

Developers file for super-sized SDC

Written by Marc Albert

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Marc Albert/KRCB

SDC's main, seismically challenged building.

Shakespeare penned the idiom 'all's fair in love and war.' Perhaps the phrase should be amended to include housing development in California.

Carefully crafted after meetings, workshops and charettes, Sonoma County officials were fairly confident they'd nailed down the parameters for probably the biggest local redevelopment project in decades.

In short, if not a deal, officials said they had the framework of one at the former Sonoma Developmental Center.

That all changed on August 21st.

A document dump by the firms selected by the State of California to refashion the nearly 1,000-acre campus---turned that framework on its head---at least according to critics.

"I'm just extremely disappointed in the process. An apparent end run around the years of conversations and planning effort that the county and the community engaged in."

That's supervisor Susan Gorin, who represents the site and the Sonoma Valley.

Although there are other aspects, the imbroglio boils down to a numbers game. Initially envisioned for up to a thousand residences, local opponents sought a maximum of less than half that. County supervisors eventually settled on 630.

A preliminary application filed on the 21st moves that number back up to 930. That change is made possible by a recent state law allowing developers to build half again as many units as would otherwise be allowed.... if they'll deliver enough affordable housing.

SDC developers The Grupe Company and Rogal & Partners did not respond to telephone or emailed interview requests.

Gorin said at this point, it's unclear who actually has authority.

"I have not been briefed by Permit Sonoma or County Counsel because we received it at the very last minute, on Monday evening when everybody was scrambling to prepare for a long housing element discussion on Tuesday," Gorin said.

And that's part of it. The preliminary application was filed after the county's old housing element lapsed, but before a new one was approved.

That adds other wrinkles to the process---and may limit the county's ability to alter the plans.

"We are not sure, I'm not sure exactly what ability we have to modify the plan, the site plan, the unit count, the kind of homes that are being proposed and any of the specifics for the site," Gorin added.

Sources within the county administration told KRCB News the entire project is on new legal ground and may be subject to more than the usual number of lawsuits.