

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Diane Walker, with your local news and commentary for Thursday, May 7, 2026.

Due to current atmospheric and field conditions, the Jefferson County fire marshal has declared a moderate fire danger level for the county, effective as of tomorrow, which means the following rules will be in place:

- Burn barrels, land clearing fires, yard debris burning, and sky lanterns are prohibited.
- Recreational fires are only allowed in permanent or portable barbecues, outdoor fireplaces or grills.
- Portable fire pits, fireplaces, and chimneys must be placed on non-combustible surfaces.
- Only natural wood may be used, and fuel must not extend outside the device.
- All fires must be constantly attended until fully extinguished.

Fire danger levels are likely to be further elevated as the season progresses. For more information, visit <https://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/1687/Office-of-the-Fire-Marshal>.

According to the *Leader*, results from the 2026 Point-in-Time homelessness count indicate homelessness is on the rise in Jefferson County. The annual count, which measures both sheltered and unsheltered populations on a single night, found a total of 103 people in shelters and 74 living unsheltered, for a total of 177, an increase of about 20% over last year's count of 147.

The increase comes six months after Port Townsend cleared its most visible encampment at Evans Vista. Since then, providers say homelessness has not disappeared – it's dispersed. As larger encampments have been cleared, people have reportedly moved into vehicles, smaller camps, and more remote areas outside city limits. That shift may have made homelessness less visible but it hasn't reduced the scale of the problem, and it's moved those without homes further away from service providers. Nearly half of the list the county uses to track people seeking housing assistance is made up of individuals 55 and older.

Viola Ware, Director of Housing and Community Development at Olympic Community Action Programs (OlyCAP), says private landlords play a critical role, but many are stepping back from affordable rentals over concerns about financial risk and potential damage. OlyCAP is applying for a federally funded intensive case management program and hopes to launch this summer, pairing households with a dedicated case manager to help them navigate housing, health care and social services. The program, funded for up to four years across Jefferson and Clallam counties, is intended to improve coordination by pairing individuals with a single case manager across housing, health care, and social services.

Jeffco PUD commissioner Dan Toepper has been elected president of the Washington Public Utility Districts (WPUDA). WPUDA brings together 27 publicly-owned utilities representing nearly one-million customers across Washington state, providing a voice to issues impacting energy rates and policies, while also offering a place where utilities can share industry knowledge. Toepper, who's been on the PUD board since 2018, will help guide WPUDA's executive committee and board of directors in supporting its members' ability to provide reliable, affordable, and locally controlled utility services.

There are two events at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds this weekend:

Local middle and high school students will present an immersive art installation in the 4-H Building tomorrow from 6pm to 8pm. Sponsored by The Benji Project, the exhibit is entitled “Making Room” and recognizes May Mental Health Awareness Month. It’s the culmination of an intensive art workshop process which began in March. For more information, visit <https://www.thebenjiproject.org/>.

And on Saturday, the Jefferson County Master Gardener Foundation will host its annual fundraising Plant Sale from 9am to 1pm at the Fairgrounds. Co-sponsored by Washington State University’s Jefferson County Extension, the sale will offer over 5,000 plants: not only a wide variety of flowers, but also themed baskets of lettuce, strawberries, or flowers and some good-sized perennials and trees. For more information, visit <https://jefferson.mastergardenerfoundation.org>.

And finally, just a reminder: the Hood Canal Bridge will be closed evenings from 10pm to 5am next Monday through Thursday.

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.