

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* for June 17, 2020.

On Sunday, June 14, health officials started investigating a new case of coronavirus in Jefferson County. Public Health Officer Tom Locke said transmission of the virus in this new case appears to have occurred within the county. This brings the total number of coronavirus cases in Jefferson County to 32.

While many counties in Western Washington are seeing the number of cases level off, Locke said eastern counties are seeing continued increases of case numbers.

The rate of growth is not only going up, but becoming exponential, he said. This could be because of the agricultural industry in Eastern Washington. Yakima County now has more than 5,000 confirmed cases of the virus. In the state, there are more than 26,000 confirmed cases and there have been 1,221 deaths.

The Jefferson County Board of Health will meet to discuss the move to Phase 3 at 2:30pm Thursday, June 18th. The board will make a recommendation for moving to the next phase, deciding what businesses can reopen. This will be followed by a special meeting of the Board of Commissioners at 1pm on Friday, June 19 to approve or reject the Board of Health's recommendation.

Locke recommended the county move forward with a full Phase 3 variance application without any restrictions. "Risk can never be eliminated; it can only be controlled," Locke wrote in his recommendation. Locke emphasized the importance of wearing masks, practicing social distancing of 6 feet from others, and continuing to use sanitation practices such as frequent hand washing.

At the same meeting on June 18, the Board of Health will also discuss how racism is a public health crisis.

Today at 5pm there will be a special joint meeting of the County Commissioners, Port Townsend City Council, Port commissioners, and PUD commissioners to discuss establishing a multi-governmental process for collaborating on the establishment of a COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Plan. KPTZ will broadcast the meeting live, which will preempt the normal 5pm airing of this news broadcast.

The Port Townsend City Council unanimously agreed to allow the painting of a giant street mural declaring "Black Lives Matter" on Water Street in time for the Juneteenth Freedom March on Friday, June 19th.

The council also agreed at its meeting Monday to explore the formation of an ad hoc committee that would review policing and public safety. A special council meeting will be held June 29 to review a resolution to create the new committee.

Also gaining momentum is a proposal to rename Jackson Street after civil rights icon Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The idea to create a Black Lives Matter street mural – reminiscent of ones painted on major streets in Seattle, as well as Washington, D.C., Oakland, California, and Denver, Colorado – comes in the aftermath of the police

killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota last month. Support snowballed for the mural proposal Monday afternoon before the city council meeting.

By Monday night's meeting, more than two dozen letters had been submitted in support of the idea, with some citizens also asking for the city's police department to be "defunded," with part of the department's budget being devoted instead to social service needs, community resource officers and other areas.

The council decision came after more than two hours of public testimony and council deliberation.

The driver of a truck who had a reportedly racist confrontation with a bicyclist in downtown Port Townsend has been cited for second-degree negligent driving. In addition to possibly paying a fine for the infraction, the 77-year-old driver will also be required to retake his driving examination. The incident has caused local outrage because when the cyclist approached the driver after crashing, the driver used a racial slur toward the cyclist, who is Black.

On June 6, around 100 people gathered in downtown Port Townsend for a bicycle ride rally around town to raise awareness of the incident. The police report on the incident showed that the investigating officer found no link between the driver nearly hitting the cyclist and causing him to fall, and the racial slur that followed, since the driver claimed to not have noticed the cyclist until he approached him after the crash.

The driver also denied using the racial slur, although multiple witnesses reported having heard him use it.

State law says that a person is guilty of a hate crime if he or she maliciously and intentionally commits a crime such as causing physical injury to the victim.

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