

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Thursday, May 14, 2020.

The Jefferson County COVID-19 numbers held steady this week at 29 reported cases. We lasted four full weeks with no new cases but that changed last weekend when a woman in her 90s contracted the disease. She was the county's first case to be hospitalized, but she was discharged this week.

Testing continues, with 72 tests administered since Tuesday. Of the 1116 tested to date, 1054 – 98.3% – tested negative. while 3% tested positive for the presence of the virus. Thirty three people are now awaiting test results.

According to the governor's guidelines, the appearance of a new case disqualifies the county from requesting a waiver for the early reopening of certain qualified businesses. Even if a waiver application is in doubt, county officials are meeting next Tuesday to discuss how a variance application will proceed. The virtual meeting will include the County Commissioners, the Board of Health, and the Port Townsend City Council, along with Port and PUD commissioners.

Some of the sectors that can be included in the application include: recreation, gatherings, travel, manufacturing, new construction, in-home/domestic services, in-store retail, real estate, professional services/office-based businesses, hair/nail salons and barbers, housecleaning and restaurants.

The meeting will be broadcast at 5pm Tuesday on the County website and here on KPTZ, both of which archive the meeting for later listening.

The meeting is physically closed, but public comment is encouraged through email, to both at <https://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/> on or before 4:30 pm on Tuesday.

Here in Port Townsend the Rhody Festival always takes place at the same time as candidate filing week. The festival is cancelled this year, but filings march on. The deadline is 4:30pm tomorrow, and we already have several competitive local races. Each of our three local state legislators – who are democratic incumbents – have drawn at least one challenger. There is a three-way race for the open District 2 Jefferson County Commissioners' seat between Democrats Heidi Eisenhour, Amanda Funaro, and Lorna Smith. If there are no additional filings, the next Board of Commissioners will have two of three female members.

District 1 Commissioner Kate Dean filed for a second term but has not yet drawn any opposition from either party. Should no one file against Dean she would be elected by acclimation. This is not unprecedented. In recent county history, in 2016 District 2 commissioner David Sullivan was unopposed.

Jefferson County Republican spokesperson Lynn Hicey said she knew of no candidates who planned to file for either commissioners' seat, and that she "sort of doubted" someone would file for Dean's seat.

It's not a done deal until 4:30 on Friday, when the filing period ends. And Jefferson County Republicans have a tradition of filing at the last minute.

Jefferson County Superior Court Judge Keith Harper and District 2 PUD Ken Collins are also unopposed at this time.

State Parks opened last weekend, with flocks of folks showing up at all three local parks. Parks Director Brian Hageman said the crowd level was as high as he'd ever seen at Fort Worden. But while the parking lots were full, once people entered the park they appeared to practice responsible social distancing.

Fort Flagler also drew crowds, as the abbreviated seaweed harvesting season was in effect.

Hageman said that toilets were in short supply, with only one flush facility open near the beach. The vault toilets on the hill were also open, all drawing long lines.

This week the weather has changed and the crowds have thinned. The parks have posted several signs featuring a raccoon with a mask warning that excessive crowds could lead to another park closure.

Hageman is now most concerned with staffing levels, worrying that the newly imposed hiring freeze will prevent assembling an adequate staff to maintain the parks through the summer.

The Port Townsend Farmer's Market continues this weekend, practicing effective social distancing from 9 am to noon on Saturday. And while the Chimacum Market begins on June 7, the Wednesday Market will not operate this year, according to market director Amanda Milholland.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at fivepm Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org.

This is Charlie Bermant with some of today's news. Thank you for listening.