

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. This is Jim Burke with local news and commentary for Thursday, September 12, 2024.

DEER ME!

From the PT *Leader* yesterday: A peaceful morning walk turned into an adrenaline-fueled scuffle when Shelly Webb encountered an aggressive female deer while walking her dogs in her Port Townsend neighborhood on September 4. Webb said, “I went out on my morning walk, and as I approached a neighbor’s home, a doe stepped out from alongside the Mugo Pine along her driveway. Its head was held high, neck ridged, and legs stiff as it strutted towards me. There were two fawns behind her. I immediately started to turn away and it charged.”

Webb lives near the intersection of S and Rose Street and has for 8 or 9 years. She said she’s familiar with the deer, but got more than she bargained for that morning. She said, “I didn’t see her until I was right on top of her. I know that deer, I’ve encountered that deer numerous times in that neighborhood. Most deer avoid you, but that deer does not.”

Webb said as the doe drew close, one of her dogs bolted and mayhem ensued. She continued with the telling of the encounter: “I tripped on the leash, falling to my knees, then to my face, releasing the dogs to run away. I looked up over my shoulder and she was within three feet. The deer quickly continued to advance on me as I rolled away several times, screaming and grabbing handfuls of gravel out of the potholes and throwing it at the deer. It was within three feet of me when I finally connected with a big handful of gravel. It swung its head up, saw my elderly 10-pound dog and charged and jumped over the top of her. At that point my larger, 25-pound dog charged by and the race was on.”

Webb said the deer chased her larger dog through the neighborhood. She said she suffered scraped knees and bruises in the encounter, and although she wasn’t badly injured, was left feeling shaken and wary. Shelly Webb said that feeding deer is one of the biggest contributors to aggressive deer behavior, yet people do it anyway, despite city codes and regulations to the contrary. (Don’t feed the deer folks!)

Webb said, upon the recommendation of fish and wildlife officials, she now carries bear spray. State wildlife managers discourage people from feeding deer for a variety of reasons – health and safety, for deer and humans, chief among them. Matt Blankenship, assistant regional wildlife program manager for Region 6, said, “When wildlife congregate, that can cause diseases to spread.” State wildlife managers have also linked deer feeding to increases in negative human-wildlife interactions, including aggression toward people and pets.

And this is from the *Peninsula Daily News* yesterday: Port Townsend city staff will address deer management questions in 2026. Emma Bolin, the city’s director of planning and community development said, “Everybody’s got a different perspective about the deer. Amazingly, you could agree with someone politically, and then you realize that they feed the deer.” (Don’t feed the deer folks, they have plenty to eat around here!)

Data on deer population, its effect on traffic and aggressive behavior is not available, Bolin said, but staff time requirements are high to pursue the data necessary for action. Bolin and Port Townsend Public Library Director Melody Sky Weaver presented the workshop, on Monday, which concluded that, for thorough city engagement to occur, timelines should be adjusted for 2026.

Bolin said in a phone interview with *PDN* reporter Elijah Sussman, “We talked about several small ways to move the needle in the interim, and the small ways that have the biggest impact are adjusting human behavior. That’s my biggest message: We need to make it trendy to avoid and respect wildlife.” (Don’t feed the deer folks!)

Implementation of some form of management plan, whether culling the population or introducing birth control, likely would be taken on by WDFW (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), Bolin said, but the agency is not interested in overreaching and would require a thorough city-led outreach process to define the problem and desired outcome.

Bolin said WDFW is willing to provide support and education, and potentially to serve on a stakeholders’ committee. There is an educational opportunity at the Port Townsend Public Library on September 26 at 6pm. Cole Janowski, a wildlife conflict specialist with WDFW, and KT LaBadie, code compliance officer with the city of Port Townsend, will give a presentation titled “Living with Deer”. The city also provides education based on concerns filed on the city website complaint portal at their website:

<https://cityofpt.us/planning-community-development/page/code-compliance>

(Don’t feed the deer, folks!)

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. (Don’t feed the deer, folks!) You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I’m Jim Burke. Thanks for listening.