

## Sequim – A Town Worth Saving

By Jodi Wilke, Chair of Save Our Sequim

Sequim is a small town of 7,108 people on the north shore of Washington State's Olympic Peninsula. As a quiet retirement community with a median age 49% above the WA state average, Sequim is home to the world-famous annual Lavender Festival and a thriving tourism industry. Sequim is also a rural farming community with deep pioneer roots. Many of the same families who founded this town have lived here for generations.

Is this the right place for a 15,000 square foot opioid addiction treatment center, expanding to a 25,000 square foot inpatient psychological hospital and detox center? According to a recent privately conducted poll, 85% of the responders oppose this project in Sequim. Yet the developers, along with City leaders and County and State politicians, hospitals and health departments are actively thwarting the will of the public with this unprecedented project and threatening the tranquility of this small Northwest Washington town.

The project was announced publicly on May 6, 2019 in the Peninsula Daily News. ([Click Here](#)) And while the news reports lauded the accomplishments of the developers and presented our district representatives as heroes for supporting the \$7.2 million grant, the citizens of Sequim had a different response – one of concern, confusion, and shock.

Our concerns arose from the social impacts of drug addiction on nearby cities such as Seattle, Port Angeles, and Aberdeen. This was a problem that Sequim had been largely able to avoid due to the social makeup of our community. Our confusion was mostly based around the question, "Why here?" This tiny town would be so disproportionately affected. The site location was next to a popular retail district, adjacent to one of the county's oldest farms, and a short walk from nursing homes, schools, and residential neighborhoods. The final shock came when we realized that this plan had been in the works for somewhere between 2-5 years, that nobody knew, and that our city leaders and other politicians had sold us down the river for the financial gain and convenience of the developers.

One of our community started a Facebook group on July 4<sup>th</sup> 2019. A small meeting was set four days later to discuss this issue. Approximately 10 people were invited and somewhere between 65-75 people showed up. This initial group became the core of our organization, forming a Board of Directors and 12 separate volunteer groups. The group voted to change the name from Sequim Against MAT to Save Our Sequim, and SOS was officially born.

The initial founder set up a GoFundMe page which was connected to a joint bank account to raise money for the cause. We soon had enough money and saw the need to incorporate as a 501(c)(4) Social Welfare Organization. SOS was in the local paper almost daily because the Chair of the organization had previously run as a candidate for the Washington State House of Representatives. [PDN](#) and [PTL](#) Although not declaring as a candidate for any upcoming election, the newspapers felt this was newsworthy enough to develop a smear campaign. [PTL](#) They suggested the chair was using this issue to springboard her upcoming campaign for 2020 and even suggested that the moneys raised for SOS would somehow be funneled into her election campaign.

The Facebook group grew in numbers to now in excess of 2400 people. SOS continues to share its message:

Sequim is an inappropriate place for a large, regional drug addiction treatment center and inpatient psychiatric ward

- SOS is not against addicts getting treatment, only that treatment should be done where the addicts are most prevalent, and not far remote from where treatment is needed.
- According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) most recent 2016 [study](#), Sequim is a NON-OPTIMAL area for such a facility
- Local treatment facilities already exist and are not filled to capacity, with another new facility opening in fall of 2019. This facility will offer Methadone and is in nearby Port Angeles
- Excess treatment capacity will trigger a referral process from other parts of Washington state, including the Hub and Spoke Model [project](#), which already functions to refer clients from outside the area.
- Sequim is ill-equipped to handle the influx of a population that statistically is 47% housing challenged, 13% criminally involved, and whose drug use continues at a rate of 45% even while IN treatment (DSHS 2019 Western Washington [study](#))
- The detrimental effects of this subset and facility are of a serious nature, in particular affecting Sequim's demographic makeup, and should be carefully considered
- Supporting this kind of a facility is against the city's own stated vision for the future of Sequim
- According to a recent privately conducted poll, approximately 85% of the community opposes this project and anticipates a negative impact to the community, the economy, and the safety of Sequim (click [here](#) to see the poll)

The City Council supports the developers project against the will of the people and stands by its initial position:

- The City claims the land in question is zoned appropriately for this kind of a "medical clinic"
- As such it will be permitted outright through an administrative process, shielding it from public scrutiny and impacts to businesses, infrastructure, and environment.
- Any protest or challenge to this conclusion will only cost the city money it doesn't have, to fight a lawsuit it believes is frivolous.
- The City of Sequim appears more concerned about legal action from the developers than representing the people who live here.

Of course, SOS and our legal counsel differ in this land use assessment. The area does not allow permitting outright. Permitting of this facility would only be possible through a rigorous public process due to the specific land use designations outlined in the Sequim Municipal Code. We believe these codes are being sidestepped to benefit the developers. Furthermore, recent changes have been made to the land use designations which appear to favor the developers project. Should this be affirmed in court, this type of "spot zoning" practice is illegal and will be challenged.

The developers maintain that they are some sort of savior to the community by building this large regional facility, dubbed a "[Healing Campus](#)" to obscure its actual purpose:

- They use outdated statistics to show a false need which appears desperate
- They ignore the existing capacity for identical treatment options in the local area

- They use indefensible statistics from their private clinics as proof of an inflated success rate of 70-80%, a rate which is disproved by the most recent 2019 DSHS study in Western Washington showing 51% (above)
- They accuse anybody who is against this facility of being ignorant of the facts and either racist or a NIMBY
- They state they will model their facility around the Didgiwalic facility in Anacortes, WA, a facility that is incomparable in many ways – particularly being miles outside of the city and located in an industrial district within 5-10 min drive from 2 hospitals. Yet even this facility has major problems, including admitting that 90% of their clients have no valid driver's license, they have a challenge serving transient population, and they find it necessary to provide tents, sleeping bags and hygiene kits. ([Click Here](#)) More study must be done to assess the true impact to Anacortes.
- They claim they will somehow refuse to treat any clientele from outside the area, a statement that cannot be supported
- They acknowledge the likelihood for the challenging clientele to remain at-large without places to go or be, yet state they will somehow prevent clients from visiting, camping, or loitering in the town. They claim the clients will be made to leave the same way they came and that will somehow solve the problem. This seems unrealistic to SOS.
- They paint a rosy picture of the social impact around other MAT facilities inconsistent with the results we have seen in Western Washington, and in other states. (photos available on request)
- The developers also have initiated a large PR campaign meant to turn the public opinion in favor of their plans by using outdated, cherry-picked or unsubstantiated private statistics.

The developers wield a lot of power in the local community. As such they benefit from the local power structure and enjoy some of the following advantages:

- Their local business interests include tribal casino, golf courses, restaurants, existing medical clinics, Pot Shop, and other businesses, along with their participation in the community buying/selling provisions from local merchants, realtors, farms, entertainers etc. Many of these DO support us but fear for their livelihood due to the ramifications of the Tribe refusing to do business with SOS supporters.
- The developer stands to gain an obscene financial benefit due to the reimbursement rates offered by the state Medicaid reimbursements for tribal entities. At \$455 per encounter plus medical fees and up to 5 encounters permitted per patient per day, we estimate net profits between \$10-\$36 million per year. This is taxpayer funded and an acceptable, more reasonably priced alternative is already in place.
- SOS has been BANNED from local venues which will not allow us to rent space to host our community and fundraising events – The senior center, local Grange, churches, to name a few. Many of the area musicians refuse to play at our fundraising events for fear of being blacklisted from the developer's venues.
- A local restaurant who had an 8-year contract selling their Salsa at the developer's Longhouse grocery had their account canceled due to support for SOS.
- Local newspapers charge SOS a higher rate for advertising the same issue as the developers, claiming the issue is political. When shown that SOS is a non-political, unpartisan 501(c)(4) the newspapers called the issue "controversial" and continued to charge us more. Newspapers also refuse to publish many of our supporter's letters to the editor.

Save Our Sequim is in a fight for the life and the tranquility of an area once known as “Paradise.” Its unique geographical features include close proximity to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. We are also protected from the western prevailing weather patterns of the Olympic Rain Forrest by a rain shadow that gives Sequim one of the mildest sunny climates in Washington State. This small area the approximate size of Singapore is inhabited by a largely senior population – and their parents! We are served by a small police force of 20, including administrative staff. Sequim is completely unequipped to handle the influx of a needy population that is known to have heavy reliance on social services, medical services, and inexpensive housing, all of which are in low supply in this small town.

Save Our Sequim is reaching out for help against the powerful and well-funded organizations who have planned this facility for years without public knowledge or input. At this time, we anticipate legal fees in excess of \$100,000 and possibly more if we must participate in any appeals proceedings. If you believe that rural areas should not bear the burden of bad policies made in urban areas, please consider supporting us. Sequim can be the one place that finally puts a stop to the spread of this scourge. Our fight is a fight for the heart and soul of small towns everywhere. We don't have this problem here and have paid careful attention to avoid it. Why should public officials and powerful interests be allowed to ruin a small town that has kept itself clean? More information and ways to contribute may be found at our website, [www.saveoursequim.org](http://www.saveoursequim.org).