

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for September 8, 2021.

Jefferson County Public Health reported 56 new cases of COVID-19 over the holiday weekend. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 805. In the past two weeks, there have been a total of 165 positive cases. There are currently 108 active cases in isolation, and 254 test results pending. According to public health officer Dr. Allison Berry, Jefferson County's case rate is now 485 per 100,000, which is the highest we've seen since the start of the pandemic. Clallam County is similarly breaking records with a case rate of 1,000 per 100,000.

Jefferson Healthcare CEO Mike Glenn gave an update to county commissioners on Tuesday morning, explaining that emergency and inpatient activity at the local hospital has surged because of the dramatic increase in COVID-19 cases in the last four weeks. This weekend, when four acutely ill patients needed to be transferred, emergency room workers were unable to find a hospital in Seattle with an open bed. When one did become available, it took an extra day to find an available transfer for the patient, again because of staffing issues. Because of the COVID-19 surge Jefferson Healthcare has suspended all inpatient elective surgeries.

At the commissioners meeting, Dr. Berry underlined the key things that we can all do to stop the spread of COVID-19: getting vaccinated, wearing masks, and avoiding crowded, indoor spaces. She highlighted the fact that the vaccine is safe and it is effective. She also explained some of the reasoning behind the mandate requiring individuals to show their vaccine cards to enter restaurants and bars. According to Berry, restaurants and bars are some of the spots with the highest amount of COVID-19 transmission. For example, in Clallam County, unmasked spread in a bar resulted in 117 COVID-positive cases. The only other option to stop the spread of COVID-19, is to close restaurants and bars altogether.

The city is in the early stages of purchasing and developing 14 acres of land for an affordable housing project at Evans Vista, behind the Department of Social and Health Services building on Sims Way. In August, the city council voted to authorize city manager John Mauro to enter into a purchase contract for a feasibility study. Now, the project has come before the city's infrastructure and development committee. According to public works director Steve King, the overall goal is to see 30 to 50 affordable housing units on that property in the future, but the city's part in it will be to just buy the property and provide infrastructure to get it ready to build on.

The project will be in partnership with Jefferson County. The county's affordable housing task force has been looking at land in that area to create a "housing hub" which the task force envisions as an area that could provide multi-level housing assistance, including a new homeless shelter, affordable housing apartment units, and also a space for RVs and trailers, as a landing pad for some of the folks who do not wish to live in a congregate setting.

According to King, the city is still in early stages of studying the viability of purchasing the property. But half of the funding for purchasing the land and starting to build the infrastructure, is already secured. The city has secured two state grants already – \$1.37 million from the state department of commerce for purchasing land to build affordable housing; and \$1.7 million from the department of commerce for installing utilities for the purposes of affordable housing. A federal legislation appropriation is currently pending. If approved, the city would then have \$2.5 million dollars to support housing services in that area. If the federal grant is secured, the city would have \$5.7 million dollars for the entire project. One thing the city would contribute to the project

would be the installation of a sewer lift station at Mill Road, which would then benefit the larger surrounding area as well.

The November election is approaching quickly, and candidates are preparing to ramp up their campaigning after a relatively calm primary election last month. The League of Women Voters will host a city council candidate forum on October 7, just a few weeks before the election which takes place on November 2. The first hour of the virtual forum, from 6 to 7pm, will focus on candidates vying for Position 1 on the city council, which is currently held by Michelle Sandoval. Cameron Jones and Ben Thomas are running for this seat. If you have a question for the city council candidates that you'd like to be asked at the forum in October, send it to lwvjeffcowa@gmail.com by noon on October 5.

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.