

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Jim Burke with local news for April 20, 2022.

Jefferson County Public Health reported 16 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 3,343, which is an increase of 80 new cases since last Tuesday. There are currently 76 active cases in isolation, but no Jefferson County residents are currently hospitalized. The two-week case rate for Jefferson County is at 329 per 100,000 as of yesterday. According to public health officer Dr. Allison Berry, this case rate puts our county in the higher risk zone where she strongly recommends masking indoors with a high-quality mask. For the most up to date case information, visit the Jefferson County Public Health website (<https://www.jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/1466/CaseInformation>) or the Jefferson County Government Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/jeffcowagov/>).

Support is growing for a local ordinance that would increase the length of the notification period that Port Townsend landlords must give their tenants when they intend to raise their rents. Conner Bouchard-Roberts, who is a Port Townsend resident and owner of a local publishing company called Winter Texts, first brought the idea to increase protection of renter's rights to the city council a few weeks ago in a public comment.

Now, Bouchard-Roberts has drafted a renter's protection ordinance himself, and presented it to the city council at their meeting on Monday night, supported by several other residents who gave public comment on the issue. The ordinance he suggested would add a chapter to the municipal code that would require landlords to give 120 days' written notice for rent increases greater than 3%, and 180 days' written notice for rent increases greater than 10%.

Bouchard-Roberts' drafted ordinance contained a list of reasons renter protection is necessary in Port Townsend. According to data collected by the Housing Solutions Network, in the last 5 years the median wage in Jefferson County has increased by 17.8%, while the median home price has increased 49.1%. Between 2019 and 2022, rents have increased dramatically, some increasing more than 65%. The market-rate for a rental is far outpacing the increase of working class wages, causing record job vacancies in Port Townsend.

Rachel Smith, who has lived in Port Townsend for the past 8 years spoke in support of the ordinance at the city council meeting. She said if the city does not support affordable housing opportunities for the working class, who are the heartbeat of this community, then Port Townsend will slowly die over time, with no workers to keep the city's businesses viable. Another citizen in support of the ordinance, Mary Schroeder, spoke about her fear of a "soft eviction" – a term that describes the process in which landlords increase the rent to a rate that is unaffordable for their current tenants, causing the tenants to seek out new housing.

Right now, the city only requires 60 days notice for all rent increases. Bouchard-Roberts believes an increase in notice time will give tenants more time to find a new rental in Port Townsend (and decrease the likelihood of the tenants moving away from the city altogether). It also will give them more time to accumulate the savings needed to pay for first and last months' rent in a new unit. Bouchard-Roberts drafted his ordinance based on the city of Kenmore's recently adopted law that requires additional days' notice for rental increases.

When he originally brought the topic of renter's rights up, the city added it to their "suggestion board" which is a space where "to do" items wait until city staff has the capacity to take them on. But council members Owen Rowe, Ben Thomas, and Monica Mickhager all expressed their desire to take this project on as soon as possible. "The timeliness of this is so crucial," Thomas said, explaining how if rental rates keep going up, there will continue to be more and more working class people who have to find a new place to live. To get the ball rolling

faster, the council unanimously voted to task the culture and society committee with looking at Bouchard-Roberts' drafted ordinance. Their next meeting will take place on May 11 at 3pm.

If you want to look at the city's "suggestion board" it is now available to the public on the city's website. Go to cityofpt.us, then hover your mouse over the "Government" tab. Click on "City Council & Mayor" and scroll down to the bottom of the page (<https://cityofpt.us/citycouncil>), where you'll find a link to "Suggestion Board Website Display"

(<http://weblink.cityofpt.us/weblink/0/edoc/205723/Suggestion%20Board%20Website%20Display.pdf>),

According to city attorney Heidi Greenwood, the suggestion board will be updated with the newest items about once every quarter.

And that's it for today's local news. KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5pm Monday through Thursday and at noon on Friday and Saturday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. I'm Jim Burket. Thanks for listening.