

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for December 16, 2020.

The number of coronavirus cases in Jefferson County has increased to 198, with the Public Health department reporting 3 new cases yesterday, for a total of 7 new cases so far this week. There are currently 64 test results still pending. Three of the new cases are individuals from Port Townsend, another three were from mid-county, and one is from south county.

Yesterday, Washington state's first COVID-19 vaccine was given to an ICU nurse at the UW Medical Center. It is expected that 20 million people in the US will be vaccinated this month, including some Jefferson County residents. Public Health Director Tom Locke announced Monday that Jefferson County is set to receive a shipment of the vaccine.

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.

The city public works department is gearing up to renegotiate its water supply deal with the Port Townsend Paper Company in 2021. If you live within city limits, the source of your water is the Olympic Water Gravity System, which pulls water from the Quilcene watershed and flows through pipes constructed back in 1928. Port Townsend has been in partnership with the paper mill since that waterline was installed, nearly 100 years ago. The mill has operated and maintained the water system since then, and spends approximately \$416,000 per year in maintenance, which includes paying for four full-time workers who live onsite at the Big Quilcene Diversion and at City Lake.

Today, the city uses about 1 million gallons of water per day, which is actually less than in the 1970s, when the rate was about 1.4 million gallons per day. The mill, by comparison, uses 11 million gallons per day, but it has made many improvements to the operations in order to conserve and recycle water.

At the city council's workshop meeting on December 14, city's water resource manager Ian Jablonski and public works director Steve King presented information to the council to prepare them for the upcoming negotiations with the mill. According to Jablonski, there are many increasing costs that the city has to prepare for in order to maintain the waterline. For example, a 9-mile section of the pipeline dates back to 1928, and will soon have to be replaced. The other 19 miles of pipeline date back to the 1950s and early 70's, and may also have to be replaced. To replace all of the pipeline would be an estimated \$113 million. To replace just the section that is the oldest would cost \$43 million.

On top of that, the city could face challenges related to the climate crisis. This waterline is the only source of water for Port Townsend, therefore it is vulnerable if there are any catastrophic incidents, such as an earthquake. The waterline relies on regular snowpack each year. Global warming could threaten the amount of water available each year.

To prepare for the upcoming negotiations, the city's public works department will be drafting a series of technical whitepapers to help look comprehensively at all of elements that could affect the city's water supply. These will be available to the public, and the city will also be partnering with the historical society to help engage the public in a series of events about the history of the waterline and the potential future.

King noted that the city cannot afford \$113 million to replace the current system. That is why the negotiations with the paper mill are important. The city council has to look at the long term goals for the waterline and how a continuing partnership with the private paper mill could be helpful in the long term.

By the summer of 2021, the public works department will have completed their technical analysis and will begin the negotiation process with the paper mill. In the fall, they will present a final draft agreement to the city council and the paper mill's board for approval. Water rate changes that may happen will go into effect January 1, 2021.

To learn more about the waterline and the partnership with the paper mill, visit the Engage PT website at cityofpt.us (<https://cityofpt.us/engagept>), where you can read about the history, see the upcoming timeline of work, and also provide your own opinion.

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.