

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for September 9th, 2020.

High winds in Washington on Labor Day led to significant growth in fires burning across the state, witnessed here in Port Townsend with the smoke that blew in Monday night and settled across the area on Tuesday.

According to the Washington Smoke Information blog, even though parts of the Puget Sound have cleared, there is still moderate to unhealthy air quality being monitored from Tacoma to Bellingham and the Olympic Peninsula, as well as many new fires being detected yesterday in Western Washington.

The state Department of Health warns that smoke can worsen symptoms of COVID-19 and also make you more susceptible to respiratory infections. Those who are at risk for the virus should try to stay inside and avoid breathing the unhealthy air.

A burn ban is in place throughout Jefferson County, and a half-acre fire at Lena Lake near Brinnon is still active. According to a press release from the Olympic National Park, the fire was one of several small fires started in a series of lightning strikes. Even after using rappellers and helicopter water drops, crews have yet to be successful in containing the fire.

The Port Townsend City Council is giving the Arts Commission more time to weigh in on how to approve public street murals.

The council was originally set to discuss a new ordinance that would create a transparent and consistent process for adding public street art to the city, but after a preliminary discussion on August 17th, decided to give the arts commission time to convene and offer opinions on the ordinance.

The discussion was sparked after the city council approved a temporary "Black Lives Matter" mural to be painted on Water Street as part of the "Juneteenth" celebration.

But now, Jim Scarantino, creator of the "Port Townsend Free Press" website, wants the city to paint a Blue Lives Matter mural downtown, too. A letter to City Manager John Mauro from Scarantino's lawyer said Scarantino hopes to paint the mural on Madison Street right in front of City Hall.

“Blue Lives Matter” is a pro-police countermovement to the Black Lives Matter movement, however, its origins are not parallel because the “Blue Lives” of law enforcement officers represent a profession. Black Lives Matter is a human rights issue.

More than 100 public comments were submitted to the city council at their meeting on September 8th, both in support of and against the Blue Lives Matter mural.

“Blue Lives Matter is a racist term created to undermine and mock the use of the term Black Lives Matter. It was never used before Black Lives Matter became a popular term,” wrote Autumn Winsheimer, a former Port Townsend High School student, who was not in support of a Blue Lives Matter mural.

Other commenters noted that the city council should handle the request for a mural in the same way they did for the Black Lives Matter mural.

“I want to see the council handle this matter the same as they did when they received requests for the Black Lives Matter mural,” wrote Michael Clevenger. “Please consider requests from all citizens of this county in a fair and objective manner.”

As drafted, the new ordinance regarding street murals would give the city manager the power to approve or deny public art projects such as street painting, intersection murals and crosswalk painting. The city manager would do so in consultation with the arts commission.

Language in the ordinance puts some restrictions on public street art if it depicts violent images, sexually graphic images, nudity, religious symbols, hate messages, support for or opposition to a candidate, or inappropriate imagery to maintain on public property.

Mayor Michelle Sandoval said all of the public comments about the mural will be forwarded to the arts commission, as they will be discussing the policy at a special meeting on September 14th.

And that's it for today's local news. 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@kptz.org. I'm Lily Haight. Thanks for listening.