

October 7, 2020: Local News — City looks at alternatives to policing; candidate forum on Oct. 8

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for October 7th, 2020.

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The city's committee on public safety and law enforcement met on September 28th to hear from community members involved in alternative public safety programs.

The two-hour meeting covered a variety of topics focused on alternatives to policing, such as mental health services and funding for substance abuse recovery.

The committee also heard from jail superintendent Dave Fortino, who spoke about seeking grants for better substance abuse treatment and behavioral health treatment at the jail, as well as ways the jail employees have worked to increase health and safety at the Jefferson County Jail.

In addition, the committee heard from three members of the Port Townsend Police Department: Port Townsend High School's resource officer Jeremy Vergin; Community Safety Officer Wendy Davis; and Jud Haynes, the Port Townsend Navigator.

These three positions offer an alternative to traditional policing for our local department. For example, Haynes, who is licensed as a mental health counselor and substance abuse dependency professional, assists with de-escalation in police-involved situations. He also refers individuals in crisis to treatment options, and helps address barriers to service.

While Officer Haynes responds to situations with law enforcement officers in the police department, his interactions with residents rarely end up with the individual being arrested. He is also able to consult law enforcement officers in optimal ways to work with residents in a mental health or substance abuse crisis.

The purpose of exploring all the current policing alternatives that exist in Port Townsend is for the committee to seek out new ways to increase public safety and redirect public funds from law enforcement to community services, such as housing and mental health services.

The AD HOC committee's creation was in response to the death of George Floyd, a Black man from Minneapolis, who was killed by police. By the end of the year, the committee hopes to have a working plan for making budgetary and policy changes to increase public safety in our community, and decrease instances of police brutality and abuse of power.

At their next meeting on October 26th, the committee will continue their discussion of alternatives to law enforcement.

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The League of Women Voters is hosting an online forum with commissioner candidates Heidi Eisenhower and Lorna Smith tomorrow from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Eisenhower and Smith, both Democrats, are running to replace District 2 commissioner David Sullivan who announced his decision to retire in February. District 2 represents communities in mid-county, including Chimacum, Port Hadlock, Irondale, Marrowstone Island, Kala Point and Cape George.

All Jefferson County registered voters will see the commissioner candidates on their ballots come November. In the August primary, District 2 residents saw three candidates on their ballots and advanced Eisenhower and Smith to the countywide vote -- Eisenhower won 43% of the primary vote, while Smith won 32%. The third candidate, Amanda Funaro, did not make it to the final round, but endorsed Eisenhower in a letter to the editor.

The Oct. 8 virtual forum will be moderated by Renee Klein, and viewers are welcome to send in questions for the candidates by emailing [lwvjefcowa@gmail.com](mailto:lwvjefcowa@gmail.com) by noon tomorrow.

The forum will also be broadcast live on KPTZ 91.9 FM and will stream live on [kptz.org](http://kptz.org).

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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.