

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for January 5, 2022.

Jefferson County Public Health reported 19 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 1,608. There are currently 132 active cases in isolation and one Jefferson County resident is hospitalized. Jefferson County's case rate has increased in the past week – now at 416 per 100,000. Case numbers could be higher than this, as self-administered rapid tests can be bought at local pharmacies such as Safeway, and taken at home without reporting to Public Health. These tests are in short supply, however.

If you are symptomatic or have been in close contact with an infectious person, you may receive a free home test kit by visiting the Jefferson County Public Health office at 615 Sheridan Street in the QFC shopping plaza during business hours; ring the bell beside the front entrance. Tests are in high demand and supply may temporarily run low. You can also pick up a test kit outside the drop-in clinic at Jefferson Healthcare. Results for these PCR tests can take up to 72 hours.

Jefferson County Public Health officials posted on Facebook that the staff are currently fielding hundreds of phone calls during the ongoing pandemic surge. Nurses and administrators are working at capacity to slow the spread by contact tracing, orchestrating vaccination clinics, and keeping the supply of free home test kits for symptomatic and exposed individuals stocked. As a result, non-urgent messages might not receive a reply from staff members. The department does want to hear from people who have tested positive for COVID-19 when using an at-home test kit, according to Dr. Allison Berry, Jefferson County's Health Officer. But if you have general questions about things like testing, isolation and quarantine, and vaccinations, visit the Jefferson County Public Health website, where you can also find the most up to date case information.

The city council convened for the first time this year on Monday night, and elected council member David Faber as mayor. In a Facebook post later that evening, Faber thanked his fellow council members for electing him, and noted that he is the first millennial mayor in Port Townsend. Amy Howard was elected to be deputy mayor.

In other city news, a PT resident, Andrea Hegland, filed a 39-page complaint with the Washington State Auditor's Office about the city's plan to remove the poplar trees that line Sims Way. The Sims Way Gateway Project and boat yard extension, is a partnership project between the city, the port, and the PUD to remove poplar trees growing along the road because they are aging and have become a hazard due to the power lines on Sims Way. The project will also extend the boat yard space on the south side of Sims Way.

In a letter to the city, Hegland explained that she filed the complaint with the Washington State Auditor's Office because she believes the city was wrongly awarded funds from Jefferson County to cut down the poplars. She stated the funds used are for projects that will create jobs and foster economic development, and she does not believe that this project will do that. However, at a prior meeting of the city council with members of Port and PUD staff, port deputy director Eric Toews explained that the expansion of Boat Haven will add one more acre of marine trade space. According to Toews estimation based on the maritime trades economic impact study completed in 2018, that this could add up to 20 more jobs to Boat Haven. But in her complaint, Hegland points out that this boatyard expansion is still possible without cutting down all the poplars, and placing the power lines underground without cutting the trees would get rid of the hazard caused by the height of the trees. Hegland also spoke during the public comment period of the meeting, and asked that the city take a step back

from the project, and create a space for community involvement. Hegland asked that the city work with citizens who want to know more information, and have transparency about the project. She detailed in her report that several citizens felt they were not able to express their feelings about the project at the online town hall hosted by the city, back in November.

John Mauro responded to her comment by stating that he has offered to meet with Hegland, and emphasized that they have held several town hall meetings, which he believed satisfy 90% of the community members in attendance with questions and concerns. You can learn more about the project by visiting the city's website and clicking on "Engage PT" (<https://cityofpt.us/engagept>). And you can always submit public comments to city council meetings by emailing publiccomment@cityofpt.us.

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.