

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for June 9, 2021.

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Jefferson County Public Health reported no new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. Right now, there are 5 active cases in isolation, and 70 test results pending. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been a total of 422 cases in Jefferson County.

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Representative Derek Kilmer joined the Port Townsend city council at their meeting on Monday night to share information about the American Rescue Plan Act, which will provide \$6.3 million in funds for Jefferson County, and about \$1.8 million for Port Townsend. Kilmer described some of the ways in which this funding can be used – such as for public health expenses in fighting the pandemic, or targeting the negative economic impacts caused by COVID-19, including everything from food assistance and housing assistance, but also premium pay for essential workers, and funding for infrastructure projects such as water, sewer, or broadband projects.

The Board of County Commissioners has discussed using the funds for “game changer” projects, such as purchasing land to build a new homeless shelter and housing assistance hub. Kilmer said he recognizes that housing access has been a challenge for Jefferson County before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and that those challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Kilmer also highlighted the Build Back Better Act, a bill which he is a lead sponsor, that will provide flexible, long-term grant assistance to communities who can't necessarily afford to spend time writing grants, or navigating the federal government's many grant programs. He said he hopes this bill will help small, rural communities access federal assistance to solve big problems. This week, the major focus in DC is on President Biden's infrastructure bill, which Kilmer said creates a framework that doesn't just focus on road and bridges, but also things like wastewater, affordable housing and broadband – which he hopes will not only put people to work now, but also lay the groundwork for economic growth over a long period of time.

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With federal dollars coming our way, the city council voted unanimously to hire a consulting firm to help do community outreach and develop a financial sustainability plan for the city. City financial director Nora Mitchell presented the proposal to the council Monday night to hire BERK Consulting, Inc. for two years for a total of \$34,000, to help develop a 2022 budget, complete a community engagement survey, compile benchmarking data, and create a long-term forecast model for the future of the city's finances.

BERK Consulting has worked with the city before on several projects, including the library strategic plan and the parks pros plan. Mitchell said city staff felt BERK excelled in community engagement efforts. In addition to hiring the consulting group, the council also voted to create a community financial sustainability task force, made up of eight at-large community members who will meet monthly for about ten months to help develop community engagement materials and strategies, and to provide recommendations to city council of strategies to ensure the long-term financial viability of the city.

City manager John Mauro explained that this project is one of the biggest priorities for the city at this moment, as it will focus on how the city funds the services that our community expects and needs, such as infrastructure services – roads, lights, water – as well investing in arts and culture, and the preservation of the city's natural environment and resources. Mauro said this project will require a long-term outlook and deep thinking about the cost of service provision. In the end, the goal is for BERK Consulting to work with the financial sustainability

task force to create a financial sustainability plan that the city council will vote on. There is no money budgeted for hiring BERK Consulting, but Mitchell said this project could be funded with American Rescue Plan dollars.

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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](mailto:news@kptz.org). I'm Lily Haight. Thanks for listening.