

Script 4/29

You're listening to KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. This is Lily Haight with what's new in this week's Port Townsend Leader.

\*\*\*

The United States now has more than 1 million cases of the coronavirus. But Jefferson County's case numbers have held steady for more than two weeks now.

The death toll in the United States is more than 56,000, with a case fatality rate around 5%.

In Washington state, there are now more than 13,686 confirmed cases and 765 deaths.

Of the 28 confirmed cases in Jefferson County, 24 people have recovered.

Jefferson County's Public Health Officer Tom Locke said at least two patients from Jefferson County are still in the hospital.

\*\*\*

The Wooden Boat Festival, the Race to Alaska and Seventy48 are the most recent event cancellations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the cancellations of these events follows a laundry list of summertime cancellations, including THING music festival, the Rhododendron Festival, the Rhody Run 12k race, Raker's Car Show, the Wearable Art Show, and Centrum's Fiddle Tunes, Acoustic Blues Festival, Jazz Port Townsend and Voice Works.

The cancellation of cultural events is an interconnected web of loss, said City of Port Townsend Mayor Michelle Sandoval.

It starts with the loss of tourist traffic, visitors who come for the widely known and celebrated events that patronize shops, restaurants and hotels and fill streets with excitement and activity.

For example, Wooden Boat Festival is the Northwest Maritime Center's founding event. Its economic impacts extend throughout the community. That weekend, hotel rooms are fully booked within a 30-mile radius of Port Townsend, bars and restaurants are packed throughout the day and into the night, and downtown stores see parades of visitors walking by.

The loss of that festival, compounded with the long list of other summer cancellations, translates directly into decreased revenue for business and local governments, meaning laid-off employees and decreased money for special projects and programs.

\*\*\*

Gov. Jay Inslee announced April 24 some "low risk" construction can resume, one month after the governor's "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" order banned most residential and commercial construction to reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

Inslee faced mounting pressure from trade organizations, lobbyists and local governments including Jefferson County and the City of Port Townsend to reopen construction.

The reopening comes with stipulations: Contractors also must adhere to a list of requirements like providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to their employees, having a COVID-19 site supervisor, taking employees temperatures when they arrive at work and providing hand wash stations and disinfectants.

According to the National Association of Home Builders, \$1 million spent on residential remodeling equates to \$841,000 in local income, \$71,000 in local government revenue and 11 and a half local jobs.

Linda Paralez, acting interim director of the Jefferson County Department of Community Development, said revenue to the county has decreased dramatically and they are looking at myriad ways to recoup the losses.

According to the Washington State Employment Security Department, between March 8 and April 18, 241 workers in Jefferson County who work in construction or engineering had filed for unemployment.

\*\*\*

On April 20th, Jefferson County commissioners approved a contract for the final design of the Port Hadlock sewer system for a core service area. This design work, which costs \$1.422 million, was funded by an appropriation from the state Legislature and the county's Public Infrastructure Funds.

This step will get the county “shovel-ready” for construction of the system. The project will cost around \$20 million to build.

Funding for such a large project typically comes from a combination of grants, loans, bonds and landowner financing.

According to commissioner Kate Dean, county officials expect the upcoming recession to make it harder for the county to service debt from loans or bonds, and landowners might be financially strained to pay for on-site installation and hook-ups, as well as the Local Improvement District assessment. That’s why the county officials hope to be shovel-ready for potential funding from a federal infrastructure stimulus package to ease the difficulty of financing the project.

\*\*\*

This spring, Marrowstone residents Janet Welch and Willi Smothers planted more than 90 Garry oak seedlings along Jefferson County’s Isthmus Trail just west of Kilisut Harbor. Garry oak, also known as Oregon white oak, is the only native oak tree found in Washington State. Some live to more than 500 years old and grow to over 100 feet tall. In 1839, the species was named after Nicholas Garry, who worked for the Hudson Bay Company and was a friend of Pacific Northwest botanist David Douglas. Throughout their natural range, from northern California to British Columbia, the oak woodlands that existed during Vancouver’s voyage have declined to less than 15% of what they were prior to the 1850s. More than 80% of the remaining wild Garry oak groves are on private property. To increase the population of these native trees in Jefferson County, Welch and Smothers fostered a host of oak saplings and have plans to plant even more around Indian Island.

\*\*\*

For these stories and more, check out this week’s edition of the Leader on newsstands and online now. This is Leader news reporter Lily Haight, on KPTZ 91.9 FM.