

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for December 9, 2020.

The number of coronavirus cases in Jefferson County has increased to 185, with the Public Health department reporting 2 new cases yesterday, for a total of 9 new cases so far this week. There are currently 68 test results still pending.

Governor Jay Inslee announced yesterday that he is extending the current restrictions on gathering indoors until January 4. That means indoor holiday gatherings outside of your immediate household are currently prohibited. In addition, restaurants will remain closed for indoor dining until January 4, and professional services are limited to 25% capacity.

Inslee reported yesterday that 80 percent of ICU beds in Washington are occupied as the coronavirus continues to spread.

We report the latest numbers here on KPTZ News during our regular broadcasts, but cases are increasing on a daily basis. For the latest numbers, including gender breakdown and cumulative percentages, visit the Jefferson County Public Health website (<https://jeffersoncountypublichealth.org/1466/Case-Information>) or the Jefferson County Government Facebook page.

City council member David Faber drew some heat from a few city residents, who are also his neighbors, after he criticized the city's mini roundabout project on Washington Street at the last transportation committee meeting. Two miniature roundabouts were installed along Washington Street in October as a 60-day trial project after residents of that neighborhood petitioned the city public works department to address the issue.

Public works director Steve King reported that prior to the installation of the mini roundabouts, most drivers traveled between 29 and 30 miles per hour, but after the roundabouts went in, speeds dropped to between 26 and 28 miles per hour.

King made recommendations at the transportation committee meeting to improve the safety of the roundabouts, including narrowing the lanes, adding more prominent edge barriers, changing traffic stripes, and adding in a 5-foot pedestrian area. After King's presentation, councilmember Faber questioned the project for giving preference to one neighborhood, which he referred to as the "squeaky wheel," when there are many other areas in Port Townsend that may have more dire traffic issues.

At the Dec. 6 city council meeting, Washington Street resident Paul Marks commented that Faber's remarks were "offensive" and "detrimental to the city."

But despite drawing this attention, Faber is certainly not the only critic of the roundabouts. When the public works department solicited feedback from neighbors, more than 30 people submitted comments critiquing the efficacy of the roundabouts, the difficulty of making left turns with the new road layout, and the necessity of them to begin with.

Some of the comments questioned the use of public funds on a project that only benefits a few residents. Any motorist who drives around Port Townsend knows there are other road maintenance issues that could be addressed, such as the many potholes in roads throughout the entire city. On top of that, the 2021 budget, approved by city council on Monday, makes some major cuts to the roads fund. To save money in 2021, the

public works department will delay and reduce street maintenance and striping. It will leave vacant two currently empty positions, the streets lead operator and streets accountant, and it will eliminate some seasonal street worker positions.

The mini roundabouts on Washington Street were not solely funded by the city. The test project was a funding partnership between the neighborhood members who donated money to fund the materials for the project, while the city provided the labor to install them.

But Faber noted that it seemed unfair to prioritize a project just because a neighborhood can afford to raise funds for its completion. City council member Pam Adams also criticized the roundabouts, bringing up the issue of the equity of favoring one neighborhood's complaints, when others may have equally bad or worse traffic issues.

Some motorists have begun honking while driving round the miniature traffic circles, perhaps in a show of support, but more likely in a show of displeasure. But other, more productive, commentators have suggested installing speed bumps in high-pedestrian-traffic areas, such as by the post office, in order to slow down traffic where people often cross the street.

The transportation committee did not make any final decision on the roundabouts at their November 18 meeting. However, King noted that the entire process has been very valuable for the public works department, and that it will help the department determine whether or not the traffic circles are a viable tool for traffic control, not just on Washington Street, but throughout the city. The next transportation committee meeting will take place virtually, on December 16th.

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.