

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for November 17, 2021.

Jefferson County Public Health reported 12 new cases of COVID-19 in the last two days. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 1,229. There are currently 25 active cases in isolation. Five people are currently hospitalized due to infection from COVID-19. A Pfizer vaccination clinic exclusively for kids ages 5-11 will take place on Saturday, November 20, from 9am to 12pm at the Chimacum Junior/Senior High School. Make an appointment by calling the Department of Emergency Management's vaccine hotline, at 360-344-9791.

PUD crews worked throughout the night on Monday and throughout the day and night yesterday to restore power to homes across Jefferson County that went out during Monday's intense winter storm. Calling in reinforcement workers from Grays Harbor PUD and Mason County PUD, the three organizations had reduced the number of outages to about 8 by this morning. At the height of the storm on Monday, there were more than 11,000 homes without power, one of the biggest outage incidents in several years. City road crews were also out and about yesterday, steadily clearing the roads of debris and fallen trees. The PUD warned residents to stay clear of road workers and PUD workers clearing areas, and to stay away from downed power lines which can charge the ground up to 35 feet away.

Monday's city council meeting was postponed due to power outages and spotty Internet connectivity thanks to the gale force winds that battered the Olympic Peninsula. The meeting was postponed to next Monday, November 22, where city council members will work through a packed agenda, including taking a look at the 2022 budget, adopting property tax levies, and voting on an agreement between the city and the paper mill for water usage in the coming years. These are just two of the many items the city council must get to before the end of the year. Currently, there are three more city council business meetings before the end of the year.

One thing some city councillors hope to pass before the end of the year, is a resolution decriminalizing entheogens in Port Townsend. Entheogens are natural psychedelic plants and fungi. They are currently a Schedule 1 drug, according to the DEA, meaning that growth and use of these plants is illegal. In October, Seattle passed a resolution decriminalizing entheogens, which the city's Culture and Society Committee – which is made up of three council members: Ariel Speser, Owen Rowe, and Pamela Adams – hopes to use as a boilerplate for its own local resolution.

However, local activist Erin Reading, who has been leading a group called the Port Townsend Psychedelic Society, noted in a comment sent to the committee members at their meeting last Wednesday that the resolution drafted by city attorney Heidi Greenwood actually left out some key parts of Seattle's resolution that can hold the police department accountable when it comes to protecting the community from arrest and prosecution for entheogenic activities.

Seattle's decriminalization resolution, which is several pages long in comparison to Port Townsend's two-page resolution, not only makes the prosecution of the cultivation, use, and sharing of entheogens the lowest priority for law enforcement, but it also ensures that the resolution will be taken seriously by police officers by asking the Seattle police department to codify and adopt policies protecting any such activities from arrest or prosecution.

Greenwood's drafted resolution merely asks police to make the prosecution of these activities a "low priority" instead of codifying it in their department policy. Giving public comment during the committee meeting last Wednesday, Reading asked that the city consider including the Port Townsend Psychedelic Society in the conversation surrounding this issue, as they have the support and knowledge of local movements from across the country in passing these resolutions in an effective way. However the committee meeting last Wednesday ended with the council members taking a vote to recommend the resolution to the regular city council to be voted on.

Throughout the month of October, Washington State Ferries canceled 349 ferry sailings due to staffing shortages. WSF announced this month that it plans to reduce last-minute sailing cancellations and restore service more long term with the help of new staff. This will begin by restoring service first on the Anacortes/San Juan Islands route, where WSF will be adding a fourth boat to the run in order to return to the previous fall schedule. The ferry system is hoping to hire more employees to return the other ferry lines back to service, including the Bainbridge Island ferry and the Kingston ferry. Here in Port Townsend, the shortages haven't affected our local route much, which has been on one-boat service since the start of the pandemic.

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.