

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, May 20, 2026.

\*\*\*

First up, as reported by Rachael Nutting, after three decades of collaboration, the relationship between the Port of Port Townsend and the Jefferson County Economic Development Council (EDC) is facing a moment of tension. Driven by long-standing concerns over a lack of public transparency, slow progress on job creation, and questions about the fundamental governance model, port commissioners are openly debating whether to sever ties or absorb the EDC's functions entirely.

During the May 13 port commission meeting, tensions that have been simmering for years hit a boiling point. Port commissioners expressed frustration, not with EDC executive director David Ballif, but with a system they feel has failed to move the needle for a community in demographic decline. The core of the dispute lies in a five-party interlocal agreement that funds the EDC. Port Commissioner Pam Petranek referenced a motion from their previous meeting to give the required six-month notice to withdraw from the agreement, a move she insisted "was not a threat" but a necessary alarm bell. Perhaps the loudest criticism revolves around the EDC's governance structure. As a private non-profit in a public-private partnership with local government, the EDC is not subject to the Open Public Meetings Act in the same way that the Port, City, or County are.

Commissioners noted that the EDC board meetings are largely closed to the public, agendas are not widely circulated, and minutes are difficult to access. For a board that includes public officials, this has become an untenable disconnect. As the port commission debated the future, Executive Director Eron Berg suggested a radical shift: abolish the current EDC contract and make the Port the official Associate Development Organization (ADO) for the county. He cited the Port of Walla Walla as a successful model, where the port district directly employs the economic development staff. Proponents argue this would solve the transparency issue immediately, as all port meetings are subject to open meetings laws. However, the transition would be expensive. Berg noted that moving EDC staff, including Director Ballif, under the port's umbrella would significantly increase costs due to state retirement system benefits and medical coverage.

According to Ballif, the organization has embarked on a significant strategic pivot since his arrival in June last year, balancing traditional small business support with larger, more systemic initiatives aimed at reversing Jefferson County's troubling economic trajectory. Ballif stressed the value of the EDC's structure as a private entity, which allows it to build trusted, confidential relationships with business owners and investors. Ultimately, Commissioner Pete Hanke withdrew the motion to issue a six-month notice, citing a desire to avoid being "frivolous with taxpayer dollars" without a clear plan.

Instead, the Intergovernmental Collaborative Group (ICG) – which includes the Port, City, County, PUD, and EDC – will spend the next 12 to 18 months studying the issue. The port commission has tasked itself with investigating whether adopting the "Walla Walla model" is feasible. For now, the EDC remains intact, but with a firm deadline looming.

\*\*\*

Now onto a news story with more joy and more rainbows, as reported by Rachael Nutting.

In a move hailed by supporters as a celebration of community resilience and public safety, the city council voted unanimously on May 18 to approve a vibrant new street painting project for the intersection of Lawrence and Tyler Streets. The project features a farmer's market mural and four Rainbow Pride crosswalks. The application was brought before the council by a coalition including the Jefferson County Farmers Market and

Port Townsend Pride. The project is the first of its kind under an ordinance passed by the city in 2021 allowing street painting. Amanda Milholland, Executive Director of the Jefferson County Farmers Market, introduced the project as a pedestrian safety measure. She testified that for nearly a decade, she has watched drivers fail to yield at the uptown intersection, often blowing through stop signs during market hours.

Inspired by traffic-calming street art in Portland, the mural will feature a mandala of a farmer's hands holding the earth, surrounded by fruits, vegetables, and jumping salmon – specifically designed to avoid covering white traffic lines. Jason Victor Serinus, representing Port Townsend Pride and Good Life, spoke emotionally about the significance of the rainbow crosswalks. He noted that, unlike traditional pride flags, which add a triangle for transgender and BIPOC communities as an "afterthought," this design integrates those colors throughout.

The council voted unanimously to approve the application. Arts and Culture Coordinator Katy Goodman noted that the project had already undergone review by the Public Works Department, the Historic Preservation Committee, and the Arts Commission before reaching the council.

\*\*\*

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](http://jeffcobeacon.com). You can submit ideas to the *Beacon* through [info@jeffcobeacon.com](mailto:info@jeffcobeacon.com). This is editor Nhatt Nichols. Thanks for listening.