

# SEQUIM GAZETTE July 10, 2019



*Barry Berezowsky, Sequim director of community development, addresses a crowd of more than 150 people on July 8 during a Sequim city council meeting, saying that there's no proposal before city staff about the much talked about medication-assisted addiction treatment (MAT) facility. He said if a proposal does come in, it'll will go before the Planning Commission. Sequim Gazette photo by Matthew Nash*

## Community members rally at city against MAT facility

Sequim staff say no proposal before council, planning commission

- By [Matthew Nash](#) Wednesday, July 10, 2019 1:30am

Emotions ran high at Monday night's Sequim City Council meeting as opponents of a proposed medication-assisted addiction treatment (MAT) facility in Sequim shared—or attempted to share—their feelings with city councilors.

Locals, some of them participants in an online group called Sequim against MAT, filled the council chambers and part of the patio of the Sequim Civic Center, seeking answers from councilors about the tentative \$20 million project on 19.5 acres west of downtown Sequim.

City staff said the July 8 meeting wasn't the appropriate venue to discuss the project but that they intend to hold a separate meeting about it with project's partners sometime in July.

The *Peninsula Daily News* reported in May the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe purchased property southeast of Costco to build a MAT facility and a 16-bed inpatient psychiatric evaluation and treatment facility.

Tribal officials said the facility will dispense daily doses of methadone, Suboxone and Vivitrol in a 15,000-square-foot building that could grow to about 25,000 square feet.

Management for the facility have an agreement between the tribe and Olympic Medical Center to operate the psychiatric facility, as well as potential agreements to collaborate with Jefferson Healthcare, Forks Community Hospital and Peninsula Behavioral Health, the *PDN* reported.

The tribe, OMC and Jefferson Healthcare applied and received \$7.2 million for phase one from the state's capital budget application, and tribal officials plan to seek the remainder of the facility's funding in the 2020 legislative session.

Construction tentatively begins in spring 2020, tribe officials said, however, city staff said no application is before them.

"We don't have an application or a pre-application, but if we do, you'll be able to hear about it in the newspaper, posted on our city website, in a notice in the *Peninsula Daily News* and also on a board posted on the property," said Barry Berezowsky, Sequim director of community development.

"At this point in time, except for rumors, I don't know if we'll be able to discuss a whole lot."

Berezowsky later said he had met with tribal and OMC representatives for a preliminary meeting but that he didn't have any concrete information "except for the fact that there's not going to be any 400-bed hospital any time soon."

He said it wouldn't be appropriate to discuss the MAT facility because "that's not on anyone's drawing board."

Berezowsky said, "I can't comment on something that doesn't exist. Again, we don't have an application."



*Sequim Mayor Dennis Smith said city staff and councilors received numerous emails and calls about a proposed medication-assisted addiction treatment (MAT) facility but he had heard only one side of the argument on Monday and he has "to have the opportunity to base the decision on facts." Sequim Gazette photo by Matthew Nash*

## **Council opinions**

Community members asked what each city councilor's take was on the proposed facility.

"We all care," Cheryl Cuccia of Sequim said. "Your particular opinions matter to us. We have elected you as officials. We respect your judgment. We have a right to know that."

However, city staff recommended multiple times that city councilors not respond.

"Because you're afraid of public opinion?" Cuccia asked.

"No, it's because as councilor Ted Miller had pointed out, as the project goes to the Planning Commission for a conditional use permit, and if for whatever reason someone wants to appeal that decision the appeal authority would be this council," city attorney Kristina Nelson-Gross said.

"It's not appropriate for the council to put their own personal opinions on the record for something they could be hearing in the future ... As law, it's not appropriate for them to sharing their personal views because it represents bias."

City councilor Brandon Janisse asked if a moratorium on development was appropriate; Nelson-Gross said she's unsure if it would be, because no proposal has been made and the specific concerns. However, councilors can explore one if asked, she said.

City councilor Bob Lake turned the question about the facility back to the audience. The crowd responded they were not in favor of the facility.

"Everyone's voice has been heard, so now we have heard your position," Lake said.

Mayor Dennis Smith said city staff and councilors received numerous emails and calls about the facility.

"I know personally what I've heard, and what you people here have said and obviously there's no one here who said they want this, but somebody did somewhere because they're still coming," Smith said.

"At this point, I don't have any full evaluation of what the inputs and outputs are and this is one side. I will not base any decision on one side I hear in a room that happened out of nowhere with no forewarning. It's not right. I have to have the opportunity to base the decision on facts."

City Manager Charlie Bush said city staff would announce a public meeting about the project soon through various outlets so people could be heard.

## **Public opinions/questions**

Several people attempted to speak throughout the hour or so of the MAT facility discussion.

Kathleen Sayles, a registered nurse with Olympic Medical Center, said she's concerned about the vulnerable population in the area and its potential impact.

"I'm very upset that we are even being considered for this that we aren't even 'one-tenth of the population of Washington,'" she said.

"Where is this fundraising coming from? Last year we all wrote letters for the hospital begging them to extend funding from Port Angeles to Sequim. Now all that fundraising is being cut off. We're lucky to have an oncology center. Where did the (state legislature funds) come from for funding?"

Sandy Collins of Sequim questioned how the city seemed to know so little about the project yet the newspaper had reported on it.



*Sandy Collins of Sequim asked multiple questions of Sequim city councilors and staff on whether them being there to oppose the proposed MAT facility mattered. City Manager Charlie Bush replied that they plan to host a meeting about the facility sometime this meeting possibly with the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe and Olympic Medical Center involved. Sequim Gazette photo by Matthew Nash*

“Again, it’s a potential project; we don’t have a lot of details,” Bush said. “We don’t have an application yet but when we do, we’ll have a process.”

“People have been quoted. Are you saying it’s all fake news?” Collins asked.

“There’s a potential project out there planned for the region with discussions for something by the site by Costco,” Bush said. “We’re saying it’s not a project yet. In the terminology of city staff, an applicant comes and talks with the city. And ultimately, if they’re serious, we’ll file a process with the city.”

Collins asked why people weren’t notified about it.

“That’s exactly what we’re talking about,” Bush said. “When an application is filed then there’s a formal process initiated. But we have no reached that stage yet. These are discussions that happen all the time.”

Someone else in the audience said the tribe already purchased the property, insinuating a project may be moving forward.

“People own land all over our community,” Bush said. “They determine what to do with it ultimately. I’d be surprised if the tribe does not offer a formal proposal to the city, but we’re not at that point at this time.”

Collins asked Bush if the public’s opinion counted; Bush said it would be valuable to the city’s planning commission.

“In this particular space, we’re very limited in how we handle state law with this,” Bush said.

“So being in America, where people have the right to vote, it won’t matter?” Collins asked.

“Your words mean a lot,” Bush said. “When we updated our comprehensive plan, it dictates how we setup our future planning ... the voice of people come in at a lot of steps.”

“This turnout means nothing to you?” Collins asked.

“It means a lot to me. It says a lot about our democratic process,” Bush said.

Lake told Collins and the crowd that city staff are showing them how to be effective in the city government process.

“What they’ve told you, we don’t vote on any of this stuff,” Lake said. “So talking to us doesn’t move your opinion forward. There is a process that does and that’s when the Planning Commission considers it.

“What you’ll want to do is pay attention if we get an application. It’ll be in our website. Go to that meeting. That’s where you have input. I want you to be as effective as possible because your voice is important.”

For more information about the Sequim City Council and Planning Commission, visit [www.sequimwa.gov](http://www.sequimwa.gov) or call 360-683-4139.

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When asked for city councilor’s opinions on a proposed MAT facility for opioid treatment coming to the city, Sequim City Attorney Kristina Nelson-Gross said that city councilors should not share their opinion about the facility because it could show bias. If a Planning Commission decision was appealed on a proposed plan, then the city council would have to hear it on appeal and any public comments now are not lawful. Sequim Gazette photo by Matthew Nash.



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