

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for August 18, 2021.

Jefferson County Public Health reported 12 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday and 16 new cases on Monday, which makes for 28 new cases so far this week. Right now, there are 46 cases in active isolation and 35 test results pending. County Health Officer Dr. Allison Berry issued a new masking policy that went into effect on Monday, requiring Jefferson County citizens to mask up inside in public spaces, such as grocery stores, businesses and workplaces. Jefferson County's COVID -19 case rate is now 235 per 100,000 – the highest numbers reported during the pandemic.

At the county commissioners public health briefing on Monday morning, Dr. Berry explained that 80% of cases the public health department sends through the sequencing process are determined to be the Delta variant, which is more transmissible than COVID. Testing capacity at Jefferson Healthcare is increasing to meet the surge in demand which has risen six-fold, she said. There are some supply chain issues, however, with delays in shipments of tests from the state.

Dr. Berry warned that six feet of social distancing indoors is not good enough with the Delta variant, and advised that people avoid indoor public spaces, especially where people might be talking, laughing, and eating. Not only is it important to mask up in indoor spaces, but airflow and ventilation are also helpful for preventing aerosol spread of the virus.

The city council voted Monday night to authorize city manager John Mauro to begin negotiating a purchase and sale agreement for an affordable housing development. Little information was shared about the project itself, as the real estate negotiations need to be kept under wraps, but Mauro explained in his briefing that the council had discussed during an executive session plans to use state-awarded money the city received from the legislative session to acquire property and provide infrastructure for affordable housing. Mauro clarified that the project and purchase will need to come back to council for a full public discussion and decision-making process, but that at this time he was seeking approval from the council to enter into a contract for a feasibility study, so that city staff can do their homework prior to bringing the full project plan to the public and to the council for a vote. City council member David Faber made the motion to authorize Mauro to negotiate and execute the agreement, and it passed with six approving votes. Council member Monica McHager was the single “no” vote.

The two traffic calming circles temporarily installed on Washington Street could become a permanent fixture, if the neighbors in that area can raise the funds to permanently install them. The city council approved a resolution at their meeting Monday night that will allow the city to accept donations from the residents of Washington Street in order to cover the costs of the permanent installation of the roundabouts. The temporary traffic circles were installed in 2020, after the Washington Street neighbors reached out to the city public works department about traffic control on their street. A speed study showed that drivers typically went a few miles per hour over the posted speed limit of 25. At the time, the study showed the average speed was 28 miles per hour. According to public works director Steve King, the study showed that these traffic circles were effective in calming speeds. Now, the city is ready to install permanent circles subject to the neighborhood's ability to raise the funds to pay for them. The neighborhood plans on doing a GoFundMe to raise the money.

City council members were in favor of allowing the neighborhood residents to raise funds for the traffic circles, but councilmember David Faber expressed his concern that the project was not equitable. Well-resourced neighborhoods may be able to raise money for projects like this where poorer neighborhoods cannot, he said. If

the city spends the time and energy improving areas purely because citizens of those areas have the funds to pitch in and help, it's not equitable for the whole city. King replied that he hopes to see future neighborhood partnership projects include a grant program to ensure neighborhoods who don't have the ability to raise funds due to income levels are able to secure traffic calming in the same way.

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.