

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for June 23, 2021.

Jefferson County Public Health reported one new case of COVID-19 yesterday. County Health Officer Dr. Tom Locke reported on Monday that Jefferson County's infection rate has risen, with 22 cases reported in the last two weeks. Right now, there are 8 cases in active isolation and 34 test results pending. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been a total of 445 cases in Jefferson County. As always, you can get the most up to date numbers on the Jefferson County Public Health website (www.jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/202/Public-Health) or the Jefferson County Facebook Page. Despite the low case count right now, the public health department's masking mandate is still in effect until June 30. You must wear a mask indoors in public spaces, including in businesses and other publicly accessible indoor locations.

Five Black police officers in the University of Washington police department have filed multi-million-dollar damage claims this week, claiming they were the target of racist insults and harassment from other officers within the department. According to a story reported in the *New York Times* and the *Seattle Times*, the officers described a culture of entrenched racism at the UW police department, that included racial slurs, racist comments about Black people, and open hostility directed at them and BIPOC members of the public. The officers are seeking \$8 million in damages for workplace conduct that they say has made their jobs "unbearable."

Port Townsend's new police chief, Thomas Olson, came to this city from the University of Washington's Police Department, where he served as the deputy chief of police. According to the *New York Times*, the officers have not yet named the specific individuals that made racist comments, but that within a series of legal notices filed with the state, they said supervisors in the department were well aware of the conduct, and some of them engaged in it themselves. In response to the legal claims, University officials said they were "stunned" and that administrators had not been made aware of the complaints.

KPTZ reached out to Chief Olson via email, and in response, he said that he had no involvement with any of the incidents mentioned in the article, and in fact, had no knowledge of any of the allegations. He said he is familiar with the officers who made the claims, but that he did not work directly with any of them. He also said that he could not comment any further due to the vagueness of the allegations, but that he believes all of the allegations are very serious and should be investigated to the fullest. At the very start of his work here in Port Townsend, a letter purported to have originated from members of the UW Police Department containing a series of allegations about Chief Olson's past conduct circulated amongst the town, accusing Olson – without evidence – as someone who has in the past promoted a hostile, homophobic and racist culture. So far, these allegations have been unfounded – as they came from an anonymous source with little information to look into.

KPTZ reached out to City Manager John Mauro after these initial allegations, and he said that he had confidence in the rock-solid process used in Olson's background checks initiated during the employment process. Mauro wrote that the city did a very extensive, comprehensive, and professional third party background check on Olson. The legal notices filed by the five officers on Monday are the first step in filing a lawsuit. The university has 60 days to pay or settle the claims, after which the plaintiffs can turn to the courts. We'll be following the story here at KPTZ. Stay tuned for more.

Public works director Steve King presented the results of a citywide survey on the Dark Skies Initiative to the city's transportation committee last week. Dark Skies is a global initiative to preserve the night sky through the implementation and enforcement of quality lighting policies and dark-sky education. Cities can apply to be designated as a Dark Sky Community, by altering the lighting policies in town, including putting shields around street lamps and limiting the number of street lamps in town. The city received a grant to replace all of the street lights in Port Townsend with LED bulbs – which would allow the city the opportunity to use dark sky compliant fixtures while saving energy and overall operations and maintenance costs. This could mean darker streets at night, and more chances to view the night sky.

At the beginning of the month, the city public works department launched a survey for city residents asking questions about street lighting preferences, such as: Should the city remove some lights in residential areas; and whether or not city residents would support a program to reduce lighting from private light sources, such as porch lights. 339 individuals responded to the survey questions. The results are generally in favor of minimizing the impacts of street lights, including by removing lights from the city. But while presenting the survey results, King said city staff still needs to do some research to understand what the city's liability responsibilities are around lighting the streets. Results of the survey showed that 81% of responders were in favor of removing lights in residential areas. Similarly, about 74% were in favor of spacing lights 500 feet apart, as opposed to 250 feet apart. According to King, most blocks in uptown Port Townsend are about 250 feet apart, and therefore most lights are about 250 feet apart.

The survey also asked respondents to share whether they would be in favor of dimming street lights to 50% of historical lighting levels in residential areas. 86% responded that they would be in favor of that. 84% also said they would be in favor of reducing lighting from private light sources. King said in addition to the survey responses, the city also received a lot of comments about the street lighting policy, which he had not yet had the chance to read through, and will be bringing to the transportation committee in the future.

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.