This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I’m Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Thursday April 16, 2020.

As of this morning, Jefferson County Public Health currently reports 28 confirmed Covid19 cases in our county. Of the 701 tested to date, 668, or 95 percent tested negative, while four percent tested positive for the presence of the virus. Five people are now awaiting test results. These numbers reflect the shortages in availability of Covid19 screening and represent less than 1% of our population tested for Covid19.

As testing continues, the county has not reported any new cases in a week. This indicates that social distancing is a qualified success, but government and health officials underscore the importance of continuing our newly acquired safety habits.

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Port Townsend’s Farmer’s Market has rescheduled its opening for April 25, that’s a week from Saturday, to operate under social distancing and safety guidelines. About 14 vendors are now expected to participate, well short of the average 70 vendors who normally fill the space at the corner of Lawrence Street and Tyler Street Uptown.

The market usually operates one crowded block with a middle row. Next week the middle row will be gone and vendors will distance from themselves. Additionally, the market has published a set of safety tips: Wear masks. Arrive with a grocery list. Limit attendance to one person per household. Purchase groceries without touching food. Avoid cash.

Market Manager Amanda Milholland told KPTZ that many of the vendors will take bank cards, unlike previous years when card holders were required to purchase market tokens. These tokens, which Milholland said are safer than cash, will still be available to accommodate vendors who do not have the required bank card hardware.

Attendees are, of course, implored to wash their hands, maintain a personal distance and stay at home if you are sick. These guidelines are nothing new, operating as standard behavior since the pandemic began. They also correspond with the guidelines for visiting a supermarket. The cautions bear repeating, to avoid complacency at a critical time.

During this time, the Farmers Market abandons its role as a community meeting place. Instead, it becomes a place where people can purchase quality local food and support its growers.

The market operates from 9 am to Noon for the duration of the emergency. The Chimacum and Port Townsend Wednesday markets are scheduled to respectively open in June and July.

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People are using the time at home to answer the census, according to statistics released by Jefferson County. As of Tuesday, just over half of county residents had filled out their census form. The initial due date was the end of April, that is now extended into the summer.

April 1 was the survey date, with people asked to state their location at that time. So it doesn’t make a lot of sense to wait. The good news is that those who wait will still remember where they were on that date. The bad news is that filling out the census form doesn’t provide a lot of relief from the boredom of isolation, as it takes only a few minutes to compete.
The anonymous census data, when complete, determines Federal representation and funding, offering a direct benefit to each locale. If the carrot doesn’t work, here’s the stick: People refusing to participate or providing false information can draw a fine.

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Port Townsend resident Joy Winfrey has organized Face Mask Challenge Port Townsend, leading a network of seamsters. As of earlier this week they have made over 2,200 face masks for the community. Of course, this does not reflect the dozens of others who are contributing masks on their own.

Those interested in helping out this group but don’t have a machine are welcome to donate elastic cording, 1/4 inch or less flat elastic and 1/2 inch double fold bias tape.

For information email Winfrey at: ezjoy2@hotmail.com.

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This is Charlie Bermant with some of today’s news. Everything could change tomorrow.