

Timeline of SDC milestones

Tracy Salcedo, June 1, 2025 *Kenwood Press*

Transformation of the former Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) property in Glen Ellen has formally entered its second decade. Here's a timeline of significant events in the history of the institution and the redevelopment process.

- **1891:** The California Home for the Care and Training of Feeble-Minded Children opens on a 1,600-acre property at the base of Sonoma Mountain in a new community dubbed Eldridge. Over the next century the institution undergoes name changes and changes in focus, including a dark period defined by eugenic sterilizations. It became the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) in 1986, and was dedicated to the care of people with developmental disabilities.
- **1960s - 1970s:** With passage of the Lanterman Act and associated legislation, the State of California begins phasing out its developmental centers and placing clients in community-based care facilities.
- **2015:** State of California agencies announce a timeline for closure of the SDC.
- **October 2017:** Nuns Fire burns significant SDC acreage on the east side of Arnold Drive.
- **December 2018:** The last client leaves the SDC. California's Department of General Services takes over, declaring the entire property surplus and up for sale.
- **2019:** State lawmakers broker legislation creating a three-year, \$3.5 million specific planning process. The legislation prioritizes preservation of about 750 acres of open space and creation of affordable housing on the 180-acre campus. Permit Sonoma hires a consultant (Dyett & Bhatia) to develop the SDC Specific Plan and accompanying environment impact report (EIR).
- **December 2022:** After years of debate, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approves the SDC Specific Plan and EIR, rubberstamping construction of up to 750 homes and 400,000 square feet of commercial space, including a resort hotel, on the campus.
- **January 2023:** Sonoma County Advocates for a Liveable Environment (SCALE) and Sonoma County Tomorrow Inc., file a lawsuit challenging compliance of the SDC Specific Plan EIR with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
- **April 2023:** DGS selects Eldridge Renewal LLC to redevelop the SDC campus. Eldridge Renewal is composed of Napa-based Rogal & Partners and the Grupe Company, El, a housing developer based in Stockton.

- **August 2023:** Eldridge Renewal submits a project application to Permit Sonoma just before the Board of Supervisors approves the state-mandated Housing Element, and secures a controversial fast track for the project under SB 330, the builder's remedy legislation.
- **January 2024:** About 750 acres of open space surrounding the SDC campus is transferred to California State Parks. However, about 50 acres of open space is later carved out of the designated parkland and set aside for a new CalFire training facility.
- **October 2024:** Judge Bradford De-Meo finalizes his scathing ruling in favor of SCALE and Sonoma County Tomorrow in the CEQA challenge, sending both the SDC Specific Plan and EIR back to the county for significant revision.
- **December 2024:** The Board of Supervisors decertifies the SDC Specific Plan and EIR, but opts to keep the planning process in place.
- **January 2025:** A second lawsuit challenging the validity of the builder's remedy application, among other items, is filed by Sonoma Valley Next 100.
- **March 2025:** Permit Sonoma approves Eldridge Renewal's project application and the environmental review process for a redevelopment that includes 990 dwelling units, a 150-room resort hotel, 130,000 square feet of commercial space, and more than 3,000 parking spaces on the 180-acre site begins.
- **April 2025:** DGS announces funding for "warm shutdown" of the campus, including provision of security and maintenance services, will end on June 30. It's unclear exactly what that means, or who will be responsible for those services going forward.
- **May 2025:** The Board of Supervisors authorizes consulting firm Dyett & Bhatia (D&B) to revise the SDC Specific Plan and EIR. D&B produced the first EIR, which fell well short of complying with environmental law, sparking outcry from stakeholders.