

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Tuesday March 17, 2020.

The Port Townsend City Council unanimously passed an Emergency declaration during its regular Monday meeting. This allows the city to streamline mandated procedures, giving them the agility needed to cope with the emergent health crisis, according to the resolution. Such a declaration allows the city to dispense with time-consuming procedures and formalities, including overriding budget law limitations, relaxing competitive bid requirements, publications of notices, and making purchases.

At the meeting, City Manager John Mauro said the city needs to institute procedures that can supply city services in new ways, while taking into account the health danger. This includes encouraging mail-in payments and conducting business by phone or video.

Mauro announced that the city will work with water customers with late bills to defer or forgive payments that have fallen into arrears. While falling short of any absolute statements, Mauro said that the City will not shut off water for anyone who cannot pay their bill during the emergency.

Mauro stressed these accommodations will be extended to those who cannot pay. Any customer who is able to pay but uses the excuse of the emergency to not pay their bill would be guilty of irresponsibility.

Over at the PUD, spokesman Will O'Donnell told KPTZ that the utility is offering payment relief for any customers negatively affected by the emergency. Payment arrangements can include individualized payment terms as well as the suspension late fees and shutoffs.

The Jefferson County Department of Health reported two new cases of the virus sustained by local residents over the weekend, while determining that the patients were exposed in Seattle. As of today there is still no local environmental transmission of the virus, although that is expected to change. While the names of the new patients were not made public, the Health Department is working behind the scenes to contact anyone who was in peripheral contact with the third case. Many of these contacts are now in a 14-day quarantine.

According to a press release, one contact in particular, who represents a potential local transmission, is under close observation.

The county has tested 133 patients. Aside from the three positives 72 are negative and 58 are awaiting the results.

Jefferson Healthcare yesterday opened a COVID-19 testing drive through, to respond to our area's escalating testing needs. The service, which resembles others that are emerging across the country, operates from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday and is on an appointment-only basis.

These tests will be administered after the patient is screened and a high likelihood of infection is determined by a health care professional. The first step in acquiring a test is for the patient to call the COVID 19 respiratory nurse contact line, 360-344-3094, to describe symptoms and determine next steps.

With a possible infection the patient is then given a time and location to administer the test.

The hospital discourages Emergency Room visits, except for those with severe respiratory symptoms who can not wait for a callback.

For more information go to the Jefferson Healthcare web page.

The Port Townsend City Council and the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners will hold a joint COVID-19 strategy meeting at 5:00 PM Thursday at City Hall. During last night's meeting Mayor Michelle Sandoval listed several groups that have a stake in the situation, such as businesses and nonprofits, that would benefit from such a meeting. Social distancing, however, restricts how many people should be at one room at a time. The City is now seeking for a way to include all the necessary voices in a safe environment.

As for the general public, they can view the meeting live on the City's website or tune to KPTZ for a live broadcast. The meeting will be archived on the City and KPTZ websites.

Due to cancellations brought about by the COVID-19 emergency, KPTZ is suspending the community calendar that normally follows this broadcast. In the next few days we will use that space to provide tips and bulletins about the virus' effect on the community.

KPTZ 91.9 FM Port Townsend brings you local news and information Monday through Saturday at Noon, and at 5 PM Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. News coverage will increase in response to the COVID-19 emergency. If you have any news or information for this program please send a message to news@kptz.org.

This is Charlie Bermant, reminding you to call ahead to determine where the activity you wish to attend is still happening.