

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Tuesday, May 19, 2020.

Jefferson County reported one additional instance of COVID-19 earlier this week, bringing the total number of cases to 30. Whether the new case should be attributed to the county is open to interpretation, as it represents a Jefferson County resident who was diagnosed, and perhaps exposed, in Arizona.

According to the latest figures, 1,182 patients have been tested, with 1,152 – or 97.5% – testing negative. Twenty eight of the patients are listed as recovered, while there are no pending tests at this time. That number will change as testing continues on a selective basis.

At Monday's briefing with the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners health officer Dr. Thomas Locke submitted his recommendations with regard to reopening the county – even as it remains unclear as to whether the county remains eligible for this Phase 2 variation given the one positive COVID-19 test last Friday.

Locke recommends reopening activities such as outdoor recreation involving fewer than five people from outside your household with no overnight camping; and gatherings of no more than five people outside your household per week with masking encouraged and social distancing maintained. Visitors from high-prevalence areas are strongly discouraged.

Essential travel and limited travel for Phase 1 and 2 are permissible activities. Out-of-area tourism is strongly discouraged until there is statewide implementation of Phase 2.

Also recommended for reopening are non-essential repair, maritime industry and others; additional construction phases; in-home domestic services including nannies, housecleaners, etc.; professional services and office-based services (non-tourism oriented, telework strongly encouraged); pet grooming, hair and nail salons, and barbers – all to local customers only.

These recommendations will be addressed at a virtual meeting at 5pm today that includes the County Commissioners, the Board of Health and the Port Townsend City Council, along with Port and PUD commissioners. It broadcasts at 5 pm Tuesday on the County website and here on KPTZ, both of which archives the meeting for later listening. The meeting is physically closed, but public comment is encouraged through email, to both at <https://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/> on or before 4:30 pm today.

If you are listening to this broadcast at home, you are not attending the Jeffco Rally for Civil Rights and Justice, scheduled for noon today in front of Safeway in Port Townsend. The rally's purpose is to call attention to how county and city leaders along with the local board of health has failed to take advantage of the so called early open opportunity won by the people through sacrifice and patience. In a Facebook post, organizer Jim Scarantino said he hopes the rally will send a clear message to local leaders that their dithering is unacceptable.

When the rally was first announced it was to occur in front of Windermere Realty downtown and directed against Port Townsend Mayor Michelle Sandoval, whom Scarantino accused of using her political influence to keep her own business open while closing others. The rally moved to the new location as it is better traveled, and it is now less personal: calling out all of our leaders instead of focusing on Sandoval.

The rally organizers have issued certain guidelines. There are to be no political signs, and people should leave their guns at home – even if they have a legal right to bring them along. They encourage everyone to spread out and respect other people’s personal space. As for wearing masks, that is the personal choice of each attendee. And the rally is legal, according to state guidelines.

In a Facebook post, Scarantino suggested that I am unable to report this story in a fair manner due to my own bias. He’s right. While I understand how the guidelines are frustrating, I believe holding this rally to be a careless, inconsiderate act. So it’s best that I move on to something else.

The Port Townsend Film Festival announced the intention to go virtual for its 21st annual festival, presenting its programs online rather than screening them at eight locations downtown. They have yet to work out the details, but are committed to the virtual format in order to protect community health.

As a warm-up, the festival will screen the movies selected for its postponed Women and Film Festival online, for free, from May 28 to June 7. According to a press release, the virtual festival will include 6 full-length features and 4 short films, all available throughout the 10-day period. Keeping in line with the organization's mission to “spark community by connecting filmmakers and audiences”, PTFF will introduce the filmmakers to our audiences prior to the film, whenever possible. These pre-recorded introductions invite viewers to learn a bit about each creator, according to the release.

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.