

Tribes granted permit to build behavioral health center near Stanwood

Up to 32 patients could be involuntarily committed for three to six months. Permit conditions aim to ease concerns of locals.

By [Jerry Cornfield](#)

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A drawing shows the proposed 32-bed mental health treatment center north of Stanwood. (Washington State Health Care Authority)

STANWOOD — The Tulalip Tribes can proceed with building a 32-bed secure behavioral health facility near Stanwood after clearing a final regulatory hurdle.

Snohomish County Hearing Examiner Peter Camp issued a conditional use permit Tuesday to the tribes to build and operate the residential treatment center on an undeveloped parcel it owns on 300th Street NW.

Camp also imposed conditions to prevent patients from walking away when released, to alert the community if one wanders off and to ensure the center will not look like an institution when constructed. Those conditions came in response to concerns raised by residents and elected leaders in a yearlong review process.

Requests for reconsideration are due by March 17. Appeals to the County Council must be submitted by March 21.

Camp's decision followed two days of public hearings on the project he conducted in late January. Residents expressed concern and support for the mental health facility in those proceedings.

The project calls for two 16-bed buildings to be constructed at the southeast corner of 300th Street NW and 80th Avenue NW, north of Stanwood city limits. If the permit is approved, the first building could go up as soon as 2024. Gov. Jay Inslee's proposed budget contains funding for operation.

The treatment facility is intended to serve adult patients who are involuntarily committed by court order for stays between 90 and 180 days and adults who commit themselves to inpatient treatment. While it is possible a patient could have been convicted of a crime in the past, the facility will not serve anyone currently in the criminal justice system, according to the conditional use permit.



A notice, seen here Oct. 13, 2022, at the site of the proposed mental health facility at 300th Street NW and 80th Avenue NW north of Stanwood. (Olivia Vanni / Herald file)

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The Tulalip Tribes agreed to build the treatment center as part of a sales tax sharing compact with the state. The tribes committed in 2020 to spend up to \$35 million to site, design and build the center in exchange for millions in tax dollars generated at Quil Ceda shopping center.

The Washington State Health Care Authority will hire a behavioral health operator to run the facility.

One permit condition says patients cannot simply walk out the facility's doors upon discharge. They must have a discharge plan detailing by what means — family member, friend, taxi, ride share — they will be taken to their “next residence.”

Another deals with elopement, in which a patient runs off or leaves. Tulalip Tribes are required to develop written procedures for notification of the public in case of elopement.

Ganelle Swindler, of Arlington, who had raised both issues with the county hearing officer, said Friday the outcome showed Camp listened.

“It’s going to happen no matter what,” she said of the project. “I am grateful they were willing to take the considerations of the community into account. I never wanted to block the project. I just wanted it to be the best for the patients who will be served.”

Another concern was aesthetics with residents worried the structure would mar the landscape in an area that is rural and largely undeveloped.

As proposed, the buildings will be one-story with sloped metal roofs like many homes and agricultural buildings in the area. Siding will have residential treatments and “fenced areas will be secured without looking like a prison,” Camp wrote in his decision. “It will not look (like) a strip mall was transplanted from the suburbs to a rural area.”

Jerry Cornfield: 360-352-8623; jcornfield@heraldnet.com; Twitter: [@dospueblos](https://twitter.com/dospueblos).



Jerry Cornfield covers politics and state government for The Daily Herald from a bureau at the state Capitol in Olympia. He writes a weekly column and a daily newsletter, The Cornfield Report, during legislative sessions. [Sign up for his newsletter here.](#)