

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

Jefferson County Public Health reported 12 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 1,399. There are currently 36 active cases in isolation and two Jefferson County residents are currently hospitalized. While cases are increasing across the country due to the Omicron variant, Jefferson County's case rate has remained relatively steady at 180/100,000. According to Public Health Officer Dr. Allison Berry, the Omicron variant is incredibly transmissible and is starting to overtake Delta in some parts of the country. She anticipates seeing this happen in January in Washington state. Omicron cases have been reported in King and Clallam Counties, and while Dr. Berry believes that it may be circulating in Jefferson, the genetic sequencing has not yet been completed to confirm her suspicions.

She also noted that prior COVID-19 infection alone is not enough to protect from Omicron. "We are definitely seeing increased reinfection and, unfortunately, increased breakthrough infection as well," Dr. Berry said to county commissioners on Monday. The good news, she said, is that vaccines are showing very strong protection against hospitalization and deaths from Omicron. Now is the time to get your booster. You can sign up for one at many local pharmacies, including Safeway and the Tri-Area pharmacy. Learn more at the Jefferson County Public Health website (<https://www.jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=845>).

Three new city council members were sworn in on Monday night at city hall. Libby Urner Wennstrom, Ben Thomas, and Aislinn Diamanti were all sworn in as Port Townsend's newest council members, filling the seats of Michelle Sandoval, Pam Adams, and Ariel Speser, who attended their last council meeting on the same night. For Mayor Sandoval, it was the end of a long era. She is the longest serving elected official in Port Townsend, having served 20 years as a city council member. The new council members will attend their first meeting of the year at the regular city council business meeting on January 3 starting at 6:30pm.

At a business meeting Monday night, the city council voted unanimously to decriminalize psychedelic plants and fungi, also called entheogens, in Port Townsend. The decision came after two years of organizing by the Port Townsend Psychedelic Society, a group that is working to decriminalize the growth, gathering, use, and gifting of entheogens in Jefferson County. The group has been writing letters, attending meetings, and talking with city council members since August of 2019, but after a woman in Port Townsend was arrested in November of 2020 for alleged possession of psychedelic mushrooms, the group upped the ante and began pushing the council and the county commissioners for a resolution.

The city's resolution, passed on Monday, makes the the investigation, arrest, and prosecution of adults engaging in entheogen related activities, including the cultivation, gathering, and sharing of entheogens for use in religious, spiritual, healing, or personal growth practices among the lowest of priorities for law enforcement and city staff. On top of that, the resolution declares that no city money be spent to enforce the criminalization of entheogenic-related activities.

The resolution also calls upon the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office and the Prosecutor's Office to adopt policies and procedures consistent with the city's resolution. As of yet, neither the prosecutor's office, sheriff's office, nor the county commissioners have policies in place regarding the use and possession of entheogens in Jefferson County.

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.