

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Carmen Jaramillo with local news and commentary for November 9, 2021.

Controversy continues this week in the City of Port Townsend over a plan to remove a long standing row of poplar trees on Sims Way. The city is holding a town hall on this issue tonight at 5pm. You can listen live on KPTZ or attend via zoom, where members of the public are invited to comment. The city is proposing a roughly \$2 million dollar project in conjunction with the Port of Port Townsend and the Public Utility District to expand the port, underground wires, and replace the row of approximately 130 Lombardy poplars on Sims Way. The plan was first announced earlier this year to major pushback and outrage from residents. Critics say removal of the trees would destroy an iconic Port Townsend landmark and they point to this issue as an example of misaligned city priorities.

The problem is that from the city's point of view, these trees must be removed sooner or later anyway because of the nature of the species. The average lifespan of this type of tree, which is non-native to North America, is estimated to be between 30 to 50 years. Both rows along Sims Way were planted in the late 1960s meaning they are now well past their expiration date. It is expected that many of the poplars will fall down in the coming years on their own or in windstorms. The poplars are also creating a fire hazard as they have grown into the existing power lines. This problem was anticipated many years ago, so a row of fir trees was planted behind the poplars in the 1980s to eventually replace them. But the growth of the firs has been hindered by their close proximity to the poplars.

According to the city proposal, the trees would be replaced with a more "appropriate" species to provide "environmental and safety benefits." The project would also add about one acre of land to the Boat Haven by moving the existing fence along Sims Way closer to the road. As it stands today the project is not yet fully approved as both the PUD and the Port are seeking solid funding options.

The Black Ball ferry line resumed service between Port Angeles and Victoria this week after being docked since March 2020. The M.V. Coho made its first voyage across the Strait of Juan de Fuca in twenty months yesterday morning. This sailing coincided with the re-opening of the US border to Canadian travellers, a much delayed and anticipated date. The Coho was met in Victoria by a small fleet of friendly vessels that escorted it into its dock, including the Victoria Fire Department fireboat, the Canadian Coast Guard, and the Victoria Harbour Ferry. Crowds gathered in Victoria at Laurel and Ogden Point to welcome the ship with flags, banners and signs. Ryan Burles, President of Black Ball Ferry Line said it was an emotional moment as the ship first docked in Victoria.

Sailings over the next week are completely booked up he said and they expect to be busy for several months to come. Travel to Canada is still not easy however. The Canadian government requires American travellers to show a negative PCR Covid test within 72 hours of entry. I went through this process last month when I entered Canada to visit my brother who I had not seen since before the pandemic. You can take your chances with trying to get a free test from a public health org or a pharmacy but the results may not return in time. The other option is to pay a private lab for guaranteed results but it can cost up to \$200.

The FRS Clipper, a passenger ferry from Seattle to Victoria, restarted their service in September only to shut down again a month later due to low ridership. The company pointed to the PCR test requirement as one reason for their low ridership in a statement last month. They said they would reopen in Spring 2022.

Nationally, cases of COVID-19 are continuing to plateau this week, which is setting us up for a significant sixth wave of the virus this holiday season, Dr. Allison Berry told the Board of County Commissioners Monday. She stressed that this pandemic is not over locally or nationally. Jefferson County Public Health added 11 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday bringing the total confirmed case count to 1,196. 28 cases are in active isolation and one person is hospitalized locally. The health department is currently dealing with two small outbreaks at local schools Berry said. Both outbreaks have infected 4 people each, with one occurring in a sports team and one in a kindergarten classroom.

Since the Pfizer vaccine was approved last week by the FDA for children ages 5 to 11, all children five or older are eligible to get shots in Jefferson County. Berry said she often hears from parents who are hesitant to get their children vaccinated because they want to protect them from any side effects. Berry said she argues that the potential consequences of a bad case of COVID-19 as a result of not being vaccinated far outweigh any small side effects a child could experience after getting the shot. A “disturbing” number of children who contract COVID-19 end up with “long covid” Berry said – meaning they have long-lasting symptoms of fatigue, shortness of breath, and brain fog even after they no longer test positive. Two Saturday clinics to vaccinate local children have been scheduled for later this month on the 13th and 20th at Blue Heron Middle School and Chimacum School respectively. Visit <https://jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/202/Public-Health> to schedule an appointment.

That’s all from me for today. KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and five PM Monday through Thursday and at noon on Friday and Saturday. You can contact us through news at kptz.org. I’m Carmen Jaramillo. Thanks for listening.