

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with with local news and commentary for Tuesday, May 18, 2021.

Filing week began yesterday, with a flurry of candidates filing for open offices in the county. All major offices have at least one candidate, although only two fire district races have drawn any opposition. The highest visibility contests are for the Port Townsend City Council, with three open seats. On Monday three candidates filed: Ben Thomas for Position 1, now held by Mayor Michelle Sandoval, Aislinn Diamanti for Position 2, now held by Ariel Speser, and Tyler Miles Vega for Position 5, now occupied by Pam Adams. All three incumbents declined to seek additional terms. While Thomas, Diamanti, and Vega are not running as a slate they are loosely affiliated and planned it so they would not run against each other, according to Thomas. They may or may not share campaign strategy in the future, he said. While Thomas is seeking to replace Sandoval he is not running for mayor, as the mayor is elected by the council. The odds-on favorite for the position is Deputy Mayor David Faber, but that's what we thought after the last election. The council now has a gender balance of 5-2, majority female. That's likely to even up a little bit after the November election.

Incumbents on other local boards are seeking additional terms. Port of Port Townsend Commissioner Pete Hanke is running for a third term representing District 3, while incumbent Hospital Commissioners Kees Kolff and Mari Dressler have signed on for six-year terms. Port Townsend School Board members Jennifer James Wilson and Connie Welch also filed yesterday. Carol Hasse has declared for Position 2 on the Port Commission, replacing retiring commissioner Bill Putney. Filing continues this week, with a deadline of 4:30pm Friday for candidates to declare. For details contact the Jefferson County Auditor, go to <https://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/1268/For-Candidates> (360-385-9119 or 360-385-9117). If three or more candidates file for a position, they will be winnowed down to two during the August 3 primary. If just two people file, they will proceed directly to Go, the November 2 general election.

Jefferson County now has 412 reported cases of COVID-19, logging 22 cases in May so far. This keeps pace with April, when 45 new cases occurred. Six active cases are now in isolation, with 53 people awaiting test results. During his weekly address to the Board of County Commissioners, Health Officer Dr. Tom Locke offered a contrary position to the CDC ruling relaxing the rules on indoor masking. Last week, the CDC announced a change in masking guidelines that includes eliminating capacity limits for events like concerts and baseball games. Events such as these can be attended at full capacity if everyone is fully vaccinated. However, Locke said that masking mandates are not federal but are local and that his order is still in effect.

He said we need to maintain the indoor masking mandate for businesses as there is no way to tell if people have been vaccinated. Outdoor mandates can be removed because, he said, COVID-19 is not transmitted easily in outdoor settings. Locke said that for special events where people can be verified as fully vaccinated, no masks will be necessary. Verification is up to the organization or person holding the event. Almost 70% of Jefferson County residents 16 years and older have initiated the COVID-19 vaccination, and 60% are fully vaccinated – the highest rate in the state. County Health Officer Dr. Tom Locke said that Governor Inslee's target of 70% vaccinated will be reached this weekend in Jefferson. Director of Emergency Management Willie Bence said his agency, along with the Public Health Department, will expand pop-up vaccination clinics through June and will continue working to find alternate sites like the Farmer's Markets and businesses, with a focus on south county. He encourages anyone with questions to contact 360-344-9791.

Jefferson County expects to receive \$6.3 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds over the next two years. In a meeting, yesterday county commissioners considered how the money could be used – some of the ideas included funding larger projects such as purchasing property for housing, Broadband infrastructure, helping Phase 1 property owners in the Port Hadlock sewer area, childcare, workforce housing, and behavioral health resources for the community.

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.

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.