

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for August 11, 2021.

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Jefferson County Public Health reported 7 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday and 13 new cases on Monday. That makes for 20 new cases so far this week. Right now, there are 37 cases in active isolation and 4 test results pending. County Health Officer Dr. Allison Berry said the Jefferson County's COVID -19 case rate is now 197 per 100,000 – the highest numbers reported during the pandemic. Dr. Berry said on Monday that a masking requirement is likely in our future given our capacity limitations in indoor spaces.

Governor Jay Inslee announced this week that he will be requiring all state employees to be vaccinated by October. King County and the city of Seattle followed suit with announcements that county and city employees will also be required to be vaccinated. There are many ways to get your vaccine. One of the easiest ways is to walk into the Jefferson Healthcare Express Clinic on Sheridan Street. No appointment is necessary to receive the one-time Johnson and Johnson vaccine. That clinic is open seven days a week from 9am to 7pm. For more vaccine options, visit the Jefferson County Public Health website (<https://jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/1432/COVID-19-Testing>).

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The city council held a public hearing on Monday night on a resolution, which they later approved with a unanimous vote, that will allow the city to levy \$605,000 in property taxes to use for improvement of public parks, sidewalks, trails and streets. In 2019, voters in Port Townsend decided to annex City fire services into the East Jefferson Fire District. Before, the city paid for EJFR fire services with money from the general levy. Now, property owners in the city have an additional fire levy to pay for fire service. The change freed up capacity for the city to levy up to \$900,000 in additional property taxes – referred to as the city's "banked capacity" – for specific purposes including street capital projects, park projects, or contributions to the city's affordable housing trust fund. Per an agreement made at the time of the annexation vote, the city can only use a certain amount of the banked capacity per year for the first four years. Last year, the city could have levied \$300,000 but chose not to. This year, the city council can approve to levy up to \$605,000. At the public hearing on Monday, city staff clarified that city council will have to vote again next year in order to levy the total \$900,000 of banked capacity.

There were only two public comments related to the resolution at the hearing on Monday – one from city resident Rick Jhanke who offered his support, and asked for clarification on the future levy process, and one from city resident Vicki Sonntag who expressed discontent with the process of creating the resolution because she believes it is not clear to members of the public that using the "banked capacity" means there will be a property tax increase for city residents. Council members Ariel Speser, Owen Rowe, and Amy Howard expressed their belief that the city has been very clear with the fact that this is a property tax increase. The city's engagement process included a town hall meeting, an online survey, multiple presentations during public city council meetings, and information booths at the farmers market for two weeks in a row.

Howard was one of several council members who described their dislike of our state's tax system. The city has a limited number of tools in the tool box, she said, and we're trying to solve a screw-driver problem with a hammer. But without a statewide income tax the city has no way of improving infrastructure without increasing property taxes. The property tax increase will go to improving seven areas in the city: Pacific Avenue, the Spruce Street trail, the sidewalk ramps in uptown Port Townsend, a sidewalk extension on 9th Street, the restoration of the Chetzemoka Park shelter, additions to Bishop Park, and new signs, maps, and kiosks in city parks and trails.

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This might be a good time to let your grass go dry. According to the city newsletter, the city expects to begin drawing from water stored in the Lords Lake Reservoir around mid-August, about three weeks earlier than normal, based on the flow trend in the Big Quilcene River. While we did start with an above average snowpack this year, the warm dry weather this spring and summer has resulted in rapidly diminishing stream flows. Lords Lake Reservoir is currently full, but once draw down begins, there is approximately two and a half months of water available in the reservoir. Whether or not reservoir water supplies are sufficient depends on the timing of the fall rains replenishing the streams. If you live in the city, you can help conserve the water at Lords Lake by not watering your lawn – or at the very least, only watering early in the morning or at night. You can also install low-flow faucet aerators in the kitchen and bathrooms, and new showerheads in your shower.

And, while the weather is warm, the U.S. Forest Service will be hosting a community clean up along the Big Quilcene River, which provides the drinking water for Port Townsend. Those interested in helping pick up trash along the watershed can meet at 9:30am tomorrow, August 12, at the Hood Canal Ranger Station in Quilcene. Gloves, trash bags and other materials will be provided. The community cleanup is an event suitable for all ages, but will require easy to moderate hiking.

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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.