

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Steve Evans, and this is the local news for Thursday, September 2, 2021.

The sun rose this morning at 6:31am, which is a full ten minutes later than last Thursday, and will set this evening at 7:50pm, which is thirteen minutes earlier than one week ago. There was a low tide of about four inches at 7:21 this morning, and high tide in Port Townsend this afternoon will reach a high water mark of eight feet at about a quarter past four. The Weather Underground website predicts a sunny day with a high of 69 degrees Fahrenheit and a low of 49 tonight and light winds out of the west all afternoon. The forecast chance of rain remains below 25% for the next ten days.

With a September 30 deadline looming for the expiration of the Washington state eviction moratorium, local officials, nonprofits, churches, and housing and shelter activists have been working overtime to prepare for an anticipated surge of displaced and newly unhoused individuals and families in eastern Jefferson County at the end of the month. Although the full scope of the problem by then is impossible to predict, whatever additional demand for housing arises will come on top of a status quo that is already dramatically failing to meet local needs.

It is not only the homeless that are feeling the crunch. A dearth of affordable housing – or housing at any price – is leading to labor shortages virtually everywhere in town. Many restaurants and shops have had to reduce their hours or even close because they can't find employees, and that's often because potential employees can't find a place to live. The Washington State Ferries has had to cancel sailings due to inadequate crew. Even the organizations seeking to help ease the crisis have been affected. The Community Outreach Association Shelter Team, known by the acronym COAST, which founded the homeless shelter at the American Legion in 2005, lost both of its previous two chairs when they each separately lost their housing in Port Townsend to rental home sales.

And at a time when the biggest surge yet in COVID-19 cases on the North Olympic Peninsula is filling hospital beds, Jefferson Healthcare is struggling to address a staffing shortage that is exacerbated not only by pandemic burnout but by the fact that people who would like to move to Port Townsend to work at the hospital can't find housing. According to Jefferson Healthcare Emergency Room nurse Peggy St. Clair, with whom I spoke in a telephone interview, the competition among regional hospitals for capable staff is stiff. She said she personally was recently offered a \$27,000 bonus if she would take a different job in Shelton, an offer she turned down – luckily for Port Townsend. But St. Clair is seventy, and says the stress of the pandemic is making her think hard about retirement, as many of her colleagues already have – even though she says she has always loved her work. This phase of the pandemic, when the sickest patients she is seeing are those who chose not to be vaccinated, is much harder to deal with, she said.

Fortunately, an array of creative efforts, both public and private, are underway to address the housing crisis, and those efforts are recently becoming better coordinated, thanks to the efforts of several volunteers with the Housing Solutions Network, who have organized a series of meetings between leaders of stakeholder organizations like the one last Friday afternoon under the tent beside the Community Build Project – the colorful tiny houses that can be seen beside the Evangelical Bible Church on San Juan Avenue built by the growing organization of volunteer carpenters, and before that Peter's Place, the first local tiny house community located at the Community United Methodist Church in Port Hadlock.

County Commissioner Greg Brotherton was there to give a presentation on the County's tight schedule for the purchase of thirty acres of undeveloped land at the intersection of Highway 20 and Mill Road just outside of town, with the immediate goal of preparing the site to receive the relocation of the homeless encampment that has been situated at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds for a year when the eviction moratorium expires at the end of the month, and the longer term goal of building a model transitional housing facility with multiple services.

Bayside Housing Director Gary Keister was there to give an assessment of need. Aside from giving administrative and other support to both Peter's Place and the Fairgrounds encampment, Bayside operates the transitional and affordable housing project at the Old Alcohol Plant in Port Hadlock. The waiting list for Bayside's transitional units, he said, had doubled in the last months from 48 to 96. "The problem," he said, "is we have no place for people to transition to."

Executive Director Cherish Cronmiller and Housing Director Kathy Morgan of the social services nonprofit Olympic Community Action Programs, or OlyCAP, which recently broke ground for a new affordable 43-unit apartment complex located on Castle Hill were there, as were Pastors Bill Wolfe and Melannie Jackson of New Life Church who are planning to provide safe parking for people living in their cars. Housing Solutions Network volunteer Carla Main also spoke on behalf of the Safe Parking Network. COAST, the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Community Build Project were also represented, among others.

Many of those who came said they found inspiration in a video about a planned affordable housing community in Austin, Texas that has been circulating recently, titled *Community First*. A couple of abbreviated versions of the film are available for free on YouTube, and the full film is available through the Community Build Project (<https://community-build.org/>). A call was put out for volunteers to help the people at the fairgrounds move to the Mill Road site at the end of the month. OlyCAP will be the lead organization in that move.

Beginning Saturday, September 4, all patrons entering an indoor restaurant or bar in Jefferson and Clallam Counties must provide proof they are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, according to a public health order issued today by Doctor Allison Berry, Health Officer for Jefferson and Clallam counties. "Indoor bars and restaurants are known to pose a high risk for COVID-19 transmission, as they encourage unmasking of large groups of people indoors," reports Dr. Berry. "Our goal is to make these safer places to be and to reduce transmission in our communities, allowing our hospitals to keep functioning and our schools to open more safely this fall." Acceptable forms of proof of vaccination include a completed CDC vaccination card, a State Department of Health Certificate of COVID-19 Vaccination, a printed copy of a State Department of Health vaccine record, a photograph of any of those documents, or an app-based vaccine passport.

According to the order, a person is fully vaccinated when they have received all the required doses of a vaccine for COVID-19 and 14 days have passed since the final dose. For the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, two doses are required. Johnson & Johnson's vaccine requires only one. Employees of bars and restaurants who mask continuously while in the building do not need to provide proof of vaccination. Additionally, children younger than 12, who are ineligible for vaccination, may enter without showing proof.

As of last month, 495 outbreaks of COVID-19 have been traced to restaurants and bars in Washington State, including several in Jefferson and Clallam Counties, according to the most recent outbreak situation report from the Washington State Department of Health. "Given the ability of the Delta variant to spread beyond 6 feet when people are unmasked indoors, we believe that a vaccine requirement will be more effective and less costly than the capacity limitations we saw last year," Dr. Berry said. "We want to keep businesses open while

protecting the public. This is how we do it.” Vaccination remains the most powerful tool we have to reduce illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19. In Washington State, 94% of those who have been hospitalized and 92% of those who have died due to COVID-19 were unvaccinated. “With hospitals around our region stretched to the breaking point, we need to do everything we can to keep our communities safe” Dr. Berry said. “Getting vaccinated with this incredible vaccine, which is safe, effective, free and life-saving, is simply the right thing to do.”

And that’s it for today’s local news. 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@kptz.org. This is Steve Evans for KPTZ Community Radio News. Thank you for listening.