

(Local News) September 29, 2020: Census in turmoil, Jail phone service enhanced.

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, September 29, 2020.

First, the numbers. Jefferson County's COVID 19 cases remain stable at 71, with 51 people awaiting test results. Port Townsend Air Quality is in the good range, with a rating of 14. The most recently reported Census response rate is 76.4 percent for Port Townsend, higher than both the 66.1 percent for the rest of the county and the 71.9 statewide percentage. And the election is in 35 days, five weeks, with ballots sent to voters on October 14, or three weeks and a day.

As for the Census, its conclusion is something of a moving target. The original pandemic imposed deadline was October 31, which was shortened one month by Federal decree. A court case restored the original deadline but the Feds are now saying that everyone will be completed by October 5, otherwise known as this Saturday.

This has thrown local census workers into turmoil, as they are unsure as to how much time they have. The county's homeless count is complete, while a census pop up event yesterday in downtown Port Townsend added just one person. Enumerators continue to attempt contact with those not responding, but are unsure as to how much time they have to complete the count. Which is why they may seem a little impatient.

All local enumerators live in Jefferson County, carry multiple forms of identification and do not ask any questions that are not on the census form. So if someone professing to be a census worker asks for your Social Security number, take their picture and close the door.

If you have not yet responded you should do so immediately, as census numbers determine Federal funding levels. Some people continue to ignore these messages, in the same way that some people will not vote. Either way, such non participation spoils someone else's day.

If you have not yet responded you can do so by logging on to 2020census.gov, calling at 844-330-2020, or by completing and mailing back the paper questionnaire that has arrived through the US Mail.

At this week's meeting of the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners Health Officer Dr. Thomas Locke said that we are in the fourth week schools have been in session in Jefferson—the fifth week for the Brinnon district—and Locke reports that as one of the first counties to open to in-person education we “learn as we go.” He said there are no established models, and we are “developing the protocols from scratch.”

Locke said that four COVID-19 vaccines were in Phase 3 clinical trials in the U.S; 43 vaccines are in human trials around the world and 11 are in Phase 3 trials internationally. He said any approved vaccine will be distributed by county health departments. He projected that a vaccine may be approved at the beginning of next year.

Ongoing discussions are in progress with the governor and the state health department regarding moving forward with phased re-openings, according to Locke.

Also at the meeting, Commissioners heard a briefing from Jail Superintendent David Fortino about inmate telephone service. The jail has renewed its contract for services with Consolidated Telecom, but with enhanced services. The new services include video visitation and text messaging along with regular service.

The County will receive 48 percent on telephone revenue, 20 percent on remote video visitation and one-cent per text, from which the county receives about \$30,000 annually. Fortino said revenue generated from the service paid for by the inmates and their families goes back into a fund to support inmate programs and inmate worker incentives.

Commissioners questioned whether the 30 cents per minute charge is cost prohibitive for some families. While the contract was approved unanimously, the Sheriff's office is expected to address the providing of relief to indigent inmates and their families.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at 5pm PM Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news at kptz.org.

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.