

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Thursday, June 18, 2020.

Jefferson County is holding fast with an in-county total of 32 COVID-19 cases. The latest posted data reports that 2,533 local residents have been tested with 2,444 testing negative. Fifty seven people are awaiting results. This represents a 1.3% positive number of all tests.

We continue to report these numbers even though they don't really change, as it's important to maintain awareness of the numbers and vigilance to prevent them from going any higher. The advice is still the same: wear masks in proximity to other people, maintain a six foot distance, and wash hands frequently. Our low numbers are directly attributable to the fact that most people in Jefferson County are following these guidelines.

Jefferson County lawmakers established an intergovernmental collaborative committee at a meeting on Wednesday, charged with developing a COVID-19 recovery and resilience plan, according to the county's official Facebook page.

The committee includes one representative from each of six boards and executive staff. Specifically, County Commissioner Kate Dean, City Council Deputy Mayor David Faber, Port Commissioner Pete Hanke, PUD Commissioner Jeff Randall; County Administrator Philip Morley, City Manager John Mauro, Port Executive Director Eron Berg and PUD Executive Director Kevin Streett will focus on six sectors, identified as those that have been greatly impacted by the pandemic: Culture and Events, Businesses, Children and Families, Human Services, Food System Security, and Broadband.

The first meeting is scheduled for Thursday, July 25, from noon to 2pm. It will be carried live on the County website and other places. The committee will meet weekly from that point, with the goal of developing a solid plan by the end of the year.

The near daily meetings to determine COVID-19 strategy continues today, with a Board of Health meeting scheduled for 2:30pm. The board will discuss the county's move to phase three of reopening the county. If approved, the county commissioners will vote on the proposal at a 1pm special meeting tomorrow, June 19.

While we have all weathered the effects of COVID-19, our homeless community has felt its greatest impact. Currently, there are 28 people housed at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds inside a building and another 15 living in tents across the campground.

The shelter at the American Legion closed in March, relocating to the fairgrounds as the Legion's open space did not accommodate social distancing. The fairgrounds is an improvement in this respect, and services are expanded. In normal times the shelter closes for the season in March with the homeless scattering to various locations throughout the area.

The shelter is operated through a joint agreement between Olycap, the Department of Emergency Management and the Health Department. According to Olycap Executive Director Cherish Cronmiller, the facility costs \$55,000 a month to operate, which includes facility rental, food, supplies and providing two round the clock

staff members to manage the residents. That sounds like a lot, but it averages to aboutt \$35 a day for each resident.

Cronmiller said the money will run out at the end of the month, with an ongoing search for funding sources. Her goal is to subsidize the venture through the winter, although camping will be more difficult in cold weather.

The fairgrounds facility provides several advantages over living rough, including clean bathrooms and showers, regular meals, and temperature checks.

There is also some, but not enough mental health support according to Cronmiller. The stress of living on the streets is compounded by COVID-19, and these challenges are difficult to address without an in person mental health counselor. Currently, counseling exists only through an on line link.

Department of Emergency Management director Willie Bence said it was fortunate that the fairgrounds was available as a shelter, allowing the potentially deserted facility to be put to good use. Once camping opens it will be possible for sheltered residents and recreational campers to share the space, Bence said.

Cronmiller welcomes community support in the form of financial donations, necessary health care items, and items like portable music players that can keep people entertained. Most of all they seek volunteers., those who can keep an eye on the residents; keeping them calm and engaged.

For more information contact Olycap (<https://www.olycap.org/>).

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.