

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for October 12, 2021.

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Jefferson County is beginning contract negotiations this week to bring on Ethan Raup, an executive at KEXP radio in Seattle, as Jefferson County's new County Administrator. Jefferson County has been on the hunt for a new top executive after Philip Morely, who served in the role for 12 years, resigned abruptly in April. Raup was one of three finalist candidates including the former city manager of Sunnyside Washington and the county administrative officer of Trinity County, California. Although Raup has been working at KEXP radio since 2014, his previous governmental experience includes work for King County and the City of Seattle where he served in various roles including as the Director of Policy and Operations from 2010 to 2014. The three finalists gave public presentations on their vision for the county Friday.

Raup's presentation focused on what he sees as the major trends which will affect the county over the next ten years. He highlighted the growing effects of climate change as well as increases in tourism, population and property values. Communities like ours can easily be overrun by the growing metropolitan footprint of Seattle, he said. As more and more people move here or choose Jefferson County as the spot for their vacation home, businesses and diversity could suffer without proper infrastructure and development plans. We must strike a balance between continued growth and protecting what makes our county unique he said. Raup noted that the effects of climate change will undoubtedly impact every aspect of life in Jefferson County over the next 10 years. He pointed to rising sea levels, increased heat events, droughts, wildfires and pest infestations as the most likely contributors. After hearing from all three candidates, commissioners voted unanimously to move forward with Raup. They expressed confidence that his experience, vision for the county and personal character would serve the county well. A contract for Raup's employment will come before board sometime over the next month.

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Ferry service interruptions and cancellations reached new heights last week with over 150 sailings across the Puget Sound cancelled Thursday and Friday. Service was reduced on seven of ten routes and wait times exceeded three hours in several locations including in Coupeville for standby vehicles. Extreme crew shortages are the main cause of cancelled ferries as if even one employee calls out and a replacement cannot be found the sailing will be canceled.

On Friday, 202 employees were unavailable for work due to being sick, taking vacation time or planned leave. While that number is not unusually high out of a workforce of approximately 1,600, the system has had a hard time finding employees to fill in open shifts as many of them are already working overtime. An aging workforce and a lack of new recruits is also exacerbating the problem. Rumors are still flying about ferry employees quitting over Governor Jay Inslee's vaccine mandate for state employees. Approximately 87% of ferry employees have already submitted proof of vaccination, said Lars Erickson, communications director for the Washington State Department of Transportation. It is possible that some employees who do not intend to get vaccinated are cashing in sick time before the October 18 deadline, said Justin Fujikoa, a Washington State Ferries spokesperson. The lack of crew is on the verge of becoming unsustainable, he said. Continued disruptions have made ferries a front and center issue for many Washington State lawmakers. Democratic senators and representatives of the 40th legislative district, which includes San Juan County, signed a statement last week calling for an increase in the Washington State Ferries budget to help with crew shortages as well as increase the overall fleet size. Governor Jay Inslee said he is considering short and long-term options to reduce the strain on the system including a possible budget increase. He also said Friday that state services will continue with or without those who refuse to get the vaccine after the October 18 deadline.

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We are no longer seeing high levels of community spread COVID-19 in Jefferson County, Dr. Allison Berry, Public Health Officer said Monday. Jefferson County Public Health added 12 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday bringing the total confirmed case count to 1,053. Thirty cases are in active isolation. The majority of newly reported cases are coming from those who travel outside of the county and then pass it on to household contacts, she said. In the first week of October about 5% of tests were returning positive.

Across Washington state, case rates are down by 14% but mostly plateauing and not continuing to decrease, she said. While lower case counts is something to celebrate, a plateau means the next spike can come much harder and faster, she said. Jefferson County has the second lowest case rate in the state with 226 cases per 100,000 residents. While case rates are down, Public Health is contending with a local outbreak connected to Brinnon Schools that has infected 16 people including mostly children, she said. Everyone connected to the outbreak is in good condition, she said and the transmission event occurred not at school but on the school bus. This event highlights the importance of vaccination for eligible adults, she said. Since children are still unable to receive the vaccine, we must protect them in other ways. In this region unvaccinated people are nine times more likely to contract COVID-19 and 26 times more likely to be hospitalized with COVID-19 Berry said.

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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](mailto:news@kptz.org). I'm Lily Haight. Thanks for listening.