

This is KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nhatt Nichols, bringing news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, October 28, 2026.

The City of Port Townsend has asked a Thurston County Superior Court judge to pause the state Growth Management Hearings Board decision that has already thrown the city's zoning code into limbo, warning that their ruling has already delayed affordable housing projects, confused developers, and jeopardized millions of dollars in state grants.

The motion is the latest update in the legal fight initiated by Affordable Hometown Port Townsend and four individual residents who successfully challenged Ordinance 3361 – the city's 10-year update to its Comprehensive Plan and development regulations. The Growth Management Board found the City's Comp Plan noncompliant with the Growth Management Act largely on public participation grounds, specifically targeting a last-minute "6-plex amendment" that the City Council added to the R-II zone density table without reopening a Planning Commission public hearing.

According to City Attorney Austin Watkins, the board's invalidity order went further than its own findings, invalidating all increases in density to the R-II zone and related amendments. The City argues the language is dangerously vague, noting that the growth management board's findings addressed only the 6-plex amendment – yet the invalidation appears to sweep in a wide range of other charges, including setbacks, lot sizes, building heights, parking minimums, and lot coverage.

City Planner Emma Bolin shared a growing list of projects affected by the uncertainty including Habitat for Humanity's planned 11-unit Carter Commons project at 10th and Hancock Street. Its director warned that the organization may cease planning potential building projects in Port Townsend for a period of time. This is due to the uncertainty of the broad scope of invalidity that may affect more than just the R-II zoning.

OlyCAP has also halted predevelopment work on replacing the aging eight-unit Haines Street Cottages with multifamily units. That project would have provided permanently affordable rental apartments.

City analysis suggests that ruling could eliminate up to 184 affordable housing units on city-owned surplus property, with potentially another 400 units lost if additional property is designated.

Permit applications, code enforcement cases, and even a proposed cohousing project have been left without clear answers on which rules apply. The Falling Waters project, started by Ann Raab of Green Pods, will be an environmentally friendly continuing care facility for seniors. However, the current concept could be viewed as a multifamily development with five individual kitchens, which is not allowed with the current moratorium.

Bolin also notes that permit applications, such as relocating a shed or rebuilding an existing deck, have been affected by the uncertainty around current zoning rules. Because of recent changes to state law encouraging greater density to support housing, many of the city's R-II zoning rules prior to the December 2025 Comp Plan adoption are no longer valid, leaving permit applicants in a "limbo" state and the City Planning Department unable to process some applications.

Interim City Manager Steve King warned that the ruling also cuts off the city's access to state funding tied to Growth Management Act compliance, including Public Works Board loans and the Centennial Clean Water Fund. To date, no permit applications have been filed for market-rate or luxury multifamily developments. The City contends it has satisfied the two-part requirement for a stay: the petition for judicial review presents debatable issues, and a stay is necessary to preserve the fruits of an appeal.

If they are not granted a stay, the City must complete all of the remedial work ordered by the growth management board by February 15, 2027 – an effort estimated at over \$1 million in staff time and consultant costs, requiring an estimated six months to redo what originally took 18 months of public process.

The hearing to determine if they are allowed to pause the Growth Management Board is scheduled for 9am November 6 at the Thurston County Superior Court in Olympia. If granted, the stay would suspend the February compliance deadline until the judicial review concludes, restoring permitting and grant eligibility in the interim.

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. I'm Nhatt Nichols. Thanks for listening.