

The Leader

Old airstrip gives way to 138 homes

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New sewer system unlocks largest affordable housing project in county history

September 02, 2026

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▶ 0:00 / 0:00



Jefferson County Commissioner Heidi Eisenhour, Chimacum School District Superintendent Scott Mauk, U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, U.S. Rep. Emily Randall and Jefferson Community Foundation President and CEO Siobhan Cauty prepare to toss shovelfuls of dirt during the Mason Street Neighborhood groundbreaking Aug. 26 in Port Hadlock. Leader photo by Alex Frick

For 27 years, County Commissioner Heidi Eisenhour waited for sewer infrastructure

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Standing on a former airstrip where Habitat for Humanity plans to build 138 permanently affordable homes, she watched as that vision began to take shape.

Aug. 26, Habitat for Humanity of East Jefferson County broke ground on the Mason Street Neighborhood, marking the start of construction on the largest affordable housing development in East Jefferson County's history.

"It took us 27 years to get to this day where we're actually building it," Eisenhour said.

The 17-acre development will include 136 attached single-family homes and two group homes for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"This is momentous," said Adrienne Goolsbee, senior vice president for the U.S. and Canada at Habitat for Humanity International. "It's the first time where you've had this type of mixed-income affordable housing development in this county."

Goolsbee said Mason Street represents a shift for Habitat from building individual homes or small groups of homes toward building larger neighborhoods.

"How do we move from this builder-to-developer mindset?" Goolsbee said.

That approach brings together public and private partners and multiple sources of funding to build more homes at once, she said.

"You've got to build a little bit more densely. You've got to actually include the green space. You want to make sure that the community thrives, and that it does remain permanently affordable for the long haul," Goolsbee said.

The first phase will begin with roads, utilities and other infrastructure on the west end of the property, followed by the construction of 32 homes. Habitat for Humanity Executive Director of East Jefferson County Jamie Maciejewski said the first homes are expected to be completed in about 15 months.

"Thanks to deep community generosity, we have the resources in hand to complete the first phase and the 32 homes that go with it. We are still working to secure the

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell said that without wastewater service, the property could have accommodated only three homes.

Cantwell and then-U.S. Rep. Derek Kilmer helped secure \$3 million in federal funding for the Port Hadlock sewer system, while Jefferson County allocated \$3.4 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding.

“We need more affordable housing all across the United States,” Cantwell said. “These homes are going to give nurses, teachers, first responders the right to live right here in this community.”

After the ceremony, Cantwell said housing shortages are increasingly affecting rural communities and their ability to attract workers.

“People realize it’s happening everywhere,” Cantwell said. “It’s not just happening in urban areas. It’s happening in rural communities too.”

U.S. Rep. Emily Randall spoke about housing instability within her own family and the range of people now struggling to find affordable homes.

“Seniors looking to downsize but unable to find an affordable smaller place. Young people who want to move out of their parents’ homes but don’t know where they can move to,” Randall said. “These are real challenges for our community.”

That pressure has reached the neighboring Chimacum School District.

“Many of our families struggle to own or even rent a decent house,” Superintendent Scott Mauk said. “Some of our families leave the district because of the lack of affordable housing.”

Mauk said the shortage also makes recruiting and retaining school employees difficult, with some commuting from neighboring counties.

“We’re thrilled about our 138 new neighbors to the north,” Mauk said.

For Eisenhower, the groundbreaking marked both how far Port Hadlock has come

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