

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for November 18, 2020.

The number of coronavirus cases in Jefferson County has increased to 125, with the Public Health department reporting two more cases yesterday, after a steep increase of 25 new cases in the last week. There are currently 88 test results still pending.

Ten of the cases reported on Monday and Tuesday occurred in Port Townsend, while three were from the mid-county area.

As a result of the rapid increase in new cases throughout the state, Governor Jay Inslee announced a four-week set of new restrictions that ban any social gatherings indoors, as well as limiting indoor retail and professional services to 25% capacity.

City crews are still at work to replace a pipeline in downtown Port Townsend after a water main broke on the intersection of Water and Monroe streets late Monday night.

According to the city's water resources manager, Ian Jablonski, crews are still working to replace some sections of the old cast iron pipe on the corner of Monroe and Water street, near Point Hudson.

Most of the work on the pipe is expected to be completed today; however, that portion of the road might remain closed tomorrow, as crews work to repair the area that had to be excavated in order to reach the pipe.

Water service was restored Monday night, but there could still be sporadic shut downs along Lawrence Street and Monroe near Point Hudson while the crews replace the pipeline sections.

Some residents noted their water had a milky quality after the break – Jablonski said this is caused by air in the water, and that it is still completely fine to drink.

On Monday, the city council held a public hearing on the city's 2021 budget, but only one member of the public – former councilmember Bob Gray – made any comments on a budget that is going to seriously affect some city services in the coming year.

The council took a first look at the city's 2021 budget presented by city manager John Mauro and finance director Nora Mitchell, at the November 16 meeting. The budget, which includes several cuts to programs as well as a few staff layoffs, reflects the city's desire to be conservative because of the ongoing global pandemic and its effects on the economy.

Budgeting during a pandemic has been a difficult task, Mauro explained. Engaging members of the public without in-person meetings and information sessions was a challenge, and on top of that, the 2021 budget forecasts some real impacts on the level of services city residents can expect in the coming year, due to a reduction in staff.

Most of the staff reduction was made by city departments deciding not to fill current vacancies, Mauro said, but there will also be three layoffs due to a constrained budget.

In addition, the budget includes delaying and reducing services like street maintenance, street striping, and pool operations. It will freeze currently vacant positions such as the city's streets lead operator and accountant. It also will eliminate seasonal parks and streets worker positions.

In addition to taking a first look at the 2021 budget documents, city council also voted unanimously to approve property tax increases for 2021, which include a percentage increase of 1% for the general levy, as well as a \$150,000 levy for the Unlimited Tax General Obligation Bonds approved by voters in February 2015 for capital improvements at the Mountain View Commons.

City councilors also discussed their decision not to levy any of the banked capacity allowed under the post annexation agreement with the East Jefferson Fire District.

Because of the voter-approved annexation of the fire district in 2018, the city could have levied up to \$300,000 in additional property taxes for specific purposes including street capital projects, park projects, contributions to the city's affordable housing trust fund, or a reduction of up to 2% of the city's utility tax for a one-year period.

But city councilmember David Faber explained at the meeting on Nov. 16, that levying those funds now would go against promises the city council made to have a robust public process in deciding how the city uses those funds, and to wait until at least 2021 to levy any of that banked capacity.

And that's it for today's local news. 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@kptz.org. I'm Lily Haight. Thanks for listening.