

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Diane Walker with your local news and commentary for Thursday, July 2, 2026.

In the last 2 years, Jefferson County has seen a sharp increase in DUI arrests, nearly 75% of which occur between 7pm and 3am, when public transportation options are limited. In response to this issue and a locally circulated petition, the Port Townsend City Council has decided to revisit ride-hail regulations at next Monday's meeting. In 2021 council members tabled a proposal to ease ride-hail regulations, citing concerns about Uber's labor practices and impacts on local businesses and public transit, but Mayor Amy Howard said earlier this year she was open to revisiting the discussion. Interested parties are invited to attend Monday's Council meeting to express their concerns. Any changes to city code or city policy will require future council action.

After enrolling their children in what they believed was a free pre-K program, several Port Townsend families have received notice that they will be asked to pay \$500 a month in tuition due to state funding cuts. Families who qualify for the federal free and reduced-price meal program will not be charged tuition, and all scholarship requests submitted to date by other families have been approved through support from a private donor. In addition, School Superintendent Linda Rosenbury told the *Leader* that no student would be turned away for lack of funds.

But some parents feel they might have enrolled elsewhere had they been notified earlier of the charges. Unfortunately, the decision wasn't final until the board's June 4 meeting, when they approved it as part of a broader effort by the district to absorb nearly \$500,000 in state and federal funding reductions.

Jefferson County Sheriff Andy Pernsteiner sent a letter to County Administrator Josh Peters back in April to express his concerns about a 40-person homeless encampment near Port Townsend's Mill Road, citing wildfire danger, sanitation issues, repeated calls for service, and growing amounts of trash at the site. But after the Mill Road brush fire last week, East Jefferson Fire Rescue Chief Bret Black reported having encountered both difficult emergency access and unsafe conditions both for the people living there and first responders: apparently firefighters spent over half an hour locating the fire and extending hose lines through dense vegetation, and it ultimately took about 35 personnel and more than four hours to fully extinguish the fire.

Having determined the encampment qualifies as an "immediate hazard" under the county's unauthorized encampment removal policy, the county set a deadline of July 15 to vacate the camp, and plans to post notices at the encampment about a week before the deadline. Anyone who remains after July 15 will be issued a trespass warning; arrests will only serve as a last resort.

Some Jefferson County PUD customers have filed complaints with the state Public Disclosure Commission against PUD after their June bills arrived with a flier supporting the Jefferson County Parks and Rec Levy. The complaints question whether public funds were used by the PUD to pay for political fliers. The *Peninsula Daily News* reports that according to PUD General Manager Joseph Wilson, the inclusion was an honest mistake. Apparently, the PUD employee who received the flyer request was unaware that it was relevant to voting, and therefore illegal to include.

The PUD pays a company to perform its bill stuffing, and they always pass on the cost of the fliers to the organization that submitted them. No PUD funds were used to cover the inclusion, said Wilson, adding that the PUD strives not to be involved in politics.

And finally, starting July 5, PUD customers will see a new \$4 rate reduction funding charge listed separately on their monthly bills, along with a new tiered discount structure for the low-income assistance program. The new policy lowers the residential base electric fee from \$36.50 to \$32.90, but with the new \$4 monthly rate reduction charge customers will now pay \$36.90 per month. Customers who qualify for the low-income program are exempt from the \$4 charge, and under the new tiered structure, customers with the greatest financial need will receive larger discounts.

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 safe, fire-free Fourth.