

## **Developer submits plan for 930 homes at SDC**

### **Preliminary application met with surprise, dismay at Housing Element hearing**

**By Tracy Salcedo**

A The cover slide from the builder's remedy housing development preliminary application submitted to Permit Sonoma by Eldridge Renewal, LLC on Aug. 21. The entire application can be viewed online at [www.permitsonoma.org](http://www.permitsonoma.org), Permit Record Search, search by address for 15000 Arnold Drive.

s the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors prepared to adopt a second iteration of the county's Housing Element, Permit Sonoma revealed that the state of California's chosen buyer for the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) had submitted a preliminary application to build 930 housing units under the "builder's remedy" legislation.

A quick reminder: Every jurisdiction, including Sonoma County, must have a Housing Element in its General Plan that facilitates the creation of new housing within its boundaries. Adopted in eight-year cycles, the county's recently approved Housing Element is for the sixth cycle, from 2023 to 2031, and features a 654% increase in the number of homes in the county's housing zoning plan.

A quick primer: The builder's remedy is a byproduct of Senate Bill 330, the Housing Crisis Act, and is intended to speed construction of homes to

## **SONOMA DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER**

### **GRUPE / ROGAL**

Source: Permit Sonoma

alleviate the state's affordable housing shortage. Under the builder's remedy, developers are able to fast-track projects and skirt existing zoning regulations in jurisdictions out of compliance with the state mandate to update their Housing Element. In this case the jurisdiction was Sonoma County, which approved its Housing Element on Aug. 22 (it was due in January). The builder's remedy proposal for the SDC was submitted by Eldridge Renewal LLC on Aug. 21.

The Eldridge Renewal application vests rights for the project under SB 330, which means, if the application is deemed sufficient by Permit Sonoma, the county's planning department, the developer does not have to abide by the provisions of the county-approved SDC Specific Plan, which includes environmental protections, design policies, and mitigations for traffic and wildfire evacuation.

First District Supervisor Susan Gorin, who represents Sonoma Valley, called the eleventh-hour submission "a bad faith move" in light of the fact that the state authorized a three-year, community-driven process to develop the SDC Specific Plan, and provided \$3 million to fund the effort. "This just smacks the community in the face, and the county in the face," Gorin said in the hearing.

### **Details of the Eldridge Renewal Proposal**

The applicant identified in the builder's remedy application is Eldridge Renewal, LLC, out of Stockton, with Matthew Skelton of the Grupe Company identified as the authorized agent and Keith Rogal as a secondary contact. The Grupe Company and Rogal + Partners were selected by the state's Department of General Services (DGS) to purchase the property in April but have yet to enter escrow, according to the application.

The property owner remains the state of California. Jim Martone, chief of the Department of General Service's Asset Management Branch, part of the Real Estate Services Division, also signed the application.

The project described in the preliminary application differs in significant ways from the SDC Specific Plan, which was passed by the supervisors in December 2022 after three years of public hearings. The Specific Plan calls for construction of 620 homes on the 180-acre core campus, along with 410,000 square feet of commercial space, including a hotel that would incorporate the historic red-brick Main Building. While the developer could apply for density bonuses to increase the number of dwellings, the upper limit identified at the time was 750 units.

The Eldridge Renewal project calls for nearly 1.5 million square feet of residential development, combining the 620 units in the Specific Plan with a density bonus of 310 units to total 930 units. One-hundred twenty of those units would be "below market rate," with 93 rentals offered at "very low income" level and at least 30 for sale at the "moderate income" level. Income levels are percentages of the area median income (AMI) for Sonoma County. According to the county, AMI is \$89,650: Very low income households are at approximately 50% AMI, or \$44,050 for a one-person household; and moderate income is 120% of AMI, or \$107,600 for a one-person household.

Housing types include three-story apartment buildings along Arnold Drive; and neighborhoods featuring courtyard homes ranging from 2,900 to 3,800 square feet; detached two-story homes ranging from 1,500 to 2,700 square feet; townhomes, duets and triplets; and apartments averaging 950 square feet. A 4,000 to 6,000 square-foot cohousing unit is also part of the plan. Five parcels would be set aside for individuals with developmental disabilities, with their locations "dependent on specific consumer needs."

Each home is outfitted with parking for two cars located off alleys, for a total of 1,860 parking spaces. Additional parking is provided for commercial development, for a total of 3,060 parking spaces.

The application calls for 410,000 square feet of non-residential development, including a 120-room, four-story boutique hotel located in the northwest corner of the campus and a café with a beer garden adjacent to the Main Building. A Biology + Ecology Resource Center is planned for the southwest corner of the campus, and an Innovation District is identified along Manzanita Road behind the Main Building.

Other amenities include a bocce court, pocket parks, pickleball courts, two dog parks, an orchard, and an irrigated oak savanna. An agrihood borders the eastern boundary of the campus. Trailheads offering access to neighboring open space are not identified.

### What happens next?

In announcing the preliminary application, Permit Sonoma Assistant Director Scott Orr said that while the Eldridge Renewal application appears to meet SB 330 pre-application requirements for acceptance, “at this time it does not meet the requirements of a builder’s remedy application.” The requirements for a builder’s remedy are “black and white,” he noted. He also added that given the newness of the application, the planning agency has not had time to determine its adequacy (as of the Kenwood Press publication date).

Orr also said that while the builder’s remedy application means the developer is not



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### SDC –

continued from page [14](#)

bound to county zoning, land-use, and other policies and protections outlined in the SDC Specific Plan, redevelopment does have to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act. The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the SDC Specific Plan studied up to 1,000 dwelling units; any additional development would be subject to a new EIR.

Permit Sonoma must approve the Eldridge Renewal preliminary application. If the planning agency rules the application deficient, Permit Sonoma Policy Manager Bradley Dunn explained, the Specific Plan would still govern redevelopment of the site.

Dunn noted that there’s limited, if any, legal precedent for builder’s remedy applications and observed that, should the preliminary application move forward, it will likely face challenges in court. The EIR for the SDC Specific Plan is already subject to a lawsuit.

The state’s Department of Housing and Community Development has 60 days to certify the county’s Housing Element, so additional preliminary applications may be submitted under the builder’s remedy provision, according to Orr.

Tracy Salcedo is an award-winning writer based in Glen Ellen. She is a board member of Sonoma Mountain Preservation, which is part of SCALE.

### [SDC from page 14 to 15](#)

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