

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, November 17, 2020.

Water Street in downtown Port Townsend lived up to its name last night after a water main broke near its intersection with Monroe Street, covering that area with several inches of water until crews were able to shut down the leak. Homes in uptown and Morgan Hill were without water for several hours, although the city now said that all service is now restored.

As repairs continue, there could be sporadic shutdowns throughout today in those areas. Customers are asked to be patient. The intersection will remain closed through today to allow crews to prepare for the expected rainstorm and to dig under the pavement to assess the damage.

City Manager John Mauro told KPTZ that crews are now working on the water main break, with the priority to stop a leaking valve. This will require an outage of Port Hudson, the American Legion, and a few homes along Monroe Street that is expected to last most of today. Once the leak is stopped the city will have a better understanding of what the next level of repairs will entail in terms of outages, Mauro said.

Downtown is not affected at this time.

The break occurred around 9pm, when the City Council was in session. The meeting was paused to deal with the emergency with Mayor Michelle Sandoval then posting to her Facebook page that Public Works was on the case.

Mauro said that customers may see some sediment in the water as the crews flush the lines. If that occurs you should run the tap until the water clears up.

After containing increases in COVID-19 for several months, Jefferson County reported 11 new cases yesterday, bringing the total up to 123. There are 78 tests pending, and the ratio of positive cases has exceeded one percent. This means we've added 25 cases in the past week.

These increased cases coincide with new restrictions imposed by Governor Jay Inslee in an effort to control the virus. Both Inslee and Jefferson County Health Officer Thomas Locke are advising people to minimize contact with anyone outside the household. People have let their guard down and invited non-family members into their homes. No one gets sick and everyone feels safe. The exposure is noticed a week or so later, at which time it has spread throughout the community and resulted in an exponential growth.

While large Thanksgiving gatherings are effectively cancelled, the holiday ritual of baking cookies for the neighbors can still continue, according to Locke. The only sensitive part of the process is removing the baked goods from the oven, at which time special care is required. While people can feel comfortable eating cookies baked by trusted friends. Locke said that a safer path is to patronizing local bakeries in an effort to support small businesses.

In recent months, the Port Townsend Safeway has offered the option of paper or plastic bags at checkout, which is an apparent violation of the city's ban on plastic bags. Whenever customers ask about this, they are told that it is "because of COVID-19" and provide no further details.

KPTZ contacted the store manager, who is not authorized to talk to the press and referred us to corporate. There was no response as of air time.

We have now learned that the City's attorney, planning director, and manager are reviewing the situation, and will soon contact Safeway informing them they are still subject to the plastic bag ban unless they apply for an exemption.

None of the city's other grocery stores – QFC, the Co-op, or Aldrichs – have relaxed their observance of the ban during the pandemic.

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

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.