

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, July 15, 2026.

This week we're featuring two stories by *Beacon* reporter Rachael Nutting.

An emergency sweep of an unsanctioned encampment near Mill Road took place Tuesday, July 14, 2026, as county officials balanced immediate public safety concerns with compassion for a large group of individuals who had called the wooded area home just two weeks prior. By Tuesday's deadline, only eight residents remained out of 15 to 20 from two weeks ago, according to Alicia Artis from Discovery Behavioral Health's REAL (Recovery, Empowerment, Advocacy and Linkage) team. Two accepted invitations to camp on a friend's property, while service providers, including Bayside Housing and OlyCAP, worked to arrange housing placement for others.

The encampment had evolved into makeshift neighborhoods complete with pathways, fencing, and even a small garden. The June 24 fire that triggered the decision to sweep the encampment burned a 75-by-100-foot area and required about 35 firefighters and more than four hours to extinguish fully. East Jefferson Fire Rescue Chief Bret Black urged county commissioners to take immediate action, citing difficult emergency access and unsafe conditions for both residents and first responders.

Public Health Director Apple Martine emphasized the county's commitment to centering dignity in the transition. In a July 13 statement to the *Beacon*, she wrote, "The County is balancing public health and safety with respect to personal property, basic needs, the elements and connections to care and resources."

Public Health's Harm Reduction Team was present, offering mobile outreach services, care navigation, and supplies. Resources were available onsite to collect, store, track and transport belongings for those in transition. Dr. Allison Berry, the Health Officer for Clallam and Jefferson counties, expressed concern about the health impacts of displacement, noting that they see a spike in hospitalizations, overdoses, and deaths after an encampment sweep. She also said that there was an overdose after the last encampment sweep, which took place in November 2025 behind the DSHS building.

Not everything is bleak, however. OlyCAP is developing an integrated program to follow people from homelessness to housing, including six months of post-placement stabilization support. The program is a partnership with Jefferson Healthcare and will be coordinated across counties. Viola Ware, OlyCAP's Director of Housing and Community Development, noted that the program will have no age cap and is first-come, first-served rather than asking participants to go through the normal intake process.

The need for care providers and government entities to work closer together inspired a meeting on July 10 that brought together County Commissioners, City Manager Mauro, County Administrator Peters and most local housing and service providers. Olycap's Holly Morgan described the discussion as "thoughtful," and Ware noted that a follow-up meeting is scheduled for July 23 to maintain momentum.

Our next story also features thoughtful collaboration. The City Council and staff emerged from their annual retreat on Monday, July 13, with a refined focus on housing affordability and water infrastructure, following a full day of workshops and ranking exercises at the Port Pavilion building. By 1pm, the council had narrowed a lengthy list of potential projects, using green and red dots on whiteboards to signal which items were high

priority. The group then moved to a more detailed ranking process, directly comparing proposed initiatives to build a prioritized list of non-statutory projects for the coming fiscal year.

Proposals related to housing affordability dominated the top tier of the ranking. The Affordable Housing Grants Program and expansion of the Multifamily Tax Exemption (MFTE) were frequently pitted against one another, with council members acknowledging that both are critical components of the city's housing strategy.

Other key housing-related items that scored high included a Subdivision Code Reform project – noted as a state requirement that the city must implement – and an Infill Surplus Property proposal for affordable housing development.

The Water Storage Study emerged as another top priority, driven by its foundational importance to the city's long-term resilience and growth. Council Member Libby Wennstrom argued for its placement, stating, “If we don’t have a reliable water supply, we’ve got a whole other set of problems.” This sentiment was echoed by colleagues who noted that housing initiatives cannot succeed without ensuring adequate water resources.

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.