.

According to the Washington State Climate Office, snowpack across Washington State is now the third-lowest since records began in 1985, prompting Washington officials to declare a statewide drought emergency. Seven of the past 10 years have seen drought in parts or all of the state, and this is the fourth statewide drought emergency since 2015. By contrast, during the 1990s, snow droughts occurred only once every five years. The years of drought have officials concerned not only about heightened wildfire risk, but also that water shortages could impact crop yields and quality. In addition, State health officials are urging residents to begin conserving water now and to expect a potentially smoky summer.

Port Townsend City Council members voted this week to extend the lease of the Winter Welcoming Center a few extra days in an attempt to reconcile the needs of Port Townsend's unhoused with standing lease agreements for the downtown waterfront events space. Located at Pope Marine Park, the center offers a warm space for those in need of shelter from November through April 15. The Jefferson Interfaith Action Coalition requested a lease extension, but the council could only extend the lease until April 19, giving the center a few extra days to clean the space before the next scheduled event. The *Leader* reports that Council also directed staff to work with the Interfaith Coalition and other community groups to explore options for housing the welcoming center in the spring and summer.

Plans to build a 24-acre light industrial park near the Jefferson County International Airport have moved closer to fruition, thanks to a recent push from Congresswoman Emily Randall. Randall requested that the House Appropriations Committee allocate \$1.85 million in grants to airport owner, the Port of Port Townsend, to spur the Port's longstanding effort to develop a light industrial park there. The funding, if secured, would go toward the development of roads and a septic and stormwater system on the Port-owned property, providing essential infrastructure for businesses to come in and set up shop. Randall said the funding should help promote job growth and private investment, increase tax receipts, foster economic vitality and "strengthen the ability of communities to withstand potential future environmental and economic shocks." According to the *Leader*, the funding is not yet secure, but Randall and Port Executive Eron Berg said they are hopeful.

And finally, from May 27 to June 8, the historic fishing vessel Western Flyer will return to Port Townsend for a week-long schedule of student programs closing with a free community event. Built in Tacoma in 1937, the Western Flyer is best known for carrying author John Steinbeck and marine biologist Ed Ricketts on their 1940 Gulf of California expedition, later chronicled in the book, “The Log from the Sea of Cortez.” After decades of fishing, two sinkings, and a full restoration in Port Townsend, the vessel now serves as a platform for ocean science, education, and storytelling, and will be docked at the Point Hudson Marina, where the Western Flyer Foundation will partner with the Northwest Maritime Center and other local organizations to deliver hands-on education programs for students from around the region.

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 and have a great weekend.