

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with with local news and commentary for Tuesday, June 15, 2021.

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COVID-19 cases in Jefferson County took an upswing this week, with twelve new cases reported yesterday. The total number is now 439 since counting began in April 2020. Fourteen people are now in isolation and eleven people are awaiting test results. In his weekly address to the Board of County Commissioners County, Health Officer Dr. Tom Locke said there is still plenty of COVID-19 in the air, and is of the Alpha (or UK) variant. He said the risk will increase as Washington State moves away from its COVID-19 restrictions, as there are more people in indoor spaces and not wearing masks.

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County Commissioners are seeking an alternative to relocate the 30 or so homeless people now staying at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds, hoping for a solution before the eviction moratorium expires at the end of the month – just 15 days away. This is a complicated story with lots of moving parts. And while we generally avoid “complicated” on this broadcast, here are several clarifying statements to keep you informed until one of the local newspapers provides an in depth account:

\* Unless the moratorium is extended, the Fair Board can begin eviction proceedings on July 1. This won't be an easy process, as many people will be reluctant to move. It will become more difficult if there is no alternative offered. Aside from that hurdle, if there is no alternative the displaced people can camp on any piece of public land. So, as Commissioner Greg Brotherton illustrates, we could see people pitch tents on the courthouse lawn.

\* The search for an alternative site has been unsuccessful, even with the diligent efforts by Brotherton and OlyCAP Executive Director Cherish Cronmiller, who told KPTZ she has scoured the county for available options only to come up empty. She said money isn't the obstacle, as she can probably come up with the required funding, within reasonable limits. An ideal site would contain RV hookups, water facilities, a kitchen or means to prepare food, Wi-Fi, proximity to transportation and services, and a support network. It would also be in a location that would not severely disrupt the local neighborhood.

\* There are no perfect sites available in Jefferson County. So Brotherton has proposed what he perceives as a reasonably imperfect solution. The county owns an 80-acre parcel along Cape George Road, primarily used by equestrians. He seeks to equip the site with electricity, porta-potties, a water source, a fence, and support services. He is working on providing an accurate cost estimate, but said it would not exceed what the county is now paying to the Fairgrounds Board and other supporting entities.

\* In establishing this facility as temporary, the county could bypass zoning and construction requirements needed to construct a permanent site. Brotherton said the site would have a movable aspect, and could be relocated to another temporary location after the six-month limit for such a facility. The site would retain its electrical connection, which will be a benefit no matter how it is used in the future, according to Brotherton.

\* The ultimate goal is to construct a permanent facility, with the most likely site being a parcel at the south end of town. This would require a significant land purchase, permitting, and a construction process that could take a year, minimum. Brotherton acknowledges the flaws in the Cape George proposal, but feels that something needs to be done right away and that extensive further study is unnecessary.

\* Brotherton's commissioner colleagues Kate Dean and Heidi Eisenhour disagree, saying that a full exploration of all the alternatives must still occur. To that end, Brotherton is assembling a detailed matrix about the Cape

George location compared to all the other possible options, for presentation at a special commissioner's meeting on Thursday morning. The meeting will be on Zoom, although no public comments will be accepted at that time.

\* In the meantime, Brotherton is securing commitments from law enforcement, the fire district, Jefferson Transit, and Jefferson Healthcare to provide services as needed. He hopes the idea of a movable homeless encampment catches on as an option for other regions.

\* This whole process has lit a social media fire, with misinformation as the fuel. The arguments, even the informed ones, are all the same. One of the most popular is the notion that if Port Townsend builds a viable homeless facility it would attract an influx of homeless people from other regions. Brotherton doesn't think this will be an issue, as any facility has its capacity and the proposals – both temporary and permanent – will only take care of the people who are already here.

Such an influx, he said, would say more about the communities who don't provide services causing people to leave. So this isn't just a local issue. And you can't not do a good thing just because something bad could happen.

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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).

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.