

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Thursday, April 30, 2020.

Jefferson County is holding steady, As of this morning, Jefferson County Public Health currently reports 28 confirmed COVID-19 cases in our county, a number that has not changed in three weeks. Of the 816 tested to date, 787 – or 97% – tested negative, while 3% tested positive for the presence of the virus. One person is now awaiting test results. These numbers reflect the shortages in availability of COVID-19 screening and represent less than 1% of our population tested.

The Jefferson County Farmer's Market in Uptown Port Townsend's season opener last Saturday was a qualified success, according to market director Amanda Milholland, who said the new structure could change the way the market operates when the emergency ends.

Fourteen vendors participated in the physical market last week, where social distancing was practiced and enforced. Another 17 participated in the online market, where orders submitted by 1pm on any given Thursday are available for pickup at the Port Townsend Community Center on Saturday. It is this service that Milholland expects could define the market's future direction, with a scheduled online order pickup possibly replacing one of the smaller markets.

Milholland said the market will continue to fine tune the social distancing practices at the Saturday markets, balancing service and community needs with safety. To manage the process, 12 to 15 volunteers will be on hand to point people in the right direction.

This Saturday's market has the dubious distinction as the first to operate without Aldrich's Market across the street. Aldrich's which closes today, had a symbiotic relationship with the market, as both benefited from increased sales on busy days. Milholland said that Aldrich's closing is akin to a missing tooth in a smile. As a result, Uptown itself will become less lively and enticing.

The COVID 19 emergency was the tipping point for the market, which has been struggling financially for years.

Jefferson County Sheriff Joe Nole will enforce the governor's stay at home order, unlike a few of his colleagues who have announced they will not disperse crowds. Nole told KPTZ that his office will use discretion and persuasion to gain compliance, and will not arrest anyone unless they can't be persuaded to comply. The department will weigh all of the priorities when considering whether to dispatch deputies to address a complaint. Deputies will avoid arresting anyone for noncompliance as it will put deputies and staff at the jail at risk. If persuasion doesn't work the sheriff's department could involve the prosecuting attorney in the process.

Nole forwarded us a statement from the Washington State Sheriff's Association that best explains the department's position, which is resolved to help reopen the economy while protecting public health. From the statement: "Citizens expect us to do what we have been empowered to do. Not more, not less, but with compassion and discretion."

Governor Jay Inslee announced a plan to restart construction projects, authorizing activity needed to fulfill obligations under a contract or with an approved permit prior to March 23. 550 permits in Jefferson County fit the governor's criteria; including single-family homes, commercial construction, garages, mobile homes, additions, and repairs.

Inspections have begun this week and local contractors have already instituted job site safety requirements including social distancing, hand washing / hand sanitizing stations, personal protective equipment, temperature checks, and sign-in sheets, according to the Jefferson County Government Facebook page.

Over at the city, the Port Townsend development staff is now issuing permits and providing limited inspections.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at five PM Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news at [kptz dot org](http://kptz.org).

This is Charlie Bermant with some of today's news. Thank you for listening.