

Frequently Asked Questions about the Thunderbird Treatment Center

This document is intended to provide neutral background info for our community, to clarify what we know for sure, going into the Sept 19 meeting and beyond. There is much we do know now, and much we don't.

Questions should be neutral in tone, as well as the answers. Answers should be based on fact, documented with links to newspaper articles, community council meetings, other documents of record. We don't yet have documentation on all the answers, and this document will be updated as more questions arise, and more documentation shows up. Please send suggested neutrally worded questions and answers with documentation to info@v-mcc.org

1. Who is the Seattle Indian Health Board (SIHB)?

Seattle Indian Health Board is a community health center that provides health and human services to its patients, while specializing in the care of Native people. We are recognized as a leader in the promotion of health improvement for urban American Indians and Alaska Natives, locally and nationally.

Source: <https://www.sihb.org/about/>

2. Does Thunderbird Treatment Center meet the current King County zoning requirements as a community residential facility?

Yes. They're working with the county to obtain a permit under current zoning.

See this thorough analysis of the permit situation in the Vashon Beachcomber:

<https://www.vashonbeachcomber.com/news/complicated-zoning-code-takes-the-stage-in-thunderbird-treatment-center-conversation/>

3. Are participants sober when they start the program? Yes

"Thunderbird Treatment Center will be for patients who have completed detox elsewhere and that it is not a "hospital" under the code because it provides no diagnostic services. It will provide supportive services including counseling, rehabilitation and medical supervision." from their permit application.

Source:

<https://www.vashonbeachcomber.com/news/complicated-zoning-code-takes-the-stage-in-thunderbird-treatment-center-conversation/>

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4. **The center is working to obtain a permit under a Community Residential Facility (CRF). What is allowed under a CRF?**

“They can have supportive services, they can have counseling, they can have rehab, they can have medical supervision,” King County’s Jim Chan said. “As long as they are below the [Residential Treatment Facility] threshold ... then they’re fine.”

<https://www.vashonbeachcomber.com/news/complicated-zoning-code-takes-the-stage-in-thunderbird-treatment-center-conversation/>

5. **Can our elected King County officials influence King County in the permit process for the Thunderbird Treatment Center?**

No. "King County Council has no role in the approval or denial of the Thunderbird facility [permit]." Teresa Mosqueda, in an e-mail to Diane Emerson Sept 10 and confirmed by Director Richardson of the Local Services department on September 11.

Director Richardson also said that he’s happy to meet with folks about the permitting process and answer any questions. richardson@kingcounty.gov

6. **The Seattle Indian Health Board spends over \$800,000 annually on security services. Source: Page 9 of their [2022 Tax Return](#). Will we have armed security on Vashon?**

Possibly. Esther Lucero commented on this in the March 21st community council meeting: “We hired private security, armed security at our other facility.”

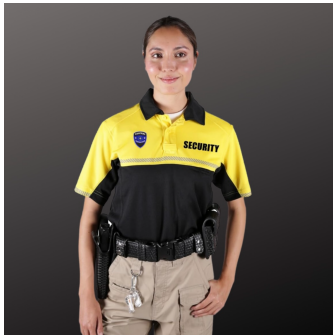
The Vashon facility will be different from the Seattle facility in that there will be pregnant women and children in the Vashon facility, which will require tighter restrictions on who gets to come. So the level of armed security may well be less. This might mean semi-armed security, with non-lethal weapons, and ‘soft’ uniforms. This info is based on a conversation with Central Protection, the company that SIHB has contracted with in the past for security. Diane Emerson spoke with Denis Kurdija, the founder and owner of Central Protection, on Aug 27, and he followed up with an e-mail and photo of a typical ‘soft uniform’ on Aug 28.

Denis Kurdija Founder/Owner
Central Protection Inc.

 CentralProtection.com

 (206) 786-5500

 (206) 683-6676



Soft Uniform example

“At Central Protection, we recognize the importance of promoting community safety, particularly when serving vulnerable populations. Our trauma-informed approach is designed to avoid exacerbating past traumas, especially for those with sensitivities to security measures due to previous interactions with law enforcement. By prioritizing de-escalation, empathy, and non-violent conflict resolution, we aim to create a safe, welcoming environment for all individuals...”

Denis Kurdija, Aug 28, 2024

Link from their website: [Trauma-Informed Security Practices: Enhancing Safety and Recovery in Substance Use Treatment Centers](#).

7. **What happens if the patients don't want to finish treatment?**

From Esther Lucero at the March 21, 2024 Community Council meeting:

“It takes several times sometimes to lead a life of sobriety. Our process is not that they just go running out the door. You have to be referred into the program. Sometimes it's private pay. Private pay would be referred by your primary care provider. So we would be contacting the referent and making arrangements for you to get back to where you came from. We do that through case management. If you complete the program we have peer after support. That is our responsibility. We have a greater responsibility because we're on an island. Now for folks that are court mandated we work with their probation officers or parole officer to get them back to where they came from. For folks that are referred through tribal communities we work with their case managers and their reference to get them back to their communities. It's not that they just go running out the door. That's not the way this works. We have the responsibility for getting folks home when they don't want to complete the program.”

This meeting is on our YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj4rLepg1Sc&t=4036s>

Esther Lucero's comments and presentation begin at minute 36 in the video.

8. How are patients vetted for the treatment program?

"We are going to have children on site and what that means is it requires us to allow folks to come in who are way lower risk. Meaning no violent crimes, no sexual assaults. Those types of things will be assessed and vetted before [people] are allowed to enter into Thunderbird treatment center." Esther Lucero, March 21 Community Council meeting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj4rLepg1Sc&t=4036s>

Esther Lucero's comments and presentation begin at minute 36 in the video.

9. Are some patients adjudicated by courts to be treated? Yes. "There are court mandates but the assessments still apply." Source: Esther Lucero, March 21, 2024 Community Council meeting.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj4rLepg1Sc&t=4036s>

Esther Lucero's comments and presentation begin at minute 36 in the video.

10. Will only Native Americans be allowed to access services at Thunderbird?

No, but "Native folks will be prioritized" Esther Lucero, during an interview with Voice of Vashon: Source:

<https://voiceofvashon.org/user-content/april-18-2023-small-talk-segment-esther-lucero-dine-executive-director-of-the-seattle-indian-health-board-vcc-purchase/>

And, from the SIHB website: "Though we primarily serve American Indians and Alaska Natives, we welcome all into our home and serve all of our relatives in the Native way." <https://www.sihb.org/about/>

11. Will Thunderbird accept Vashon residents to get help? Yes. "King County handles the assessment to be placed into the program. This is for Medicaid folks. For private pay you go to your own doctor. They refer you. You don't have to go to Seattle for that." Esther Lucero, March 21, 2024 Community Council meeting <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj4rLepg1Sc&t=4036s>

Esther Lucero's comments and presentation begin at minute 36 in the video.

In addition, this question was asked in a Voice of Vashon interview with this response from Esther Lucero: "Yes, it will be available to Islanders. We do recognize that there are some addiction challenges. Predominantly it looks like

alcohol seems to be the substance that is most concerning there. Additionally, we do operate an intensive outpatient program and we do outpatient addiction services as well.” Source:

<https://voiceofvashon.org/user-content/april-18-2023-small-talk-segment-esther-lucero-dine-executive-director-of-the-seattle-indian-health-board-vcc-purchase/>

12. When will the Thunderbird Treatment Center open?

It is planned for 2025: <https://thunderbird.center/>

13. What services will the residential program offer?

Thunderbird will provide culturally attuned services and programming for people seeking to heal from substance use disorder. Thunderbird will offer a 45-day intensive inpatient treatment program (American Society of Addiction Medicine 3.1 and 3.5) where residents have access to behavioral health professionals, Traditional Indian Medicine experts, counselors, and support staff. Residents will also have access to high-end amenities, including luxury rooms, a cultural healing space, an outdoor traditional garden, kitchen, and customized community and counseling spaces.

Thunderbird will be offering a very unique component to its programming. Fifteen beds will be allocated in a wing of the facility for pregnant or parenting adults, where they will have the opportunity to still be with their children as they complete the program. This is modeled after The Women’s Lodge program in Oakland, California, which has a decades-long history of success.

Sources: <https://thunderbird.center/program/>
<https://www.friendshiphousesf.org/the-womens-lodge>

14. Will the residential program offer detox to residents?

No. They will not be providing detox services at this location.

Source:

<https://www.vashonbeachcomber.com/news/islanders-learn-more-about-thunderbird-treatment-center/>

15. Why is this residential program needed in our region?

The opioid epidemic has reached alarming levels. According to King County, 318 people died from drugs or alcohol in 2013. Last year — a decade later — that number had jumped nearly 300 percent: 1,339 people in King County lost their lives in 2023 due to drug overdoses or alcohol poisoning, fentanyl and other opioids being the lead cause.

At the same time, there remains a significant gap in access to comprehensive treatment services for those struggling with addiction. Countywide, there are currently only 148 inpatient beds. This shortage in addiction treatment is also felt on Vashon Island, where there are no inpatient beds and few substance use disorder providers, according to the 2021 Vashon Youth & Family Services Behavioral Health Needs Assessment: <https://vyfs.org/community-needs>

16. Can we expect an increase in crime on the Island because of the facility?

Here is what King County Sheriff Captain George Drazich said at the April 20, 2023 Community Council meeting, when responding to concerns about increases in crime related to the new treatment center: “I understand that an issue like this can be unsettling. It's the unknown, right? There are things that we're not sure of and you've got a wonderful place and of course we all want to keep it that way and so I'm happy to address any concerns you may have. I can tell you up front that we as a Sheriff's Office have no reason to believe that there is any expectation of increased crime or safety concerns. I personally don't have any history or experience with this particular organization but in preparation for this meeting I reached out to one of our detective sergeants in our precinct and asked him to do a little research for me. He told me that in his research he doesn't find any reason for an expectation of an increase of crime. Of course no one can predict the future but we can look at past practice as a potential indicator and with facilities like this we don't see any red flags or causes for alarm.” The discussion begins at 1 hour, 16 minutes into the video.

Video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKhNPtSN_Nc&t=4587s

In addition, Esther Lucero said at the March 27, 2024 Community Council meeting that “[I]n the 33 years that the Health Board had previously operated its recovery center in Seattle, there had been no instances of

neighborhood crime associated with the facility.”

Source:

<https://www.vashonbeachcomber.com/news/islanders-learn-more-about-t-hunderbird-treatment-center/>

17. Will there be a sweat lodge? Yes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj4rLepg1Sc&t=4036s>

Esther Lucero’s comments and presentation begin at minute 36 in the video.

18. Was SIHB required to obtain input from the community?

No. SIHB has attended numerous Vashon community meetings and met directly with residents who have had questions about the facility. This Voice of Vashon interview with Esther Lucero has detailed info on the background of the purchase of the facility:

<https://voiceofvashon.org/user-content/april-18-2023-small-talk-segment-esther-lucero-dine-executive-director-of-the-seattle-indian-health-board-vcc-purchase/>