This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I’m Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Tuesday, May 12, 2020.

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It’s been four full weeks since Jefferson County had its last reported any new cases of COVID-19. But last Friday a 90-year-old woman tested positive, presumably from an in-county exposure.

Nevertheless, the percentage of positive tests fell to 2.8%. Of the 1046 tested to date, 1016 – or 98.2% – tested negative, while 4% tested positive for the presence of the virus. One person awaits test results at this time.

During his weekly briefing in front of the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, health officer Dr. Thomas Locke said that much of the testing is now done in-house with results available in a matter of hours.

Locke said that the emergence of a new case meant that the county is technically no longer eligible to qualify for a variance that would allow the early opening of some businesses. This doesn’t rule us out entirely, as some other counties who do not meet the criteria are still seeking variances.

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This just in from our “we thought we escaped some of the madness” desk: A rally in support of opening businesses is scheduled for May 19, one week from today. The Open Jeffco rally, will begin at Noon in front of Windermere Realty on Water Street in Downtown Port Townsend. Organizer James Scarantino’s Facebook post says the event is meant to highlight the unfairness, arbitrariness, and political favoritism of Governor Jay Inslee’s imposed restrictions.

Windermere was chosen as a location because of its owner, Port Townsend Mayor Michelle Sandoval, who is using her political clout to favor her own business, according to the post. Scarantino criticizes realtors’ ability to stay open as other businesses remain closed.

There are no campaign signs allowed, as this demonstration is meant to reopen the county. The post discourages people from openly carrying their weapons, while reminding them that it is their right to do so. There is no mention of social distancing or whether participants should bring protective gear.

Sandoval told KPTZ that the rally won’t have much of an audience from inside the business, as most of the staff is working from home. She dismisses the idea that her own political position provides an advantage, citing specific state protocols for operating real estate transactions during the health emergency.

Scarantino posted that he may continue picketing in front of Sandoval’s office until the county opens.

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It’s filing week in Washington, with several office seekers formalizing their candidacy online or through the mail. Three candidates, Amanda Funaro, Heidi Eisenhour, and Lorna Smith filed for the open District 2 Jefferson County Commissioners seat, which sets up a primary challenge, with the two top vote getters in the August 4 contest advancing to the November 3 general election.

No Republicans have yet filed for county offices.

Incumbent state representatives Steve Tharinger and Mike Chapman both filed for two year terms. Both are opposed. Carlsborg Republican Brian Pruiett will face Tharinger, while Port Ludlow resident Daniel Charles Svoboda, who has no party preference, is challenging Chapman.

Congressman Derek Kilmer filed for a fifth two year term and is challenged by Tacoma resident Rebecca Parson. Both candidates are Democrats.

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The Census is kicking back into gear. Resuming operations in Jefferson County, delivering invitations to those households that had not received them when operations were suspended in March due to COVID-19. This operation affects a small percentage of households – primarily those in rural areas and households with P.O. boxes who do not receive mail at a physical location.

Census workers will not ring your doorbell or collect data. All they will do is leave a packet of information and instructions on how to respond at your front door. Non-response follow-up will begin August 11. You have until October 31 to complete the Census. But it makes sense to get this out of the way. Equal representation and funding for essential programs is based on Census data. It takes less than ten minutes and besides that, what else do you have to do?

As of Sunday, Jefferson County has a response rate of 58.5%, ranking seventeenth in comparison to other Washington Counties. Port Townsend ranks 40th city in the state with a 70.3% turnout.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at five PM Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news at kptz.org.

This is Charlie Bermant with some of today’s news. Thank you for listening.