

Fact Sheet: Discussions with Sea Mar Community Health Centers

Discussions are underway with Sea Mar Community Health Centers (Sea Mar) to reach an agreement to operate the Lopez Island Medical Clinic.

When the University of Washington announced that it would end its operation of the Lopez Clinic on June 30, 2026, the Lopez Island Hospital District (LIHD) and Catherine Washburn Medical Association (CWMA) immediately launched a joint committee to find a new clinic partner to ensure that the Lopez Island Medical Clinic would remain open without interruption. In addition to the joint committee, outside experts were brought in to assist with the search and negotiations.

The joint LIHD - CWMA committee is leading the discussions with Sea Mar. CWMA is the owner of the clinic building and its equipment.

Throughout the search process, the committee's goal has been to secure quality healthcare with financial sustainability, informed by Lopez views and values.

QUALITY HEALTHCARE

Operating more than 90 community-based clinics, Sea Mar has a 40-year history of delivering quality primary health care to diverse communities in Washington State.

Sea Mar was one of the first community health centers accredited by Joint Commission and has received the Gold Seal of Approval by demonstrating compliance with Joint Commission's national standards for health care quality and safety.

Sea Mar is a nonprofit corporation founded by Latino community activists and health advocates who sought to establish a Seattle health center, with satellite clinics in rural communities. In 1978, Sea Mar opened a clinic in Seattle's South Park neighborhood and in 1985, it opened a second clinic in Mount Vernon in the Skagit Valley.

Many Sea Mar clinics are located in small communities and rural areas. For example, in Skagit County, Sea Mar operates eight clinics in Mount Vernon, Anacortes and Concrete. In addition to primary care clinics, Skagit County facilities include a Women's Clinic and Maternity Services.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Discussions with Sea Mar indicate that they may require a smaller subsidy from the Hospital District than the subsidy provided to UW Medicine. Sea Mar is a Federally Qualified Health Center, which would enable the Lopez Medical Clinic to receive additional federal resources.

A reduced subsidy from the Hospital District suggests that no additional tax levy would be anticipated and funds may be available to explore investments in other services such as after-hours care.

Sea Mar has developed the systems legally required to operate health clinics, including centralized billing, records, human resources, and regulatory compliance. Sea Mar has indicated that they would be ready to be fully operational on Lopez by July 1, 2026 when UW will cease operation of the clinic.

INFORMED BY LOPEZ VIEWS AND VALUES

Since the UW announcement, the LIHD has gathered public input from more than 600 Lopez households through board meetings, community surveys, listening sessions and a town hall meeting, and this honest, heartfelt, and creative input helped shape our search for a new clinic operator and negotiations with Sea Mar.

Based on public input, the joint committee presented minimum requirements and desirable additional services to each interested health system. The committee has shared public perspectives on the unique challenges of receiving quality health care on a remote island and the needs of everyone from families raising the next generation of Lopezians to seniors aging in place.

OTHER OPTIONS

While negotiations with Sea Mar are underway, exploration of the option of an independent clinic continues.

Extensive research by community members and expert consultants has revealed several requirements for an independent clinic, including developing a new business structure, and identifying affordable sources for required centralized systems.

Of the eight health systems responding to our request for proposals, all but Sea Mar have either withdrawn from consideration to provide a long term solution or it has been determined they are unable to meet the community requirements to operate the clinic.

WHAT'S NEXT

Upcoming LIHD meetings regarding the discussions with Sea Mar include:

Monday, February 23, 5:30 pm - Community Town Hall to learn more about Sea Mar, Lopez Community Center and by Zoom Webinar

Wednesday, February 25, 4 pm – Regular Meeting of the LIHD Commissioners, Lopez Island Family Resource Center meeting room and by Zoom

All board meetings of LIHD and CWMA are open to the public.

For more information and updates on the process, visit the LIHD website at <https://lopezislandhd.org/news/> and www.lopezislandhd.org/transition. For background on Sea Mar, visit the Sea Mar Community Health Centers website at www.seamar.org.