



Sequim City Council member William Armacost said that a poll, whether online or in-person, gives residents an opportunity to speak on the proposed medication-assisted treatment, MAT, facility. (Matthew Nash/Olympic Peninsula News Group)

Sequim puts MAT poll decision on hold

City Council seek options to include more people in decision process

By Matthew Nash

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SEQUIM — To poll or not to poll: A decision on whether the Sequim City Council will gauge public opinion on the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe’s proposed medication-assisted treatment facility with an internet poll remains on hold.

Council members voted 4-2 — with Candace Pratt and Bob Lake opposed — to postpone a vote to the Oct. 14 meeting, so that absent council member Jennifer States could weigh in and city staff can explore other polling questions.

Council member Ted Miller initially proposed using the city's online polling system, Polco, to ask residents about the medicated-assisted treatment (MAT) facility Sept. 9.

In a statement to the City Council at its Sept. 23 meeting, Miller said the city remains divided and that council members have witnessed rhetoric from both MAT proponents and opponents.

Miller proposed an impartial moderator "experienced in addiction issues with a medical background to conduct meetings in which the participants are encouraged to express their concerns in a low-pressure environment, and most importantly to get objective answers."

He said a Polco survey is a "valuable first step."

"The primary purpose of the survey is not to find the exact percentage that favor, oppose or are unsure," Miller said.

"The primary purpose is to determine why the opponents and unsure are not supporting the MAT. This will provide a focal point to either correct misconceptions or provide an impetus to address the concerns."

Council member Brandon Janisse said he liked the idea of asking the public questions, but that was concerned about skewed results. He said he asked if city staff could come up with options other than Polco to reach more people.

City Manager Charlie Bush said city staff will look into it.

"It's a tough problem to solve, given the timing involved," he said. "For example, if you want to do an advisory ballot measure, it's months out. It's also a large price tag."

Lake said "the ballot doesn't make sense because we're not voting on it."

He compared it to the city's advisory vote on commercial firework use where residents voted for a ban, and the City Council followed it with an ordinance.

"We don't have an option on this [MAT]," Lake said. "All this energy is misdirected. Direct it towards something more positive."

He encouraged residents to sign up for a Neighborhood Watch program, Map Your Neighborhood and Community Emergency Response Team.

Lake said an online poll vote could be divisive.

“My concern is when people use statistics in an inappropriate way,” he said. “Unless you have a random sample, you’re going to get a skewed result. That just adds to the division in our town.”

Pratt said she’s against the online poll because she finds Miller’s questions “politically charged” and the data will be unreliable because it won’t reach all the citizens in Sequim who don’t go online, read the newspaper and/or aren’t engaged.

Mayor Dennis Smith voted to extend a decision but said he doesn’t want an online poll, either.

“I don’t like the idea of a Polco poll, but I don’t have an answer for what to do get that information that might be beneficial,” Smith said.

“The other negative is, what do we do when we get the results? If we get the possibly skewed results we get, what are we going to do with that?”

Council member William Armacost favored a poll in some capacity, saying, “In order to serve our constituents we have to give them the opportunity to be heard.

“We have too much energy in the problem and not enough energy in the solution ... their input is critical,” Armacost said. “Our personal opinions should have nothing to do with this decision. It should be based on the needs of the citizens of Sequim.”

Armacost said he understands the city is in a position that it can’t do anything legally to stop the proposed MAT facility but there’s a “potential to make an impact on the heart of soul of the Jamestown Tribe” by hearing from concerned residents.

Miller said he’s not interested in the number of those for or against but the reasons.

“There’s no biased in asking why they’re opposed,” he said.

To sign up for the monthly questions, visit polco.us/sequim.

For more information on Polco, call the city at 360-683-4139.

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