

January 25, 2021

Sonoma County Board of Supervisors  
575 Administration Drive  
Room 100 A  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

*Via Electronic Mail*

**Re: Sonoma Developmental Center Workshop: January 26, 2021**

Dear Board of Supervisors,

On January 26, 2021 the Board of Supervisors will hold a workshop to discuss the preparation of the Specific Plan for the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC). All three of us are members of the Sonoma Development Planning Advisory Team (PAT), residents of the Sonoma Valley and, in different capacities, career real estate professionals with experience in complex master planned projects.

We wanted to take this opportunity to provide comments to the Board prior to the January 26, 2021 workshop. Pursuant to Cal Gov't Code Section 14670.10.5, in carrying out the long range SDC planning process, the county shall ensure that the lands outside the core SDC developed campus be preserved as public parkland/open space and carry out a land planning process for the balance of SDC to allow for its disposition. It is this second requirement, the land planning process on the core campus, that is the focus of our comments.

As we see it, the purpose of the planning process is to ensure that the future SDC Specific Plan will reduce the development uncertainty and increase the land values at SDC to the point where the property can attract the interest of third-party purchasers as is required by the enabling legislation. To do this, the County must adopt a Specific Plan and amend the general plan and appropriate zoning ordinances with an eye towards ensuring the economic feasibility of future development. This last point requires additional emphasis. Any plan that is ultimately adopted for the SDC site must be able to be implemented by a third-party purchaser, which means it must be economically feasible, bearing in mind that the State estimates that there is at least \$114 million dollars in needed infrastructure alone to redevelop the SDC site. Cal Gov't Code Section 14670.10.5 is unambiguous, housing is priority use at the SDC site, including affordable housing. At a minimum, the SDC Specific Plan must provide for housing, including affordable housing, in sufficient quantities that a third-party developer will be willing to invest resources in the re-development of SDC with a sufficient economic return to ensure that the investment and development is economically feasible. Of course, other non-residential uses at SDC can also supplement the economic feasibility which will allow affordable housing and other non-revenue generating uses to be incorporated in the overall plan. Most importantly, without a viable plan that can be implemented by a third party, the SDC runs the risk of not being redeveloped at all.

It with this basic framework in mind that we wish to provide a response to a letter dated January 22, 2021 to the Board of Supervisors from a coalition of organizations, including the Sonoma Land Trust, Sonoma Mountain Preservation, Glen Ellen Forum SDC, Sonoma Ecology Center, Greenbelt Alliance, Valley of the Moon Alliance, Glen Ellen Historical Society and Eldridge Memorial Cemetery Committee. A core component of this letter was the request that the Board direct staff to add the following additional sentence to the Guiding Principles that are intended to guide the development of the SDC Specific Plan:

**“The density, scale, and design for new development or redevelopment at SDC must be compatible with surrounding land uses, as set forth in General Plan policies and Glen Ellen Development and Design Guidelines.”**

We wish to voice our concern with this language being added to the Guiding Principles because we believe that it is antithetical to the purpose of the planning process that we outlined above. The SDC Specific Plan is intended to provide for an economically feasible, housing-oriented development of the core campus (with preservation of the non-core open space and future parkland) that envisions a bold and creative land plan. The suggested additional language above implies the opposite. The density and scale and design of new development at SDC cannot possibly be compatible with the surrounding single-family, medium density multifamily, rural estate homes, open space and vineyards of the surrounding land uses. In fact, the SDC even in its present state is not compatible with surrounding land uses. Relying on the 30-year-old Glen Ellen Development and Design Guidelines (that do not cover the SDC site) to guide development of the SDC campus risks handcuffing the SDC Specific Plan process before it even commences. Moreover, as we understand it, the Specific Plan is to amend the General Plan and build upon the General Plan, not be guided entirely by the General Plan. The General Plan in 2008 did not contemplate the closure of SDC.

We appreciate all of the hard work and effort that County Staff and the consulting teams have completed thus far and the attempts to navigate the community outreach process through COVID. As members of the PAT, we believe that SDC is an incredible opportunity to smartly plan for the re-use of an underutilized property, provide housing relief, and ensure preservation of natural resources. This requires bold and ambitious forward thinking with smart planning based on an economically feasible plan that can be truly implemented, not handcuffing this effort at its inception.

Regards,

**Peter Ziblatt**  
SDC PAT Member

**Robert Upton**  
SDC PAT Member

**Victor Gonzalez**  
SDC PAT Member