

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Tuesday March 31, 2020.

The Jefferson County Department of Public Health reports there are now sixteen local cases of COVID-19. Of these, six are designated as in-county exposures while ten are presumed out of county exposures. Of 510 patients tested 426 have come back negative while just 68 are awaiting the results.

This just in: The Port Townsend Farmer's Market will postpone its projected opening, scheduled for this Saturday, April 4. In an email to KPTZ, market director Amanda Milholland said that many public officials, such as Port Townsend Mayor Michelle Sandoval and County Health Officer Dr. Thomas Locke supported opening, and the proposed safety plan would protect both vendors and customers.

Despite this, Milholland made the decision to postpone in response to several messages from the community who opposed opening the market while stay-at-home rules are in place. Even with an equal number of supportive messages, she decided that postponement was the wisest path, noting that several local businesses were depending on the market to give their flagging businesses a needed boost.

The county approved opening the market last week, giving it the same designation as a supermarket. The proposed safety-related changes included removing the middle vendor row, providing a ten-foot space between vendors, and eliminating the tables and benches. Milholland feels the safety practices will protect customers and vendors, stating that produce in a farmer's market is handled by fewer people than in a supermarket.

The perception of masks is changing. Days ago, health officials were saying that masks are necessary for those infected by COVID-19 but not so useful for the uninfected. Over the last few days, some have recommended that everyone who goes outside should protect themselves with a mask. This has prompted people to create masks at home using patterns supplied by health officials.

The Jefferson County Emergency Operations Center has instructions on its website for those who want to create the masks. Once completed with an approved design, craftspeople are instructed to put multiple masks into a sealable bag and deliver them to library drop boxes in Port Townsend and Port Hadlock.

Community-made masks will be available from 9 am to 11 am at eight locations: Salish Coast Elementary, Jefferson County Airport, Port Townsend Safeway, Port Townsend Food Co-op, Quilcene Village Store, and QFC in Port Hadlock.

At Monday's weekly briefing before the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, health officer Dr. Thomas Locke said there are no food shortages at this time, and local stores are fully stocked. Even so, people should maintain social distancing practices while shopping. And don't go into a store that if a store seems busy; go back at another time.

State Parks are officially closed, but Port Townsend residents can still enjoy the local treasure that is Fort Worden State Park. The park is closed to vehicle traffic, and public restrooms are not available. Visitors can still access the park from outside the fence, while exercising caution and courtesy as to where they park. Access is also available from the North Beach area.

At this point, the effect of the closure on the planned relocation of KPTZ to the park is undetermined.

This is the first week of Olympic Disposal's reconfigured trash collection services. Customers received the new containers earlier this month, for garbage and yard waste. The biggest change is ending weekly garbage collection service, which will alternate weeks with yard waste and recycling.

This week is designated as "blue," which signals garbage collection, while yellow weeks are for yard waste and recycling. This week is an exception. Recycling will be collected, but the new schedule takes effect in full next week. So we get two consecutive weeks of recycling collection, to compensate for all those extra beer cans and wine bottles generated by the average household.

While the old 32-gallon garbage cans can be repurposed for other household purposes, the disposal company will collect and recycle those cans during the week of April 13.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Friday and at five PM Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news at kptz dot org.

This is Charlie Bermant with today's news, keeping in mind that everything will change tomorrow.