

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for April 7, 2021.

Jefferson County Public Health reported no new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. So far this week, five new cases have been reported, bringing our total case count to 351. There are currently six cases in active isolation, and 51 test results pending. For the most up to date information, visit the public health department's website (<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/DataDashboard>).

The Port Townsend City Council is still facing increasing calls to decriminalize entheogens, such as psychedelic mushrooms. The council had planned to meet about the issue next week, on April 12, but after the Washington Supreme Court ruled the state statute criminalizing drug possession unconstitutional – which decriminalized all drugs including entheogens – city staff decided to cancel that meeting. Members of the Port Townsend Psychedelic Society, and those who support the benefits of using natural psychedelic drugs for health and spiritual reasons, gave public comment at the city council meeting on April 5 expressing disappointment that the city acted so quickly to cancel the meeting on the topic of entheogens.

Port Townsend resident Mike Morissey explained in a detailed letter to the city that the State v. Blake ruling did not fulfill the Psychedelic Society's proposed resolutions request to not only decriminalize possession of entheogens, but to also decriminalize the growing, gathering and use of entheogens, as well as the desire to create advocacy for change at state and federal levels to remove entheogens from the list of Schedule 1 illegal drugs. Morissey also pointed out that the decriminalization of possession of all drugs, including addictive drugs such as meth and heroin, will amplify the need for increased awareness about the effects entheogens can have for people who struggle with addiction, anxiety, and depression.

At Monday night's meeting, city manager John Mauro said he plans to meet privately with members of the PT Psychedelic Society and with city council member Ariel Speser to discuss the group's goals. He said he hopes to advocate for the group to work on a state-level, instead of a local one, emphasizing that council is not avoiding the issue but that the city might not be the appropriate agency. The Psychedelic Society, however, specifically aims to encourage the city to follow along the lines of other cities across the country that have put in place resolutions decriminalizing entheogens, such as the city of Oakland, California and Ann Arbor, Michigan. Leaders of the Psychedelic Society are hoping that city officials will offer to host a county-wide discussion of the issue, that includes the Sheriff, chief of police, county commissioners and prosecutor.

As the Fort Worden PDA continues to restructure its board in the midst of financial insecurity and news of former mismanagement of funds by employees that was revealed to the community by a slew of public records published by the Port Townsend Leader, the city council passed a first reading Monday night of an ordinance that will add oversight to the financial workings of the PDA.

Initially, while drafting proposed changes to the city code, the city council expressed interest in creating a financial oversight committee that would monitor the PDA's finances. But PDA interim executive director and former city manager David Timmons expressed concern that creation of a committee could hurt the PDA's ability to attract investors and work its way out of its current financial crisis. At Monday night's meeting, city manager John Mauro emphasized that there needs to be a clear division of roles between the PDA, the city, and the state park; and that in its role, the city government needs to oversee, but not control the PDA.

So the city modified the drafted language to require the PDA to submit an operating budget to city staff each year. If the city finds that the budget is unbalanced or not in conformity with the purposes of the PDA, then that will trigger the meeting of a financial oversight committee to help the PDA develop an alternate budget. This will be in addition to requiring the PDA submit quarterly reports.

Mayor Michelle Sandoval added that at a meeting she attended last week with the State Auditor's Office, she learned that the state will be releasing the audit of the PDA's finances by the end of April. She added that the State Auditor officials said during the meeting that the previous PDA director, Dave Robison, was not as willing to ask for help when he needed it, either from the city or from the state. She said it also appeared to the auditor that the PDA board did not have a lot of involvement in the budget in the prior years. Sandoval was one of several council members who expressed a desire to create a more collaborative process with the PDA and the state park, and that the city's ordinance is a necessary step to regain the trust of the public, since many citizens have felt left in the dark about what has been happening at the PDA.

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.