

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Thursday, March 19, 2020.

The Port Townsend City Council and the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners will meet this afternoon to develop a strategy to coordinate services from both government and non government agencies during the continuing COVID 19 emergency.

The meeting takes place at 5 PM today in council chambers at Port Townsend City Hall and is theoretically open to the public. People are encouraged to not attend, rather they can watch live video on the city's web site. KPTZ is now working to overcome some technical obstacles that will allow us to broadcast the meeting.

Jefferson County Public Health officer Dr. Tom Locke is expected to give a short presentation about the latest COVID 19 impacts on the community. Other participants include the Chamber of Commerce, Emergency Operations Center, Main Street, and the Local Investing Opportunities Network, or LION. Mayor Michelle Sandoval told KPTZ that she expects most of these agencies to present their information remotely through conference calls.

Sandoval told us that the meeting will help the community navigate what is essentially uncharted territory.

According to the agenda, each participant will address COVID-19 economic issues, coordinating the response, aid to the community, and impact on businesses and employees. In the future the government could force businesses to shut down, but that has not yet occurred. Still, Sandoval said that several merchants have closed down voluntarily to prevent the spread of the virus. They did so reluctantly, Sandoval reported, as last weekend was especially busy due to an influx of tourists. One possible strategy is for all merchants to close down for two weeks, impose a heavy cleaning regimen and re-open using best practices.

Both the City and the Public Utility District will not shut off service for nonpayment during the duration of the emergency. According to a PUD resolution approved on Tuesday, reliable water, electricity, sewer and telecommunications services are critical to compliance with the statewide emergency directives; ensuring proper hygiene necessary to prevent the transmission of the disease and ensuring citizens, businesses, public agencies, service organizations and educational institutions are able to remain productive through use of utility systems during this state of emergency.

Customers experiencing financial difficulties due to the emergency are asked to contact the PUD or the city.

As of this morning, four Jefferson County residents have tested positive for the virus, although none of them are thought to have contacted the disease locally. They are all currently isolated, either at home or at a care facility.

Of the 242 patients tested, 103 are negative while the remaining 135 are awaiting the results. The increase in testing results from Jefferson Healthcare establishing a drive-through testing facility. The service, which resembles others that are emerging across the country, operates from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday and is on an appointment-only basis.

These tests will be administered after the patient is screened and a high likelihood of infection is determined by a health care professional. The first step in acquiring a test is for the patient to call the COVID 19 respiratory nurse contact line, 360-344-3094, to describe symptoms and determine next steps.

Once collected, the tests are sent to the University of Washington with a three-day turnaround. According to a hospital spokesperson, the testing process is going well, aside from a need to conserve protective supplies for the staff.

Due to cancellations resulting from the COVID-19 emergency, KPTZ is suspending the community and entertainment calendars that normally follow this broadcast. Beginning Monday we will present community resources, a listing of short items to help our listeners cope with the local life as the situation worsens. This will include new services designed to help people stay in place until the emergency subsides. You can submit items for this daily feature by writing resources@kptz.org.

KPTZ 91.9 FM Port Townsend brings you local news and information Monday through Saturday at Noon, and at 5 PM Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. News coverage will increase in response to the COVID-19 emergency. If you have any news or information for this program please send a message to news@kptz.org. And again, please contact us at resources@kptz.org if you have a community item.

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening to KPTZ News.