

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for September 22, 2021.

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Jefferson County Public Health reported 9 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 941. In the past two weeks, there have been a total of 192 positive cases. There are currently 58 active cases in isolation, and 111 test results pending. With the increase in COVID-19 numbers, hospitalizations have increased too, putting stress on our healthcare facilities in town.

Jefferson Healthcare, which is facing a staffing shortage, is asking the community to participate in a car parade to show support for healthcare staff on Thursday. The car parade will take place tomorrow from 12 to 12:15pm. Drivers, bikers, and walkers are encouraged to bring signs, and cheer and wave as they drive around the Jefferson Healthcare campus on Sheridan Street in Port Townsend. In a press release from Amy Yaley, Jefferson Healthcare's public relations director, she wrote that September has been particularly straining on employees with increased COVID-19 activity in our community, higher-than-average patient volumes throughout the hospital, and community divisiveness around the vaccine and masks. You can also send letters of appreciation to staff, which will be posted on a bulletin board at the hospital for all staff to read. In addition to thanking physicians and nurses the hospital asks that you thank housekeeping, lab and all the staff in general. You can mail them to Amy Yaley at Jefferson Healthcare located at 834 Sheridan Street in Port Townsend, WA 98368.

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Fall is on its way and the leaves on the iconic Poplar trees that line Sims Way are beginning to turn yellow and fall to the ground. But the sight of these trees turning color in the fall may not be part of our city landscape for much longer. The city of Port Townsend is planning to eventually remove all of the Lombardy Poplars there – about 60 lining the Boat Haven side and 70 lining Kah Tai Lagoon.

According to city public works director Steve King there are several reasons to take the trees down and replace them with different trees. The main reason is a public safety concern: recently there have been reported incidents of electricity arcing between the power lines and the trees on the Boat Haven side. This summer, there were visible burn marks on some of the poplars from the power lines. And according to Eric Toews, deputy director of the Port, a Port employee who went to investigate the arcing actually received an electric shock from the incident. In addition, King said the Poplars aren't necessarily the best tree for that space: they draw a lot of water, have a short life span, aren't ideal for nesting birds, and they don't sequester as much carbon as other tree species could in that area. So the city plans to partner with the Port of Port Townsend and the PUD on a multi-step project to remove the trees, install the powerlines underground, expand Boat Haven, and build a multi-use sidewalk on the Boat Haven side of the street. This will also lead to replanting native trees where the Poplars once stood, he said. In fact, replacing the Poplars is a project that has already been started by the Olympic Audubon Society, who started planting native trees behind the Poplars in Kah Tai Park many years ago. Some of those trees have started to reach maturity and once the Poplars are removed, will be more visible. The total project will cost just shy of 2 million dollars, he said, which is why the city, the Port and the PUD are seeking multiple different grants to help fund it, including a public infrastructure grant from Jefferson County. The city council voted at their Monday meeting to authorize the city manager to seek a Public Infrastructure Fund grant and commit \$100,000 of city money as matching funds for the grant. The city also approved an interlocal agreement between the city, the port, and the PUD to work together to complete the project.

According to Toews, the port and the PUD are both eager to see this work done as soon as possible, as right now, the port is liable for any injury that occurs because of the electricity issues. In addition, he said, the

expansion of Boat Haven will add one more acre of marine trade space. The maritime trades economic impact study completed in 2018 shows that this could add up to 20 more jobs to Boat Haven. If funding and permits are secured, work on the project could start in the summer of 2022.

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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.