

# State picks developers for the Sonoma Developmental Center

*The \$100 million redevelopment project will be overseen by a pair of development firms from Northern California with backgrounds in mixed-used communities.*



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After four months of quiet deliberations, the California Department of General Services named The Grupe Company and Rogal & Partners on

Tuesday as the development team picked to lead the \$100 million redevelop project at the former Sonoma Developmental Center in Eldridge.

The deal calls for the firms to buy a 180-acre portion of the 945-acre property “as is,” and follow the redevelopment plans spelled out in the SDC Site Specific Plan that the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved in December. Now, the team of developers will be responsible for bringing to life an ambitious vision to address housing and job diversity in Sonoma Valley.

“After a long, careful review of the County’s Specific Plan, the proposals themselves, and interviews/Q&A, we have selected a group that is most in keeping with the County’s plan for the site and has a track record of successfully delivering projects like this,” DGS public information officer Jennifer Iida wrote to the Index-Tribune.

Rogal & Partners is owned by Napa resident Keith Rogal, founder of Rogal Projects, which created the Carneros Resort and Spa in Napa and is a managing partner of the Napa Pipe mixed-use development project.

The Carneros Resort and Inn is a luxury property located on Sonoma Highway between Schellville and downtown Napa, where the average room is approximately \$1,000 per night. In 2005, Rogal sold the inn to the PlumpJack Group, which was founded by Gov. Gavin Newsom, who was the mayor of San Francisco at the time.

Rogal & Partners has spent 18 years developing the Napa Pipe project on a 154-acre former industrial site along the Napa River, which includes 945 housing units around a town center with restaurants and retail shops, including Napa Valley’s first Costco Wholesale.

The Grupe Company has built more than a dozen projects with 1,000 or more housing units, mostly located in Stockton but also in Sacramento and other Northern California cities. These include a variety of housing types, including affordable housing, single-family homes and multi-family projects.

“Permit Sonoma is excited the state has chosen a purchaser,” Permit Sonoma Director Tennis Wick told the Index-Tribune. “We are ready to implement the state statute and the specific plan’s vision for open space

protection, affordable housing – including homes for those with developmental disabilities, and economic development that will benefit Sonoma Valley’s future.”

The supervisors approved a plan that calls for a mixed-used development of approximately 620 housing units, as well as commercial shops, a potential climate research center and a boutique hotel. The project is expected to create 900 new jobs.

The majority of the property, around 700 acres, will be preserved as open space, including a 100-foot setback along Sonoma Creek.

Although supported by housing advocates, the redevelopment project has been unpopular with Glen Ellen residents, who sought a scaled-back option that called for no more than 450 housing units. In February, two community groups filed a lawsuit against the county that challenges the environmental impact report, calling the project “a shortsighted plan with serious environmental consequences.”

The deal marked the first time California allowed a county to take the lead in developing a financially feasible proposal on state-owned land. Developers will be bound by the requirements of the specific plan when it comes to scope and design.

“We’re deeply grateful for the state’s work on this and for naming a developer for this vital site in the heart of Sonoma Valley,” said 1st District Supervisor Susan Gorin.

First opened in 1891, at its height SDC served as the largest employer in Sonoma Valley with over 1,300 staff members caring for more than 3,700 clients. Following years of declining population and increasingly expensive deferred maintenance on site, the state closed the facility in 2018.

It will likely be years before the project comes to fruition. Sonoma County and the team of developers must formalize a development plan for the project detailing the conditions and obligations during construction, according to DGS. The department will also plan to transfer the 700-plus acres of open space to the Department of Parks and Recreation as part of the state budget process, Iida said.

“We look forward to helping ensure the developer provides numerous opportunities to outreach and hear from the community to develop a project that reflects the qualities of Sonoma Valley while addressing the needs within the guidelines of the SDC specific plan,” Gorin said.

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