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## **The Threat to the Valley of the Moon**

For 24 years, the Valley of The Moon Alliance (VOTMA) has stood for wise stewardship of our unique natural resources. Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) is one of those natural resources with its beauty, serenity, and open space. The most consequential development proposal in the history of the Sonoma Valley is now being considered.

A private developer and the State Government have proposed transferring to the developer roughly 180 acres of Sonoma Developmental Center public property for the purpose of building 990 new homes, a 150-room hotel and conference center, and 130,000 square feet of commercial uses.

This proposal would more than triple the population of Glen Ellen in a Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) and make congested fire evacuation capacity in the Valley even more of a safety concern than it currently is.

When this idea was first considered, Sonoma County government did a poor job of analyzing the proposed concept. A broad coalition of Valley non-profit organizations -- the Valley of the Moon Alliance, the Glen Ellen Historical Society, Eldridge for All, and Sonoma Mountain Preservation -- came together in a united effort to form Sonoma Community Advocates for a Liveable Environment (SCALE), which brought suit against the County arguing that the plan's environmental impact report (EIR) was poorly done and failed to meet state requirements under the California Environmental Quality Act. The judge fully agreed. The County was ordered to go back to work to do a better analysis and a revised EIR. The developer and our government then conspired to use the "builder's remedy" statute to force the County to undertake a restricted review of its proposal.

What is the current status of the SDC plan? The County is expected to release a revised draft environmental impact report (DEIR) sometime before the end of this summer. Public hearings will be limited by the "builder's remedy" statute. The public will have limited time to respond. Those who love this Valley need to be ready.

What is being done while we wait on the DEIR?

First, we recognize that the SDC site should have intelligent, right sized development. Community groups have come together and have proposed to the County development proposal that calls for 470 residences, with adaptive re-use of many of the existing buildings, and more affordable housing than the developer's proposal. You can review that proposal on <https://eldridgeforall.org>; search for the Provide, Protect, Preserve Alternative. That site is a great resource for many years of documents on the SDC question. Sign up for the newsletter on the site to learn more about calls to action.

Second, VOTMA, backed by contributions from hundreds of Valley residents, commissioned a study of the Valley's evacuation capabilities by a leading national evacuation and emergency planning firm whose expertise has been used extensively by the federal government. The study concluded that the *existing* available roadway supply (evacuation routes and roadway network) is not sufficient to allow the *existing* population of the Valley to evacuate safely and in a timely fashion in a fire evacuation emergency. That study is available at <https://votma.org/> Adding thousands of new residents and vehicles onto the SDC site would make matters worse, and there are no plans to increase the existing roads' capacity.

Third, the community group Sonoma Valley Next 100 has taken the lead on creating the alternative specific plan for the property, and it sued the State for failing to follow state law in the way it has tried to dispose of the property with the developer. The suit also challenges the State over its ongoing willful neglect of the SDC site. Next 100 has so far won in court, and a judge will be overseeing that lawsuit.

Fourth, our community groups continue to engage experts' analysis of the consequences of the developer's proposal. These analyses will inform comments on the DEIR when public input is invited.

While large commercial interests are well represented at policy-making levels, residents and property owners in this Valley - who have a stake in maintaining the region as a beautiful, healthy, safe place to live, do business, and raise families - need to be prepared to have a voice on the DEIR when it is issued late this summer.

The above-mentioned community groups will do their best to evaluate the DEIR and inform residents about its content and implications, but time to comment will be short. Be ready to engage when the time comes.

This is the most consequential development proposal the Valley of the Moon has seen in more than a century. Your voice will matter.

Tim Dorman  
President, Valley of the Moon Alliance