

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Thursday, May 21, 2020.

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The Jefferson County Board of Health web site lists a total of 30 reported instances of COVID-19 earlier this week, although the latest case attaches an asterisk. That case represents a Jefferson County resident who was diagnosed, and perhaps exposed, in Arizona. Many of the initial cases originated from out-of-county exposure, with one-third of the reported cases designated as such.

Currently, 1,326 patients have been tested, with 1,268 testing negative. Twenty eight of the patients are listed as recovered, while we have the same number of people awaiting results. Testing continues at a rapid rate, with 144 administered since our last news broadcast on Tuesday.

Meetings continue about reopening the county. A two-and-a-half-hour joint meeting on Tuesday included governing boards from the county, city, health department, chamber of commerce, Public Development Authority, PUD, and Port. According to the county's Facebook page, many of the attendees favored applying for a variance with some restrictions. Most were in agreement with the plan while some wanted to allow camping. Also addressed, allowing high school graduates to matriculate at the Wheel In Drive in Theater.

A Board of Health meeting this afternoon will consider a set of draft recommendations submitted by county health officer Dr. Thomas Locke. The final decision about applying for a Phase 2 variance will face a vote by the county commissioners on Friday afternoon.

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A rally on Tuesday afternoon calling for reopening the county drew either 50 or 75 people, depending on the respective reports from the Port Townsend Leader or the Peninsula Daily News. This sets up a game of "which local media outlet do you trust more?" KPTZ did not attend to provide its own count, as I had to stay home and wait for the cable guy.

The rally's main theme was criticism of local officials for not addressing the reopening of the county, a concern that should be at least partially addressed with the aforementioned slew of meetings.

The question about reopening balances economic and health concerns with no easy answers. The county has successfully flattened the curve, with health services theoretically able to handle an influx of patients. At this point no one knows anything for sure, and the waiting is trying everyone's patience.

What is for sure, historically, is that several past pandemics suffered an early onslaught of the disease and then relaxed restrictions too soon, leading to a more severe second wave. So we don't know if we have weathered the storm or are now in the hurricane's eye.

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The City of Port Townsend will implement temporary changes this week to the downtown streetscape in order to provide residents additional sanitation amenities and public space for safe physical distancing.

This initiative includes four main elements: 1) Opening the waterfront space at Lower Adams Street, Pope Marine Park, and the Tyler Plaza to limited and appropriately-distanced outdoor seating. 2) Closing the one-way portion of Taylor Street from the Haller Fountain to Water Street to cars to allow for safer travel on foot

and bike as well as limited and spaced outdoor seating. 3) Increasing the frequency of the garbage service of public waste bins to help accommodate increased volume from takeaway meals. And 4) increasing access to public restrooms with the installation of additional bathrooms and hand-washing stations downtown.

These are emergency measures and would need approval from the City Council, the Transportation Committee, and associated advisory boards like the Historic Preservation Committee to become permanent. The Taylor Street closure has already ignited a Facebook firestorm, with some people favoring its permanent status because it would make the downtown more pedestrian friendly. Another faction opposes the move as it would worsen an already bad parking situation.

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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](http://kptz.org).

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