

# Snohomish County Residential Treatment Facility Frequently Asked Questions

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## Background

### What kind of facility is being built in Snohomish County?

**Fern Lodge Behavioral Wellness** is a 16-bed in-patient facility that will offer around-the-clock care to its residents on 90- or 180-day treatment plans. These centers for rehabilitative treatment will serve individuals who do not need to be hospitalized but still require additional support to prepare for living independently in their communities.

The Washington Health Care Authority will provide ongoing maintenance of the facility. A second 16-bed facility may be built on the site in the future. This is one of several similar projects around the state of Washington.

The Fern Lodge Behavioral Wellness comes as a response to not only the Governor's 2018 behavioral health transformation plan but also to meet the demand for accessible, non-hospitalized inpatient care options, particularly beyond urban hubs.

### Why is this facility being built in Snohomish County?

- For one of the largest counties in the state, Snohomish does not have adequate capacity to serve community members with behavioral health needs. As of November 2023, there are only six beds in the county contracted by HCA to provide this type of treatment. When people receive inpatient care closer to their home, it allows them to maintain and build community connections that support their recovery.
- This is part of a statewide effort to build community-based behavioral health capacity. We need a continuum of services that can prevent individuals from being committed to state hospitals and can support people in their recovery after treatment.

### Why was this site selected?

- Other sites were considered; however the site selected for this project was guided by the Snohomish County Code requirements and in consideration of property that was available to Tulalip Tribes to comply with the Compact requirements.

- To learn more about the Tulalip Tribe Memorandum of Understanding, [read the Tax Sharing Compact Requirement document](#).

## Why was there a county hearing? Who participated?

- In order to build any type of facility, the land owner needs to submit an application for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). The purpose of the CUP is for a Hearing Examiner to ensure that the facility is compatible with existing permitted uses in the same zone, and a public hearing is part of the CUP process.

## What was the outcome of the Snohomish County CUP Hearing?

- Snohomish County Hearing Commissioner Peter Camp's [approved the CUP after the January 26, 2023 public hearing](#). A member of the public filed an appeal, and the Hearing Commissioner's decision to [approve permitting](#) was affirmed during the May 17 appeal hearing. The council decision came with stipulations, including diligent monitoring of wastewater and sewage units.

## What was the approved zoning for the Fern Lodge Behavioral Health Wellness?

Snohomish County Code (SCC) 30.91H.095 defines this project as a Level II Health and Social Service Facility (HSSF). This use is permitted in the R-5 zone through a conditional use review process per SCC 30.22.110.

## What is the construction timeline?

- The estimated construction timeline is July 2023 through December 2024.

## Impacts to the Stanwood community

### Where will the facility be located?

- Fern Lodge Behavioral Wellness at Stanwood will be located at the east side of the parcel located at 29919 80th Ave, NW, Stanwood, WA. The facility entrance will be on 300th St NW.

### How will this facility impact traffic?

- Traffic impact will be minimal. The majority of the traffic will be generated by staff coming to work and leaving at the end of their shifts.
- The project includes an eight-foot-wide paved shoulder the full width of the parcel, and vehicles exiting the parking facility will be allowed right turns only.

- Due to the fact that this is a 90-to-180-day facility, intakes occur at scheduled times and are significantly less frequent than with facilities who house patients with a shorter commitment.
- Updates will be issued to the community via [email](#) distribution.

## What are the design considerations for sewer and water services for the new facility?

- On-site water and sewer infrastructure is being engineered to serve the needs of the the Fern Lodge facility.
- Water service will be provided by a new Group A Community Water Well designed and constructed in accordance with the Washington State Department of Health's Office of Drinking Water Standards and Requirements.
- The water system will be operated and maintained by a qualified Satellite Management Agency (SMA).
- Soil investigations have confirmed the feasibility of an on-site septic drain field for adequate disposal of pre-treated sewer discharge from the proposed buildings.
- The system is being engineered and designed in accordance with Snohomish Health District Standards and Requirements to serve sewer needs.

## How are wetlands, stormwater, and endangered species being considered?

- Wetlands have been mapped on either side of the primary drainage running through the site.
- The project proposes buffer enhancement to meet the requirements of Snohomish County Code. Stormwater discharges leaving the developed site will be managed and released to maintain the wetland hydrology in accordance with the Snohomish County Drainage Manual.
- There are no endangered species known to be on or near the site. Snohomish County is within the Pacific Flyway for migratory birds. Migrating species of geese and ducks can be found in lakes, ponds, wetlands and waterways of the area and that should continue to function in the same manner subsequent to development.

## How will the new facility be designed to fit into the community setting?

- The development is limited to five acres within the site, leaving the remaining 10 acres in its current state of pastures, residential structures, horse barns, and other outbuildings.
- The proposed buildings are being designed as single-story structures with residential components such as sloped roofs, window design

and spacings, and finish materials that are similarly found in residential construction.

- In addition to landscaping that will be provided around the base of the building, the wetland buffer enhancement will provide additional landscaping to meld the project into the site.
- A 20' wide landscaped buffer will also be provided along the eastern edge and street edge landscaping. Frontage improvements are also included in the proposed development.

## About Fern Lodge Behavioral Wellness

### Who will this facility serve?

- This location will serve people ages 18 and older who are court-ordered for long-term civil commitment for 90 or 180 days under the state's [Involuntary Treatment Act](#).
- These centers for rehabilitative treatment will serve those individuals who do not need hospitalized care but still require additional support to prepare for living independently in their communities.
- These are community members who are experiencing mental health conditions, such as mood and thought disorders. They may also have substance use disorders as a secondary diagnosis.
- **These are not individuals involved in the criminal court system.**
- The goal is to stabilize the patient sufficiently so that they can return to the community as quickly as possible. Discharge planning begins as soon as the patient is admitted.

### Will the patient population be predominantly Native American?

- This facility is for all Snohomish County residents and will be focused on the designated crisis responder process for placement.
- If the facility has an available bed, it is possible that someone from outside the county may be admitted.

### The Tulalip Tribes of Washington will be given admission priority. But the facility population will vary over time and will generally represent the population present in the State of Washington. Will the patients be civilly committed as a result of being involved with the court system?

- Individuals committed to the facility are not placed in the facility as a result of being involved in the criminal court system.
- [RCW 71.05](#) explains the involuntary commitment process in detail.

## What kind of treatment will this facility provide?

- Mental health treatment services will be provided at this facility. Each person within the facility has a set of individualized treatment goals that once met will signify a readiness for discharge. A multidisciplinary team of trained health care professionals will work closely with each individual on a daily basis to make progress toward their treatment goals. Treatment interventions can vary based on an individual's need but in general may consist of one on one and group therapy, peer counseling, case management, medication management, and skill building.

## What security considerations go into an RTF?

- Individuals receiving treatment under the Involuntary Treatment Act will not be able to leave the facility on their own. The facility will be secure and locked.
- Individuals receiving treatment here may be considered a danger to themselves or others or unable to take care of their own needs. It is important to understand that people living with serious mental illness are far more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators.
- Patients can move freely about the facility and will be allowed discharge upon satisfactory completion of their treatment, or by order of the court.
- All exterior doors are locked. The outdoor areas with patient access are securely enclosed with anti-climb walls that are twelve feet tall. Patients have the right to visitors, however, visits are limited and monitored as needed.
- The facility is staffed on a 24/7 basis.
- The building interior has clear sightlines without any hidden corners allowing patients to be continuously and safely monitored.
- Staff are trained in de-escalation strategies and emergency management processes.
- A safe room exists should any patient need to be removed and managed to maintain the safety of themselves and others.
- Common areas have ample width to avoid crowding and unwanted interactions.
- The main entry and exit points are secure vestibules, wherein two doors are programmed so both doors cannot be open concurrently.
- Special attention was paid to construction. Windows are outfitted with half-inch-thick impact-resistant windowpanes, and other areas are outfitted with security glazing.

## What happens to people once they complete their treatment?

- The treatment team at the facility will work with the residents to create individualized discharge plans to ensure their needs are met in their community. Discharge plans include linkages with outpatient counseling, medication management, case management, and medical

care, as well as housing supports, when needed. The court may also be involved to order less restrictive conditions of treatment.

- The treatment team, managed care hospital liaisons, and [peer bridgers](#) coordinate to discharge residents in a well coordinated handoff to a pre-arranged housing location, typically close to their home community or county.
- Patients will not be discharged as pedestrians to the street outside the facility or into the nearby community. When possible, residents will be discharged with the help of a loved one.

## Who is the provider?

- HCA is currently working to procure exemplary providers via solicitation. The facility will be staffed 24 hours daily by doctors and medical staff uniquely trained and suited for this level of care and treatment.

## What training will facility staff receive regarding safety?

- To maintain patient and staff safety, employees at the facility will be trained in person-centered counseling techniques such as motivational interviewing. They will also be trained in verbal and physical de-escalation techniques. Staff at the facility will be trained in Advance Crisis Intervention Training which has been proven to reduce the incidence of seclusion and restraint through offering individuals' autonomy and respect. Staff are also trained in emergency management processes to minimize calls to law enforcement and the fire department.

## Washington State licensing process

### How does the state ensure residential treatment facilities adhere to licensing requirements?

- The state licenses more than 100 residential treatment facilities to provide care within the minimum health and safety standards established. The Washington Department of Health inspectors are trained to inspect facilities to confirm compliance with the appropriate state regulatory standards.
- The inspectors look for indications of deficiencies in meeting state regulatory standards that pose patient safety risks.
- Visit the [Department of Health Residential Treatment Facility webpage](#) for more information about the regulatory standards

## How do I learn more ?

- Visit [www.hca.wa.gov/snohomish-facility](http://www.hca.wa.gov/snohomish-facility). HCA is committed to providing opportunities for the community to learn more and ask questions throughout the building process.