

KPTZ Local News for September 16, 2020

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for September 16th, 2020.

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Washington's unhealthy air quality is expected to continue across the state through Thursday.

According to the Department of Ecology's smoke forecast, air quality in Port Townsend and Jefferson County is still at an "unhealthy" level, despite the light showers we saw on Monday and Tuesday.

Fog around the Puget Sound in the morning confirms that some marine air swept through overnight, however the Washington Smoke Blog reports there's still large amounts of smoke over coastal waters which the marine air is dragging along with it.

The smoke blog also reports light southerly winds could drag more smoke directly from Oregon fires northward along the I-5 corridor and Puget Sound area, so we could be beneath smokey skies for a few more days. Thunderstorms predicted for Thursday could bring enough rain in Washington and the Oregon Cascades to tamp down fires, which would result in less smoke. Here's hoping.

A burn ban is in place throughout Jefferson County. This includes all outdoor burning, including recreational fires, pits and the use of charcoal briquettes.

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

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According to employees at Discovery Bay Wild Bird Rescue, seabirds across the Olympic Peninsula might be struggling from the smoky conditions.

Staff from the bird rescue nonprofit posted on Facebook that they have received three different seabirds from La Push, Salt Creek and Port Angeles who all needed rehabilitation.

The bird advocates advised beach walkers to call their office if they find a bird on the beach.

"Don't put it back in the water," the post said. "Throw a jacket over it and get it safe, then call us or your nearest rehab center."

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With smoke blanketing the city and cooler weather coming in, the city council is considering how their "Streateries" program can continue through the winter.

Back in June, the city council approved a resolution that allowed for businesses to apply for temporary permits to expand their eating areas onto the sidewalks and street parking areas.

At the city council workshop on September 14, city staff and restaurant owners reported that the “Streaterie” program was successful.

“The option to be able to have the Streateries was really a life line,” said Kris Nelson, who owns three downtown restaurants, including Sirens, Alchemy Bistro, and the Old Whiskey Mill.

Nelson said at a time when restaurants could only have 35% occupancy inside, the program allowed them to expand their dining and make the most out of the tourist season. Steve King, the city’s public works director, said there were a total of five Streateries in town, as well as one parklet and two private outdoor seating areas, making for an extra 75 table seats that all met the state’s COVID-19 spacing requirements.

No action was taken at the city council’s meeting on Monday, however, members of the council discussed the idea of extending the Streaterie program to the end of the year.

As weather conditions worsen, it may be difficult to entice eaters to dine outdoors, however Main Street director Mari Mullen said there is interest from restaurant owners on extending the program, so they at least have the option to offer outdoor dining. Kris Nelson said she would like the opportunity to come up with creative ways to serve people outside, even in the winter.

“If we had the option to make something special and magical outside, that would mean a lot for our survival,” she said, painting a picture of an outdoor eatery under tents, with lights and heaters. Nelson mentioned that most diners still prefer to eat outside, because many aren’t comfortable dining inside during the COVID-19 pandemic.

City council members also discussed the possibility of making the Streateries program permanent, however this would take some due diligence in order to solicit more feedback from uptown and downtown business owners, as well as looking at the parking issue in town.

The council will continue the discussion at a business meeting coming up in October.

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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](mailto:news@kptz.org). I’m Lily Haight. Thanks for listening.