

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Lily Haight with local news for October 20, 2021.

Jefferson County Public Health reported 9 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. This brings our total case count, since the beginning of the pandemic, up to 1,080. There are currently 23 active cases in isolation, and our two-week case rate is 156 per 100,000.

Port Townsend residents who live in neighborhoods near Cook Avenue have been alarmed by a large new home building project that has now cleared a considerable amount of forest habitat along the street. The development, called the Trail Crest Development Project, is in the second phase of a three-phase development project. The first phase of development included building Trail Crest Road and 14 parcels to build on. The road sat empty for some time, until earlier this year when the first house went up. That house just sold for over \$700,000.

The second phase of the project is a bit further up the hill on Cook, where Richmond American Homes owns three 5-acre parcels. Richmond is a homebuilding company that operates in over a dozen states across the country. Recently, the company has received negative press for poor reviews from homebuyers, who say the homes are built cheaply, and sometimes left unfinished. Construction crews are currently cutting into the bluff along the roadside to install a new sewer main and pedestrian improvements along Cook Avenue. For several weeks, they have closed the north lane of Cook, and installed an automated traffic light to help with traffic control on the now one-lane road. This past week, a large sign went up on the property, advertising luxury homes. Port Townsend resident Suzy Carroll took to Facebook to ask fellow city residents how they felt about the project. Like her, many posted in the comments that they were upset by the logging, which left not a single tree in sight and could cause some dangerous erosion along the roadside, and by the price of the house that was already sold, as Port Townsend continues to struggle with an affordable housing crisis. Even some city officials got involved in the Facebook post. Mayor Michelle Sandoval explained that the project was out of the city's hands, as it was approved in 2008 by a hearings examiner, not the city council. The original owner of the land, she said, lost it during the Great Recession and the bank sold it to a local company, Seton Construction, which developed phase one, and then sold it to Richmond. Lance Bailey, director of development for the city, explained that there are a lot of local jobs supported by the project. He said that while Richmond American will buy the land with road and infrastructure and build the houses, a local construction company is doing the work, and a variety of local contractors will be involved in the home construction process. Ben Thomas, who is running for a seat on city council, got involved in the conversation as well, saying that while he agrees more houses need to be built, developing new roads, instead of investing in roads and parcels that already exist, will actually cost the city and the taxpayers more down the road, in maintenance and upkeep. "The people who don't want to pay high taxes and also don't like potholes should be upset to see more roads laid," he said, "Even if the initial cost is borne by the developer."

And speaking of road upkeep - The traffic light which has been broken at the intersection of Taylor and Water streets for some months now has since been fixed and replaced with a new traffic signal pole. But the signal is still flashing red, instead of operating as a normal traffic light. The reason for this, explained on the city's Facebook page, is because city engineering staff observed over the summer that the intersection at Taylor and Water streets actually functions just fine as a four-way stop, which allows pedestrians to cross while not holding up traffic. Because of this, the city plans to leave the signal on red flash as a four-way stop for now, while keeping the option of turning the traffic light back on. And the city engineering department is asking for your thoughts on the intersection. Send an email to engagept@cityofpt.us to let them know what you think.

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.