

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
September 22, 2022

**CLIMATE ADAPTATION CENTER PLAN**

Project No. 22-023-01  
Project Manager: Moira McEnespy

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to the County of Sonoma to develop a plan for a climate adaptation center at the former Sonoma Developmental Center, Sonoma County.

**LOCATION:** Former Sonoma Developmental Center, Eldridge, Sonoma County

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to the County of Sonoma (“the grantee”) to develop a plan for a climate adaptation center at the former Sonoma Developmental Center, Eldridge, Sonoma County.

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of the Conservancy.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

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1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
  2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$250,000 to the County of Sonoma to develop a plan for a climate adaptation center (the Center) at the former Sonoma Developmental Center, a property located in Eldridge, Sonoma County (see Exhibit 1), that is currently owned by the State of California.

The former Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC; also formerly known as Sonoma State Hospital) is a 930-acre campus that served individuals with developmental disabilities from 1891 until its closure in 2018. Per the 2019 Budget Act, the State Department of General Services (DGS) and the County of Sonoma were authorized to enter into a Land Use Planning Agreement under which the County is leading development of environmental review and a specific plan for the property, and DGS is leading a property disposition process. The Legislature has mandated that a new configuration of the campus provide for open space and wildlife enhancement, housing, and economic sustainability. To this end, DGS released a Request for Proposals (RFP) in May 2022 seeking parties who wish to purchase the property for potential redevelopment subject to the specified land use terms.

Although real estate developers have proposed typical uses for the campus, the County would like to explore the possibility of dedicating a portion of the site to producing and demonstrating practical solutions necessary for climate change adaptation.

Conservancy funds will enable Permit Sonoma, the County's consolidated land use planning and development permitting agency, to develop a plan (Plan) for implementation of the Center. Plan development will build on an existing economic feasibility study prepared by Sonoma Water, the County's Water Agency ("Economic Impact Analysis of Eldridge Enterprise, Redevelopment of the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC), Sonoma County, California" (Economic Forensics & Analytics, Rob Eyler, January 2022)). The Plan will examine and make recommendations for the following elements:

- Governance and site control of the Center facilities: Determine what part of the existing campus is available for the Center, how the site will be set aside, governed, and managed; analyze how the project purpose will interact and coexist with other activities on the broader campus; make preliminary estimates on the cost of infrastructure and improvements.
- Potential financial partnerships, including state agencies: Research and analyze public and private funds available for providing a concentrated physical presence and focus for climate adaptation innovation.

- Outreach to the private sector to determine which innovators, inventors and investors are available to provide the economic engine of the Center: Develop strategies for approaching potential participants, including an appropriate mix and diversity of adaptation applications.

The Plan for the Center will be completely consistent with the core campus requirements that are being developed through the environmental review and specific planning process, i.e., the Plan will not consider Center development in the proposed park, green, or open spaces.

In developing the Plan, Permit Sonoma will collaborate with Sonoma Water, Sonoma Clean Power, Sonoma Transportation Agency, Sonoma County Regional Parks, Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, and various climate advocacy groups. The Plan will be developed in approximately one year. Upon its completion, Permit Sonoma will make the Plan available to the developer selected via the DGS disposition process for use in refining their development plans such that the Center can be used to both study climate action, and demonstrate/implement sustainable community principles and practices in its daily operation.

**Site Description:** In 1889, the State acquired nearly 1,700 acres from William McPherson Hill to support the State's first public institution for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The State has since sold or transferred land from the original acquisition to Sonoma County for Sonoma Valley Regional Park, conveyed conservation easements to the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District on Sonoma Mountain, and annexed a portion of the SDC to Jack London State Park. These actions have resulted in the delineation of the current SDC property, which includes an approximately 180-acre developed core campus surrounded by over 700 acres of open space located at the northern edge of Eldridge, a census-designated place ("Eldridge CDP"), and south of Glen Ellen, a census-designated place ("Glen Ellen CDP").

The SDC is located six miles from the plaza in downtown Sonoma and 15 miles from downtown Santa Rosa. The SDC is bisected by Arnold Drive and Sonoma Creek. Jack London State Historic Park borders the SDC to the West and Highway 12 and the Sonoma Valley Regional Park borders the SDC to the East.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** Permit Sonoma relies on grants for policy development. Currently, the agency administers approximately \$16M in grants for vegetation management, specific and general plans - including the SDC Specific Plan - code enforcement, and other initiatives. Two full time employees are dedicated to grant and contract proposals, administration, and auditing.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

## Selection Criteria

### **1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.**

See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Strategic Plan” section below.

### **2. Project is a good investment of state resources.**

The Center will focus on developing resilient products, processes, and services that will benefit all Californians in their daily lives. The Center will not be a solely academic/commercial enterprise within a building, but integrated into daily life on the former SDC campus. Center participants will live climate action rather than just study it. Water reuse, microgrid energy production, low carbon mobility, innovation vegetation management, fire safety technology, regenerative agriculture, vermiculture technology, and equitable farm starts will all contribute to climate adaptation.

### **3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.**

Permit Sonoma has consulted with five tribal partners concerning the SDC Specific Plan. Officials of one tribal group have met with County staff on-site to examine known cultural resources and to fashion protections for such resources as the site is redeveloped. Staff have encouraged this tribal group to offer best land management input, and to consider partnerships in the Center, housing, and other parts of the SDC campus redevelopment. County communications with this tribal group are ongoing.

### **4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.**

Within the Center, public and private partners will generate new, profitable technologies and practices addressing how humanity can adapt to increasing dangers from disasters and reduce our contribution to them.

The Center and its sustainable community will lie at the edge of the wildland urban interface and be located within one of three geographies included in the first Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant awarded in the nation. Design and development of the Center will reflect BRIC’s objective of fire safety from the building out (structural hardening and defensible space) and from the wildland in (Tribal and prescribed burns, agricultural buffers, sustainable forestry, and vegetation management).

In the setting described above, it is envisioned that the Center will also be the cornerstone of a sustainable community treating and reusing its own water, generating its own solar and geothermal energy, growing its own food through regenerative agriculture, and relying on low carbon mobility (pedestrian, bike, EV share). The Center will use water collected in two on-site reservoirs to service a full reuse system, groundwater recharge will replenish site aquifers, and reservoirs will enjoy dual use as recreational amenities. Geothermal resources will be tapped to heat buildings and modulate greenhouse agriculture. Streams coursing through the Center will benefit from riparian setbacks 200 percent greater in breadth than local code requires.

Finally, food security has arisen as a significant constraint during the shelter-in-place phase of the pandemic as shortages of crops and foods derived from small livestock stressed the local food supply. Continuing the SDC tradition, the Center will grow its own food through regenerative agriculture. It will also provide innovative programs such as food waste diversion from landfill treatment and application to vermiculture to minimize traditional crop inputs (fertilizers and herbicides) and maximize outputs (crop productivity). A related program will inject social equity by offering land to local farmers who want to start their own enterprises but cannot afford high land costs.

**5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

The prior State SDC facility served as the largest employer in the region, including the nearby disadvantaged community of The Springs. Its closure has left local workers with mostly agricultural and hospitality jobs, and wages from these positions do not keep pace with accelerating housing costs. Development of the Center will provide public and private employment that offers wages and benefits capable of supporting upward mobility. The Center will also anchor a development complex that provides 25 percent affordable on-site housing, and will itself generate hundreds of jobs providing direct and indirect economic benefits (as detailed in the 2022 Eyler economic study referenced above).

Access from The Springs to local parklands is very limited, so the Center’s campus will serve as a gateway for the public to access 700+ acres of new and adjacent State and regional parklands.

See #4, above, for a description of the wildfire, water, and food security benefits.

**6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.**

Development of the Center will build on the efforts of the SDC Specific Plan to bring equity, diversity, and inclusion into the process. Over the past three years, county staff have engaged multiple stakeholders through various forms of community engagement. During the pandemic, most engagement relied on remote meeting technologies such as Zoom; however, bilingual staff also held in-person meetings in local churches and schools, and pop-ups were conducted in the neighboring community of The Springs to solicit community input. While some residents wanted more open space and less housing, and others wanted more economic development and affordable housing, there was wide community favor for an institutional use. Nonprofits such as La Luz that provides social service and advocacy in The Springs, and Creser Capital Fund that provides business formation advice and funding for Latino business starts are very interested in forming the Center. As indicated above, Tribal partners have also expressed interest in the Center.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of climate resilience. (Budget Act 2022, SB

154) The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it is granted through the Climate Ready Program pursuant to Section 31114 of the Public Resources Code and because it will facilitate development of a climate adaptation center that will both generate and demonstrate practical solutions necessary for climate change adaptation.

Plan development will build from an economic feasibility study prepared and paid for by Sonoma Water in January 2022.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The recommended project would be undertaken pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy's jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)). The recommended project will plan for addressing the impacts of climate change on resources within Sonoma County, part of the Conservancy's nine-county San Francisco Bay Area jurisdiction (Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code).

Pursuant to Section 31113, subsections (b) and (c), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects that include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and addressing extreme weather events, sea level rise, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. Furthermore, the Conservancy must prioritize grants for projects that maximize public benefits and have one of several purposes, including reducing flood risk, enhancing coastal wetlands and natural lands, and providing recreational opportunities. The proposed project meets these criteria because it will grant funds to a public agency (County of Sonoma) to develop a Plan for a sustainably-run climate adaptation center, which itself will generate future solutions and projects to address climate change, including reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 8, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will underpin development of adaptation solutions to climate change.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines at California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15262, which exempts feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions from the requirement to prepare an Environmental Impact Report or negative declaration, and 15306, which exempts from CEQA basic data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not disturb environmental resources. The proposed project consists of planning activities, preparation of designs, and review of environmental effects, none of which will impact any environmental resources and all of which will be undertaken for possible future actions that the

Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or funded. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of this project.