

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for September 15, 2021.

Jefferson County Public Health reported 16 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 887. In the past two weeks, there have been a total of 192 positive cases. There are currently 87 active cases in isolation, and 46 test results pending. Jefferson Healthcare has begun posting a daily "hospital bed" snapshot on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/JeffersonHealthcarePT>), with information on how many hospital beds are full, and how many COVID-positive patients are at our local hospital. Yesterday, there were 13 total admitted patients, four of whom were COVID patients. Patient volume is only slightly higher than average, but a smaller staff pool is putting a strain on existing staff. According to the hospital, patient activity in the Emergency Department and Express Clinic continues to be very high but there was a slight decrease in activity last week in comparison to the prior week. Elective surgeries are postponed, ensuring that the hospital can care for the most acutely ill and urgent/emergent cases. Like many other hospitals in the state, it is becoming increasingly difficult to transfer patients to a higher level of care due to significant patient volumes in hospitals across the state. COVID testing volumes at Jefferson Healthcare dropped over the last five days from an average of 66 tests completed daily to an average of 95 tests completed the five days prior. The test positivity rate over the last 10 days is about 10%. The Jefferson Healthcare Express Clinic offers Johnson & Johnson daily from 9am-5pm; no appointment is needed.

The Executive Board of the Jefferson County Democrats is recommending that the Democrats endorse Libby Wennstrom in the race for Port Townsend City Council position 5. An official endorsement requires a two-thirds vote of eligible Jefferson County Democrat members present at a meeting. Voting will take place at a virtual meeting on September 21. The endorsement doesn't come as a huge surprise, given the fact that Wennstrom is currently the vice-chair of the Jefferson County Democrats Executive Board. But Wennstrom's opponent in the city council race, Tyler Vega, called into question the upcoming vote because he was not made aware that the Jefferson County Democrats would be issuing endorsements for the city council races, especially since both he and Wennstrom are members of the democratic party, and because the city council race is non-partisan. Vega labels himself as a progressive, and has run for office before on the green party ticket, but he said in a Facebook post that he entered the city council race hoping to soften, or close, the divide between the progressive and moderate factions of the left in Port Townsend, but that his hope may be in vain. Despite hoping to close that divide, Vega encouraged all his supporters who are eligible members of the Jefferson County Democrats to vote "no" at the upcoming endorsement meeting.

After a hot and dry summer, last weekend's rain came with a sign of relief from those fighting fires across the state. Because of improving weather conditions, Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz will announce today the reopening of Department of Natural Resources lands east of the Cascades to the public starting tomorrow, after closure due to the threat of wildfires this summer. According to the Department of Natural Resources, this fire season presented unprecedented challenges with historic heat and drought conditions, in addition to lack of staffing because of the increased rate of COVID-19 spread due to the Delta Variant. Firefighters have battled about 1,750 fires that have burned more than 650,000 acres in Washington state. Since the closure of DNR lands eight weeks ago, conditions have improved dramatically because of a tactical focus on initial attack from firefighters, which has allowed the DNR to respond to fires quickly and keep them from spreading. Last Labor Day weekend, more than 500,000 acres burned in less than 36 hours. This year, there

were no new significant fire starts over the holiday weekend. A statewide burn ban remains in effect, currently set to expire September 30. Jefferson County's burn ban is also still in effect, until further notice.

Washington State Department of Transportation maintenance crews will be in Port Townsend today and tomorrow working to replace outdated traffic lights at the intersection of Kearney Street and Highway 20. While work is being conducted, flaggers will alternate traffic through the work zone, so drivers in Port Townsend should expect some delays. Work will be conducted today and tomorrow from 9am to 3:30pm. Eventually, the light at that intersection will be replaced with a roundabout. WSDOT plans to install two compact roundabouts in Port Townsend in 2023 – one at the intersection of Kearney Street and Highway 20, and the other at the intersection of Mill Road and Highway 20.

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.