

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
From: SDC Campus Project

1/22/2021

Re: SDC Specific Plan

We are writing to advocate for our group's proposal for affordable co-housing and regenerative farming to be included in each of the three SDC Specific Plan alternatives. In the past 24 months we have extensively researched the potential for adaptive reuse of some of the existing residential buildings on the east side of Arnold Drive. We have been studying the WRT report, touring the campus and buildings, obtaining public documents and plans from the Department of General Services, inspecting the buildings with long-time knowledgeable Department of Developmental Services staff, and collaborating with energy and HVAC consultants.

Adaptive Reuse for Affordable Housing As Soon As Possible

There are mistaken ideas that these buildings are dormitories (and therefore unusable for housing) and that they have toxics that cannot be remediated. We have found the opposite to be true. They are perfect for co-housing for people who are housing insecure or otherwise not served by typical affordable housing: seniors, veterans, students, our workforce of minimum wage earners, agricultural workers, hospitality and child care employees, singles and young families, all below 60% of Area Median Income (AMI).

The waiting lists for Section 8 vouchers and affordable housing projects are in the thousands. By providing housing for people who work in the local community, traffic is reduced, lifestyles are enhanced, and the economy is improved. Business owners, nonprofits, and public agencies are finding it difficult to hire employees because of the workforce housing shortage. Access to this kind of housing will be a boon to the economy, creating truly affordable housing to the working community.

Co-housing has become a solution to the affordable housing crisis around the country. Each of these units has a large bedroom, 14' x 20' (280 sq. ft.), with an attached private half bathroom; a shower is down the hall, shared with three or four other units. Other amenities include large common living rooms, meeting rooms, offices, kitchen and large dining room, laundry, study, yoga, music, and

other rooms as desired. Each building will have space for an organic food garden from converted lawns, providing a sense of community needed for a beneficial lifestyle.

Adaptive reuse is often less expensive, better for the environment, and quicker to develop than new construction. Indeed it is the only way for Sonoma County to get truly affordable housing units occupied at SDC before the end of the upcoming Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) cycle. Refer to HBRE, Home Building and Remodeling Experts article here: <https://hbre.us/the-benefits-of-adaptive-reuse/>

All hazardous materials must be removed before **either** the buildings are demolished or adaptively reused. Refer to the handling of toxics on page nine of our proposal, attached separately.

Regenerative Farming

Use of some of the historic agricultural land on the east side of the campus, near the residential buildings along Railroad Street, well away from the wildlife corridor and wetlands is essential.

A sustainable community that can provide food for its residents and surrounding community is vital for the future. Food insecurity is a growing threat to people of lower income, elders, the infirm, families, and children. The mission of SDC has been to serve those in need. Using the land in this way carries on that tradition. Local agriculture is important to health, the environment (carbon sequestration), jobs, sense of community, and will aid in fire prevention. See page four of our proposal, attached separately.

To abandon this prime farmland and demolish the residential buildings is not a responsible use of State resources and does not respect their historic legacy value. Furthermore, the design of the existing residential units on the east side of Arnold Drive is ideal for supportive co-housing. These are the very places that were the heart of SDC...where the people lived and worked.

In conclusion, the SDC Specific Plan must include these vital elements in all project alternatives. We look forward to a vital, inclusive, sustainable community to evolve at the Sonoma Developmental Center campus and surrounding land.