

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for December 7, 2021.

Jefferson County Public Health reported 2 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 1,324. There are currently 21 active cases in isolation and two Jefferson County residents hospitalized. Public Health announced a man in his 50s who was unvaccinated and had a chronic condition died from COVID-19 last Friday. This brings our county's total COVID-related deaths to 20.

At the Monday morning commissioners meeting, Public Health Director Dr. Allison Berry said nationwide we are beginning to see the start of a winter surge of COVID-19. Cases are rising throughout the country, but in Washington we are not yet seeing this rise start to happen. Dr. Berry said this could be because of the sheer number of our population who are fully vaccinated.

According to Dr. Berry, the Omicron variant of COVID-19 has reached Washington state, with cases emerging in King County, and therefore it is inevitable that we will see some Omicron cases here in Jefferson and Clallam county sometime in the future. She explained that researchers are still learning about the Omicron variant, but that early research shows it is more transmissible than the Delta variant. However, the severity of the OMICRON variant is not yet known. Dr. Berry said researchers are not seeing significant evidence of decreased efficacy of the vaccine with the Omicron variant, which is good news for those of us who have been vaccinated. However, she said that now would be a good time to get vaccinated, before the Omicron variant hits this part of the state. If you need a COVID-19 vaccine, call the Department of Emergency Management's vaccine hotline, at 360-344-9791.

Public Health also announced that this week is National Influenza Vaccination Week. Free flu shots are available at local pharmacies, and children's flu shots are now available at the health department. Just call Public Health at 360-385-9400 to set up an appointment.

Utility rates for city customers will be increasing on January 1. For an average residential customer, the monthly fixed rate for all services combined will increase from \$117.10 to \$119.57 plus usage charges. This is a 3% increase from last year. Rates will vary for each class of water customer and water meter size. The monthly water base rate will increase from \$21.42 to \$22.06. Water usage charges will increase from \$3.03 per 1,000 gallons used to \$3.12 per 1,000 gallons used. The water capital surcharge remains \$22.00 to fund ongoing capital improvement projects. The water rates could increase even more as the city prepares a new agreement with the Paper Mill. Because of the new agreement, and the aging pipeline, public works director Steve King said he estimates a rise in water rates of \$9 to \$14 per month.

The monthly sewer base rate increases from \$35.91 to \$36.99. Sewer volume fee increases from \$8.49 to \$8.74. The sewer capital surcharge remains at \$9.00. The monthly stormwater base rate increases from \$8.33 to \$8.63. The stormwater capital surcharge remains at \$6.00.

In addition to an increase in utility rates, the city is also increasing building permit fees starting January 1. The building permit fee schedule for construction-related permits has not been revised since 2011. The new fee schedule covers Building, Mechanical, Plumbing and Grading permits for residential and commercial construction, as well as plan review fees. Flat fee permit rates have been adjusted for approximately a 20% increase, while valuation-based permits for remodels will result in approximately 10% increases. For new

construction or additions, fee changes will vary based upon construction type and occupancy. The new fee schedule can be viewed at the city's Development Services website (<https://cityofpt.us/development-services>).

The Port Townsend Library will be hosting the Uptown Gingerbread Contest this year, starting on December 15. Gingerbread kits will be available at the library starting today, and rules for the contest are on the library's website.

The gingerbread houses will be judged by Mayor Michelle Sandoval, and prizes will be awarded in four categories: children 12 & under, most creative, most literary, and people's choice. Visit the library's website (<https://ptpubliclibrary.org/library/page/uptown-gingerbread-contest>) for more information.

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.