

September 30, 2020: Local News — Bayside takes over Cherry St. project; city approves new downtown signs

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for September 30th, 2020.

Bayside Housing is taking over the Cherry Street apartment project, three years after the four-unit apartment building, called the Carmel building, was barged to Port Townsend from Victoria B.C.

The apartment building has an infamous history: with a loan from the city, the housing trust called Homeward Bound had the building barged over in 2017. It was placed on blocks and sat there until June of 2019, after a reorganization of Homeward Bound's board and the hiring of a new contractor.

As crews broke ground in 2019, with the intention of building an additional four units in the building, it became clear that the cost of the project was going to exceed what was originally planned.

Originally, it was estimated to cost \$475,000 to move the building and place it on top of the ground floor living spaces. The city loaned Homeward Bound around half that amount at the start. But at a meeting last November, Homeward Bound board member Paul Rice said the project would cost another \$1.3 million to be completed, not including the half-million already spent.

An \$834,000 20-year taxable bond provided funding to progress planning, design and engineering. The city also executed a 40-year loan agreement with Homeward Bound for \$925,000 with the expectation they would pay back the loan.

Now, Bayside Housing is taking on the project. Bayside is a service that operates in tandem with the Old Alcohol Plant in Port Hadlock. A block of rooms in the hotel are used as "transitional housing" for those who currently don't have homes. But Bayside has been wanting to expand their services for a while. During the pandemic, the organization opened 10 more rooms in the hotel for transitional housing. And the director, Gary Keister, has been hoping to launch a tiny home village for farmworkers and other workers in need of housing.

At a city council meeting on September 28, the council voted to authorize the city manager, John Mauro, to negotiate agreements with Homeward Bound and Bayside Housing to negotiate a final purchase and sale agreement in order to transfer the Cherry Street property to Bayside.

In a press release from the city, Mayor Michelle Sandoval stated that she is thankful to see a viable path forward to complete the project. The city took considerable risk, she said, and that risk didn't initially pay off. She said she is grateful for Homeward Bound's hard work and to Bayside for stepping up to get the project finished.

Thanks to heavy rains last week, East Jefferson Fire Rescue announced an easing of the strict burn ban that took place in September.

Recreational campfires are now allowed in Jefferson County. Washington State Parks has also adjusted its Burn Ban to allow wood fires in approved fire pits within designated areas, along with gas or propane fires.

Land clearing/debris burning fires within Jefferson County is still illegal, however.

For updates on the burn ban rules, go to the East Jefferson Fire Rescue website or Facebook page.

The city council voted on Monday to remove and replace the wayfinding signs IN downtown Port Townsend.

The wayfinder signs are located along Water Street downtown. They're equipped with a map of the historic district, and some have a few plaques with the names of local businesses. When the signs were first erected, the city allowed business owners to purchase plaques on the signs to let visitors know they were there.

According to Nathan Barnett, Director of Olympic Peninsula Steam, which was a partner in the original sign project, the signs are well designed and well placed, but they haven't been very effective.

City manager John Mauro said that the project phased out in 2015, and now many of the plaques on the sign are out of date or inaccurate.

Now, city staff members are working with PT Main Street and Jefferson County Historical Society to come up with new signs that follow a theme based on the history of Port Townsend.

Drafted versions of the new signs show old photographs of Port Townsend and contain historical information about sites such as Union Wharf and what used to be Chinatown. There will be a total of 14 signs both uptown and downtown. The new design will not include a space for merchant information.

The project will cost approximately \$3,200, and though the city budgeted for the cost, Barnett surprised city councillors with an offer for Olympic Peninsula Steam to cover the cost of the project. The city council approved the project, with an addition that allowed for staff to explore alternative funding if possible.

And that's it for today's local news. KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at five PM Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. I'm Lily Haight. Thanks for listening.