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KPTZ 91.9FM ANNOUNCES PLANS TO JOIN THE LIFELONG LEARNING CENTER

Radio Port Townsend explores new studio space, transmitter site at Fort Worden

PORT TOWNSEND, WASH.—KPTZ 91.9 FM could be the next organization to call Fort Worden home.

The Fort Worden Public Development Authority (PDA) and KPTZ have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding that outlines the potential for the radio station to move its operations to Fort Worden, and the steps each organization must take to secure the necessary approvals.

“The prospect of relocating to Fort Worden is exciting because it would place KPTZ amongst Port Townsend's vibrant arts, culture and education community, where we have many natural synergies,” said Robert Ambrose, KPTZ Board Chair and interim General Manager. “Such a move would greatly expand KPTZ’s ability to inform our communities about the diversity of activities at the Fort and to give ‘voice’ to its tenant organizations.”

The agreement highlights KPTZ’s interest in reestablishing its broadcasting studios and administrative offices in the basement of Building 305, the cornerstone facility in Fort Worden’s proposed Makers Square redevelopment project, and relocating the radio station’s transmitter tower to Artillery Hill.

“KPTZ’s mission and values align closely with that of the Fort Worden Lifelong Learning Center (FWLLC) as it provides extensive training for volunteers of all ages ranging from sound editing to journalism,” said PDA Executive Director Dave Robison. “The radio station already partners closely with Centrum to broadcast Free Fridays and other concert series; if it were to relocate to the Fort, KPTZ could develop many more collaborative partnerships here.”

KPTZ is a nonprofit, community radio station licensed by the FCC serving principally East Jefferson County. Since May 2011, KPTZ has operated as the only full-service, non-commercial educational station in the county, offering a wide variety of locally-produced news, information and entertainment programs. Today, KPTZ’s operations are anchored in two locations. Its broadcast transmitter is located on private property leased to the radio station, while its office and studio spaces are located in a 900 square-foot portable classroom at the Mountain View Commons, leased from the City of Port Townsend.

In addition to securing approval from Washington State Parks, KPTZ anticipates needing to raise \$500,000 to cover the costs of relocating the transmitter and accompanying infrastructure, as well as moving and other expenses associated with tenant improvements in Building 305 at Fort Worden.

“While our move to Fort Worden will expand the services we are able to provide to our community, it also will provide long-term facility stability to continue serving the community far into the future,” said Ambrose.

If KPTZ is successful, it would be the first organization to join the FWLLC since the Port Townsend School of the Arts opened in Building 306 in June 2016.

A STRONGER SIGNAL

In 1906, the US Army constructed a radio transmitter atop Artillery Hill and since 2014, KPTZ has eyed the site as an alternative location for its transmitter.

“The site would provide exceptional broadcast coverage within our FCC license, and has the potential to improve reception in downtown Port Townsend and southern Jefferson County,” said Ambrose.

KPTZ directed its initial inquiries to Washington State Parks but discovered that the cost would be prohibitive.

“It became apparent that a use agreement [with State Parks] for the transmitter site would be based on KPTZ being a commercial vendor, such as a cell phone provider,” Ambrose said. “The associated costs were significant, thus we abandoned the process.”

However recently KPTZ learned that it will not have the option to renew the lease for its current transmitter site, which is set to expire in 2019.

“Changing the location of our transmission must pass through regulatory agencies, such as the FCC and its Canadian equivalent,” Ambrose said. “It’s a lengthy regulatory process that requires approximately 12-14 months to complete, so it is crucial that we identify a new location as soon as possible.”

Recognizing KPTZ’s strengths as a potential program partner and the compatibility of the historic radio facilities on Artillery Hill, the PDA approached State Parks about amending its Master Lease area to include the Artillery Hill site in order to be able to include KPTZ as a new tenant organization, said Robison.

In 2014, State Parks and the PDA collaborative management agreement and 50-year Master Lease for the Life-long Learning Center campus, which occupies 90-acres at the heart of Fort Worden, a 434-acre National Historic Landmark. State Parks remains steward of the parklands and natural resources. The PDA manages all operations within the 90-acre FWLLC including tenant leases and facility use, hospitality and guest services, capital improvements and program development

“Rehabilitating the 1908 radio station in a manner that preserves its historic integrity and gives it new life is a win-win-win—for State Parks, for the PDA and for KPTZ,” Robison said. “However, the process of amending our Master Lease and incorporating a new tenant partner is one that takes time and collaboration. Our three organizations will be working toward an agreeable solution over the next few months.”

STUDIO OUTGROWN

During its first six years on-air, KPTZ has produced an astonishing variety of quality programming and established itself as a key asset for the community, said Ambrose, but operations have outgrown the space.

With plans underway to renovate Mountain View Commons, KPTZ leadership has been considering alternative locations both within the complex (the former Red Cross room for example) and outside of it; but few spaces presented the desired square footage, said Ambrose. In October, he informed the City of KPTZ’s intent to relocate to Fort Worden.

“Our portable classroom was originally converted into three small studios and an office by volunteers, and equipped with funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, but after six years of operations we have outgrown it,” Ambrose said. “If we are to continue to evolve as public radio station and a community asset, we need a larger space designed specifically for our purposes.”

AN ARTISTIC HUB

In the spring of 2017, KPTZ staff participated in a public process with more than 40 other community stakeholders to develop the vision for Makers Square, a new artistic hub at Fort Worden. Makers Square will consist of nine vacant or underutilized historic structures renovated into a 21st Century showcase for creative community building and placemaking. The Makers Square journey begins with a \$13 million capital campaign to transform the first three buildings— 305, 308, 324— over the next three years.

“Built in 1905 as the Quartermaster Storehouse, Building 305 is one of the most significant historic structures at Fort Worden. It will serve as the nucleus for new arts, culture and education programs,” Robison said. “Offering more than 15,000 square-feet of programmatic space, Building 305 will be reconfigured into flexible classrooms, galleries, studios and workspaces.”

At the southern end of the basement of Building 305 is a 2,100 square-foot space surrounded by a solid rock foundation. In early discussion, project architects and stakeholders identified specific activities such as a digital arts, sound recording and photography as best uses of the low-light, subterranean space, said Robison.

“Our ideal space is approximately 2,000 square-feet able to accommodate on-air and production studios, a performance broadcast studio, a music library and offices,” said Ambrose. “Makers Square and Building 305 is in close proximity to its 13 tenant partner organizations as well as key performance facilities, including the Wheeler Theater, the USO Building and McCurdy Pavilion.

“I don’t think there could be a better placement for KPTZ’s studios.”

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