

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Thursday, July 2, 2020.

The nonprofit Jefferson Community Foundation that administers funds for a variety of charitable causes has vacated its offices over the posting of a Black Lives Matter sign, but the circumstances leading up to the action are in dispute.

In a Facebook post, JCF Executive Director Sioban Canty described the situation, stating that the organization was given notice in mid June that they needed to immediately vacate their space in the Salmon Office Park in Port Hadlock because a Black Lives Matter sign they taped on the window violated a clause in the lease requiring approval for signage. Canty goes on to say that the "JCF staff and Board are unequivocally committed to equality and we stand with and support the goals of the Black Lives Matter movement. At this pivotal moment of reckoning in our country and specifically in this County, it is imperative that each of us act in support of what we believe. So we are actively seeking a new home for JCF."

The signage consisted of several "Black Lives Matter" leaflets taped together, covering an entire window of the JCF storefront.

The owners of the business park take issue with Canty's position, that the Facebook post's headline "Jefferson County Foundation Forced to Move" is incorrect, and that the foundation's decision to leave was its own. According to property manager Brent Garrett, he sent an email to JCF telling them to remove the signs on June 12, stating they violated a clause in the lease prohibiting political signs. When that message was ignored he invoked the two week notice that following Sunday. The signs were removed on Monday.

Canty apparently did not receive the first email and began plans to relocate. Garrett provided a copy of a June 17 email reflecting a cordial exchange between himself and Canty, where she says she does not want to part on bad terms and could move out earlier than June 30 if the rent was reimbursed. Garrett responded, acknowledging the misunderstanding of the initial unread email, "that could be forgiven if you would like to stay."

But JCF continued the move out process even though it did not-and still does not-have a definite new location.

After the Facebook post, attorney Matthew Lind, representing the business park, outlined the initial position, threatening a defamation charge if JCF did not revise or soften its social media position. "My client's demands were solely for business purposes, not political," Lind wrote. "This has nothing to do with my client's opinion about the BLM movement."

The first JCF Facebook post called out Garrett by name, while the second – posted yesterday, perhaps in response to Lind's letter – was conciliatory, stating "It is critical that we all use this moment to be for ending systemic racism and not against a specific person or business. JCF is clear that our mission and capacity should not be consumed by a single act but should be dedicated to serving as an ongoing asset to efforts to dismantle systemic racism broadly in Jefferson County."

Garrett, mentioned in the original post, says he was deluged by hate mail accusing him of racism. Due to this, he has decided to quit his job and move out of the county because he no longer feels safe.

On the advice of his attorney he declined to share any of these mails. JCF also declined further comment, beyond those on its social media page.

JCF is currently soliciting contributions toward its moving expenses, managed through its website and social media pages.

The Fourth of July is the day after tomorrow, and things will be a lot quieter around Jefferson County than last year. We can still expect some fireworks, so it might be best to keep your pets inside. People with horses have a bigger problem.

In a statement. East Jefferson Fire Rescue Interim Chief Brian Tracer reminds us that the possession and discharge of fireworks is illegal within Port Townsend city limits, although allowable in unincorporated areas. Permission from the property owner is required, and they are banned from use in parks and on county property.

Allowable fireworks times are from 9am to 11pm Friday, and 9am to midnight on Saturday and Sunday. And the expected disclaimer: Always use common sense and have a water source available.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at 5pm Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news at kptz.org.

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.