



*Sonoma Mountain Preservation*

P.O. Box 1772  
Glen Ellen, CA 95442



**Glen Ellen Forum SDC/Eldridge Committee  
Eldridge Memorial Cemetery Committee**



January 22, 2021

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

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

Dear Chairperson Hopkins and Board Members:

On January 26, 2021, the Board of Supervisors will hold a workshop to discuss the County's progress in preparing a Specific Plan for the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) property. As you know, the planning and reuse of SDC is guided by state law (Government Code Section 14670.10.5) and the Legislature has identified two main priorities for the property: building affordable housing and protecting land outside the core campus as public parkland and open space. This statutory framework also honors and emphasizes SDC's legacy of care by prioritizing construction of housing for people with developmental disabilities and protection of historic resources. Our organizations have been closely involved in the closure and reuse planning processes for SDC since 2014, and we offer the following comments on the draft Vision Statement and Guiding Principles, and on the Specific Plan process:

## 1. Vision Statement and Guiding Principles

The January 11, 2021 Draft Vision Statement and Guiding Principles are the critical first step in the preparation of the Specific Plan for SDC. This document creates the framework and parameters for the rest of the planning process, and hopefully reflects consensus in the community about the direction of the Specific Plan. Generally speaking, we are pleased with the Draft Vision Statement and Guiding Principles and appreciate the effort that the planning consultants and Permit Sonoma have put into soliciting feedback and community priorities.

Prior to the County's specific planning process, a coalition of Sonoma County organizations sponsored and organized a series of community workshops from 2015–2019 that laid the groundwork and provided much of the substance for the documents you are reviewing today. A June 2019 workshop resulted in a vision statement and guiding principles very similar to what your consultants have prepared. Although the language of this community-generated document differs in some regards, your planning team has captured most of the key priorities.

The one issue that is still a major concern for our organizations and the residents of the Sonoma Valley is the necessity of ensuring that redevelopment of the SDC property is **compatible** with the goals and policies of the Sonoma County General Plan regarding the surrounding rural community of Glen Ellen, both north and south of the Eldridge campus. In order to strengthen this commitment, we ask the Board to direct staff to add an additional sentence (in bold) to Guiding Principle #4 to read:

4. Balance Redevelopment with Existing Land Uses. Use recognized principles of land use planning sustainability to gauge how well proposed land uses protect public trust resources and fit the character and values of the site and surrounding area, as well as benefit local communities and residents. ***“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.”***

## 2. The Specific Plan Process and Timeline

We are all aware of the challenges that COVID-19 and shelter-in-place orders have posed to government operations—and in particular to planning efforts like this one—where there is a legal mandate to include community input in a meaningful way. The SDC Specific Plan process kicked off in early 2020 with a well-designed and ambitious public engagement strategy. Unfortunately, those plans were not realized due to the inability to hold in-person workshops, public hearings, and other events because of health concerns. What we have been left with is online surveys, some informational webinars, and one “zoom” workshop in November.

This shift to an almost exclusively online engagement strategy means that large and important segments of the population are not included and are not participating at the level needed to truly ensure that the SDC Specific Plan is reflective of the priorities and aspirations of the local community. As described in the consultant's **Community Conversations Report #1**, *“Despite conversations and coordination with several community leaders in the Latinx community, efforts to engage virtually have so far not been very*

*successful, although some Latinx community members were engaged through youth leaders.” We applaud Dyett & Bhatia and their subcontractors for their efforts during these difficult times, but as we move into the next phase of the planning process, we cannot sacrifice meaningful engagement for the sake of a truncated planning timeline.*

Now that the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles have been prepared, the next step is creating and sharing project alternatives for public review. The original schedule stated that the development of project alternatives would start in April 2020 and conclude in March 2021. Because of COVID-19 and 2020 fire-related delays and disruptions, the schedule has now been revised to complete development of alternatives between February-April 2021. This severely constrained timeline seems unrealistic and will only exacerbate the problems of building consensus because community engagement is still limited by pandemic restrictions. We understand that the timeline is being dictated by the funding agreement between the state and Sonoma County, but we must create measurable and significant public support for the Plan before it is adopted by your Board in 2022.

**We recommend the following steps for the rest of the year to expand and improve community engagement:**

1. Hold monthly meetings of the Planning Advisory Team (PAT) and ensure that this experienced and talented group has an opportunity to assist Permit Sonoma and your consultants in developing and reviewing project alternatives.
2. As stated in the charter for the Planning Advisory Team, utilize this group as “ambassadors” to the community to educate and inform organizations and individuals on the status of the specific plan process, and how people can get engaged and stay involved.
3. Develop a community outreach committee within the PAT and allocate sufficient financial resources to Dyett & Bhatia to hire consultants with the necessary expertise to develop a new and improved strategy that reaches a broader and more diverse audience, and that ensures no segment or demographic is left out of the process.
4. As recommended by Sonoma Mountain Preservation in their December 12, 2020 letter to Permit Sonoma, the consultant team should develop and publicize a formal process for community members to submit project alternatives and reuse ideas for SDC, including guidance on the submittal and subsequent analysis process, and how to work within site constraints and identify appropriate locations for project ideas.
5. The County should begin negotiations with the State to secure more time for the overall project timeline, and in particular for the public outreach process. Given the setbacks and delays we faced in 2020, simply trying to rush the process forward risks a lack of meaningful stakeholder input and public consensus, and creation of project alternatives that are not well thought out or properly vetted.

2021 is going to be a critical year as we try to pull out of the trauma and setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Planning the reuse of the Sonoma Developmental Center is the single most important decision the County will make for the future of the Sonoma Valley. We thank you for considering our

comments, and look forward to working with the Board, your staff, and your consultant team to improve the planning process and to create a plan that is worthy of this incredible place.

Sincerely,

Christian Pease  
Eldridge Memorial Cemetery Committee

Alice Horowitz, Ph.D, Co-Chair  
Glen Ellen Forum SDC/Eldridge Committee

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Glen Ellen Historical Society

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