

Hello world, you are listening to KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Carmen Jaramillo with local news and commentary for December 14, 2021.

The Poplar saga continues this week as the City of Port Townsend is hosting its second virtual town hall meeting on what it is calling the Sims Way Gateway and Port Expansion Project. The city is holding a town hall on this issue tomorrow December 15 at 5pm. You can listen live on KPTZ or attend via Zoom, where members of the public are invited to comment. Submit comments beforehand via email to engagePT@cityofpt.us. Some vocal residents have taken issue with the city's decision to remove about 130 Poplar trees along Sims Way and replace them with a native variety.

The city is seeking to educate people about the drawbacks of the Lombardy Poplar species and explore options for the future of Sims Way in collaboration with the PUD and the Port of Port Townsend. The city's position is clear: the trees will come down one way or another because of their advanced age and, if we remove them proactively, we can accomplish multiple goals at the same time. If only a few had been knocked down in that big wind storm last month and that might have helped the city's argument. Instead they are still smugly standing and adding fuel to the fire of the residents who believe they must stay. Poplar has become a dirty word in my household. I say chop the damn things and let's get back to arguing about roundabouts again. I'll leave you with this age old proverb: "Blessed is he who plants trees under whose shade he will never sit."

The seasonal warming shelter in downtown Port Townsend has reopened for the winter starting this week. Every morning from 8:30am to 12:30pm, the Winter Welcoming Center will be offering free wifi, coffee, snacks, charging stations, and bathrooms at the Pope Marine Building on Water Street. In particularly inclement weather, the center may stay open later into the afternoon but it is dependent on volunteer availability. In order to enter, guests must be wearing masks and show proof of vaccination. The center's staff and volunteers are all fully immunized, coordinator Julia Cochrane said. The center will run into March and could extend into April if the weather stays frigid. The First Presbyterian Church is accepting volunteers and donations of hand warmers, coffee, individually packaged snacks and winter clothing to support the center.

In COVID news, no cases of the omicron variant have yet been discovered in Jefferson or Clallam County, Dr. Allison Berry told the Board of County Commissioners yesterday in her weekly update. But Jefferson County Public Health expects the rogue variant to reach the peninsula sooner or later, as it has already been identified in Washington state and many people are leaving the county for regional travel. It takes about two weeks for sequencing results of COVID cases to come back, meaning omicron could already be here and we just don't know it yet.

Berry said in Clallam County there have been several severe cases of reinfection, which suggests the presence of the omicron variant. As of yet there is no clear data to suggest whether or not infection from the omicron variant will be more severe than other types of COVID, but the data does suggest that it is more easily transmitted. Right now the majority of COVID-19 cases locally are still being traced back to the delta variant.

With the omicron variant, Berry is recommending that all eligible adults receive a vaccine booster shot which can only increase one's immunity. This Saturday at Chimacum Schools is the last county-sponsored mass vaccination clinic of 2021. Eligible kids aged 5 to 11 can receive their first or second doses of the Pfizer vaccine in the morning from 9am to 12pm. And adults can sign up to receive their first, second or third dose of Moderna

at the same clinic in the afternoon from 1 to 4pm. There were still plenty of open spaces as of yesterday, according to Willie Bence, director of Jefferson County Emergency Management. Visit jeffersoncountypublichealth.org to reserve your space on Saturday. I'll be there getting my third shot and then going straight to bed for the rest of the day.

Nationally, COVID cases are trending upwards, Berry said, with a 43% increase in cases. This is being largely driven by the Northeast and Midwest where in some states they are nearing crisis care standards in hospitals. Washington state has remained an outlier and has so far managed to stave off a large spike but has seen its numbers start to trend slightly upwards this week. Locally, cases are down slightly with most of the new cases being identified in unvaccinated children who were exposed over the Thanksgiving holiday, Berry said. Public Health added 7 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday bringing the total confirmed case count to 1,358. 24 cases are in active isolation and two people are hospitalized. Our two week case rate dropped to its lowest in several weeks with 165 cases per 100,000 residents.

And now for a quick weather report. Temperatures are expected to stay in the low 40s and high 30s over the next week with lots of rain. The 10-day weather forecast predicts we could see some snow in Port Townsend around Christmas Eve with temperatures dropping into the low 30s and high 20s. Southwestern Jefferson County has seen some snow this week in Quilcene and Brinnon and more is expected tonight and tomorrow. I'll be in Brinnon next week camping and hope to see snow!

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@kptz.org. I'm Carmen Jaramillo. Thanks for listening.