

October 14, 2020: Local News — Golf course news; Indigenous People's Day ideas; city budgets for 2021

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for October 14th, 2020.

After residents of Jefferson County celebrated Indigenous People's Day on October 12th, the Jefferson County Anti-Racist Fund is hoping to spark a conversation around getting land back into the hands of Indigenous folks in Jefferson County.

The tradition of celebrating Indigenous People's Day -- in replacement of Columbus Day -- has slowly gained popularity, especially across Western Washington. Both the Port Townsend City Council and the Jefferson County Commissioners proclaimed the holiday on Monday, and recognized the land that is now known as Jefferson County once belonged to Indigenous people, including the Jamestown S'Klallam tribe, who lived in the village of *qatay*, which is now downtown Port Townsend.

The Jefferson County Anti-Racist Fund, which is a mutual aid organization that supports Black, Indigenous and People of Color members of our community, took it one step further, however. In a post on Instagram, members of the organization wrote that celebrating Indigenous People's Day by paying reparations is a start, but asked how we as a community can make a larger shift towards a future where there is more balance in both Black and Indigenous home and land ownership. The post referenced the popular "Land Back" movement, which calls for the literal restoration of land ownership, whether through personal property, land stewardship or comprehensive land claims and self-governing agreements.

The Jefferson County Anti-Racist Fund asked for ideas and for viewers to share the post amongst community circles in order to spark conversation. Perhaps the city council should take this "Land Back" idea into consideration when discussing the future of the golf course, which was once vibrant prairie land, utilized by the Jamestown S'Klallam people for its camas flowers and other natural resources.

To learn more about the Jefferson County Anti-Racist Fund and what they do for our BIPOC community members, go to JCARF.org.

The city council continued its golf course discussion at a workshop meeting on Monday night.

This fall, city staff embarked on a two-pronged process in an effort to involve the community in deciding the future of the Port Townsend golf course. First, city staff put out a request for proposals in search of organizations that might wish to continue operating the golf course. At the same time, they began an engagement campaign, through an online survey and a few public events, to ask Port Townsend residents what they think should be done with the golf course property.

The city received three proposals from organizations wishing to operate the golf course. These proposals will be evaluated over the next few weeks and the city will come back to discuss them at a meeting on November 2nd. If one of these proposals is chosen, it will likely mean the city will enter into a lease agreement with an organization, who will then operate the land.

City staff has also received over 150 emails regarding the golf course. Many public comments submitted over the past month have been in support of the land remaining as a golf course.

However, the results of the Engage PT golf course survey show that while retaining the golf is important to some, most people want the land to be converted into a natural area or park for all to enjoy.

Parks and recreation director Alex Wisniewski presented the results of the survey to city council on Monday. The majority of comments reflect the desire to retain the area as open space, he said. When ranking the importance of community goals, nearly all the population segments who took the survey ranked three things as most important: protecting critical natural resources; developing active and passive parks; and accommodating housing needs.

The next steps in the public process will be for city staff to interview the vendors who submitted proposals for the golf course, and BRING RECOMMENDATIONS before the council (again) in early November with some MORE SPECIFIC ideas for how to proceed.

Back in March and early April, the city made a tough call to cut back on services, including furloughing more than 50 employees, in order to reduce expenditures during the pandemic.

While this reduced the amount of services available to the community, city manager John Mauro pointed out at the city council's meeting on Monday, that the sacrifice was worth it. Because of this quick decision making, the city will not have to request a supplemental budget for 2020 and is likely to carry through the rest of the year "in the black," he said.

However, now city staff is taking a look at the 2021 budget, and with the very real possibility that the coronavirus pandemic could continue well into the next year, it's likely that the freeze on some city services will continue, in order to deal with a potential million dollar deficit that city staff is predicting for 2021.

A million dollar gap is quite a bit for this community, Mauro said, that can have a real impact on the services the city can provide.

Next year, the city is proposing reducing training and travel expenses for city employees. There is also a proposed reduction of community services, such as reducing Mountain View pool services, eliminating seasonal parks and rec workers, delaying 50% of computer purchases for city employees to future years, freezing vacant accountant and legal assistant positions and reducing some human resources positions from full time to part time.

In addition, reductions to the streets fund were proposed, including reducing street light costs, reducing striping work, delaying street maintenance work, eliminating the purchase of a leaf

mulcher, freezing the street lead operator position and eliminating street seasonal worker positions.

Mauro also discussed the possibility of using fund balance reserves in order to cover deficits, or looking to alternate options such as canceling the opening of the pool for 2021, or levying additional taxes.

The city will continue to discuss its 2021 budget in the coming months, and must vote on the final budget by the end of the year.

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.