

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for December 2, 2020.

The number of coronavirus cases in Jefferson County has increased to 170, with the Public Health department reporting three more cases yesterday, for a total of 10 new cases so far this week. There are currently 84 test results still pending. Six of the new cases are from Port Townsend, while four occurred in mid-county.

We report the latest numbers here on KPTZ News during our regular broadcasts, but cases are increasing on a daily basis. For the latest numbers, including gender breakdown and cumulative percentages, visit the Jefferson County Public Health website or the Jefferson County Government Facebook page.

The city's committee on law enforcement and public safety met on Monday night to discuss two controversial aspects of policing in America: qualified immunity for police officers and police union contracts.

Issues like qualified immunity – which is a judicial doctrine that protects law enforcement officers from being held personally liable for their excessive use of force or brutality – have been questioned across the country since the police killing of George Floyd. Floyd's death also put police unions under a microscope, since union contract provisions that protect officers can make it more difficult to hold police officers accountable.

City attorney Heidi Greenwood discussed the Port Townsend Police Department's union contract with committee members at the November 30th meeting, and also explained what qualified immunity is.

As city council members, the committee on law enforcement in Port Townsend does not have the power to end a judicial doctrine such as qualified immunity. But Greenwood noted other ways in which the committee and citizens of Port Townsend can contribute to the discussion on holding officers accountable, such as writing to congressional representatives.

Recently, the activist group "Campaign Zero" which emerged from protests against police brutality, has created a campaign called "Nix the Six" which calls for the end of six common practices of police unions that protect officers and prevent accountability. On top of that, a bill introduced by Senators Ed Markey, Bernie Sanders, and Elizabeth Warren, calls for Congress to eliminate qualified immunity and provide for accountability when police officers violate Americans' constitutional rights.

The committee on law enforcement and public safety, which was formed by the city council in June in the wake of protests over the killing of Floyd, will have one more meeting this year, on December 28. According to Mayor Michelle Sandoval, the purpose of that meeting will be to have a more full-bodied discussion about everything the committee has learned so far, and to bring up any questions, concerns, comments, or things that the committee would like to see changed with city policing.

So far, the committee has been briefed by Interim Police Chief Troy Surber about the police department's budget, its use of force policy, and training practices. The committee also heard about alternate policing methods, such as the PT Navigator position, school resource officer, and community safety officer.

At the last city council business meeting, the council voted to extend the timeline for the ad hoc committee, so that work can continue into the new year. The committee plans to meet in January and February to finish crafting a work plan for the future of the police department.

At the December meeting, the committee will bring forward any issues that still need to be discussed in the coming months. Members of the public can also submit comments, questions and concerns. To submit a comment, email publiccomment@cityoft.us at least two hours before the start of the December 30 meeting.

The city public works department reported another water main break on Monday, this time on Willow Street. In a post on Facebook, city employees warned residents on Rose Street that the water may be temporarily affected as crews worked to repair the pipe, but water was fully restored by Monday evening.

This is the second water main break in the past month. A water main broke at the intersection of Monroe and Water Streets on November 16, spilling 180,000 gallons of water. The pipe has been repaired, but that intersection remains closed to traffic as crews finish work on the road.

On November 23, Jefferson County Public Health completed an analysis of water samples from Port Townsend Bay for harmful bacteria as a result of the break, and removed the No Water Contact Advisory for that section of the Bay due to improved water conditions. Water samples taken from the bay on November 19 showed normal levels of bacteria.

And that's it for today's local news. KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at 5pm Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. I'm Lily Haight. Thanks for listening.