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, June 24, 2026.

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The Intergovernmental Collaborative Group (ICG) held a special meeting on Thursday, June 18, to continue developing a framework for economic development in Jefferson County, as reported in the *Beacon* by reporter Rachael Nutting. The meeting, facilitated by Karen Affeld from the North Olympic Development Council, brought together elected officials and staff from Jefferson County, the City of Port Townsend, the Port of Port Townsend, and the Jefferson County PUD.

The ICG has been working since February to refine its focus, moving from an initial 13 broad topics to a prioritized set of four key areas: funding, housing, infrastructure, and shared vision. But several members pushed to add a fifth pillar: job creation and workforce development. Affeld noted that housing alone doesn't sustain an economy; job creation must accompany it. County Commissioner Heidi Eisenhour agreed, saying, "We will never have affordable housing until we have jobs that pay living wages."

The group also debated whether "shared vision" should apply narrowly to the ICG's collaborative work or broadly to the entire county's economic future. County Commissioner Heather Dudley-Nollette suggested the ICG start with the former, a vision for how member governments coordinate, before expanding to a community-wide conversation.

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Housing discussions turned to what's blocking development. Several members noted that building was easier 30 years ago, with fewer regulations, and that developers currently choose other areas because Jefferson County is seen as difficult to build in. County Administrator Josh Peters suggested the group identify where housing can happen with the least amount of resistance and bring developers, lenders, and major employers into the conversation. Others advocated for state-level changes, including higher taxes on vacant or second homes.

The city noted its recent Request for Expressions of Interest for the Evans Vista neighborhood development, which has drawn three submittals. It highlighted its upcoming work on the Olympic Gravity Water System, a regional asset that supports the paper mill and jobs, as well as providing drinking water to Port Townsend residents.

While climate change and food and agriculture resilience weren't among the top four priorities, Carol Hasse made a point of advocating for them, suggesting that their work should be seen through a climate lens.

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Now, a few words about local news from me, *Beacon* editor Nhatt Nichols.

Last week, the latest report on the abysmal state of local news landed in my inbox. My inbox is frequently depressing, and reports like this aren't designed to lift spirits. This particular report is the 2026 Local Journalism Index, whose key findings include a marked decrease in local journalists. Washington State is down to just 7.8 per 100,000 people after an adjustment for metro areas, ranking us at 29 out of the 50 states.

The report, which uses data compiled from MuckRock and Rebuild Local News, also found that where there are fewer local news journalists, there are fewer stories about health and education.

As an editor of a small rural news outlet, I felt this statistic pretty deeply. Education and health stories are a continuous struggle for us to tackle. We simply don't have the money to dedicate staff to these stories, in part because they need to be dedicated beats. It's an issue we're trying to solve, at least on the education side, by applying for grants to fund a dedicated education reporter. Unfortunately, another reason my inbox is depressing this week is we were turned down for a grant that would have made this possible.

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Another finding shows that places with more reporters have more civic engagement. Because a letter from an editor is technically an opinion piece, I feel confident in saying, "well, duh."

When you read about your city council discussing options to provide affordable housing, and the options have been clearly laid out by a professional journalist, you're more likely to write in and say, "Hey, let's do this!" or "Please do not do anything that will jeopardize my house's value." In short, you have to know what your government is up to in order to care about it and want to get involved.

The most interesting thing in the report is that a lack of local news leads to higher loneliness levels. It seems obvious that a good community news outlet helps people stay connected to each other, but it's not something that I'd directly thought about. I have been consistently impressed by the way readers comment on articles and respond to comments from each other on our website. But hadn't considered that it could lead to a greater sense of community county-wide.

I hope that's what you've found too.

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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 editor Nhatt Nichols. Thanks for listening.