

David Bolling: SDC And The Zombie Apocalypse



Zombies? Sometimes you just gotta ask. Drama? Or Documentary? Do the Dead really come back to Life? (Not talking about you, Jesus).

Living Dead. What a concept. Living humans with consciousness but no souls? Dead humans imbued with scientific training and a hunger for

human flesh? The UnDead, maybe sociologically and politically stand-ins for the UnHoused? All the signs point toward the rebirth of a failed social response to the presence of a desperately urgent population who have no where else affordable to live but the abandoned homes of the defenseless, the wealthy and the dispossessed.

Given the public's appetite for the macabre, the distinction between a Zombie Apocalypse and the fight for affordable housing in Sonoma Valley may be slim-to-none.

Consider this: California, Sonoma County and Sonoma Valley have a crisis in affordable housing. There is not enough of it.

We can't speak for the rest of Sonoma County or California, but we do not perceive a local shortage of what is benignly referred to as "market rate" housing hereabouts. That is, housing with prices that start at a million dollars and climb endlessly upwards. In Sonoma Valley, we're talking two-to-ten million dollars, and more.

And hey, no hard feelings. If you can afford those price tags, you either earned it, inherited it, or hit the hedge fund trifecta. Good for you. Seriously.

But meanwhile, here's the problem.

Sonoma Valley is on a slow ride toward demographic Armageddon. Which is to say that the inflow of new residents is composed of either the older, wealthier, less child-bearing beneficiaries of the American Dream, or it is the poorer, younger, browner or Blacker dreamers, trying to cut out a first-generation slice of the opportunity pie for themselves. And the former demographic outnumber the latter demographic, because they can afford to. And wealthy, older residents don't have school

children. So, Sonoma Valley's school-age population is plummeting. By 40-percent in recent years. So schools close. *Public* schools close. And the district loses money. And the overall quality of life in the Valley incrementally declines.

Elsewhere in this issue you will read about a dysfunctional school district challenged by budget deficits that do not represent the real wealth of this community, but reflect an ignorance, or unwillingness to recognize how important equal educational opportunity is to any community.

And if you connect the dots, they may lead you to the conclusion that, when you have the opportunity to make community-conscious, socially, culturally, and economically equitable decisions about how to make the best use of a piece of essentially-free public land, you do not allow for-profit developers to drive the planning and rake off the vast majority of potential profits.

Welcome back to SDC. And the Undead.

So far, the State of California and the County of Sonoma, have given anemic lip service to the pledge that local community values and priorities will be heard in the SDC decision-making process.

That pledge, as reflected in the SDC Specific Plan produced by Dyett & Bhatia consultants, and as thrown out by an alert Superior Court Judge named Bradford DeMeo in 2024, is utter and complete BULLSHIT. Repeat after me, let's say that again: **BULLSHIT!!!**

Go to the D&B website and you'll find this amusingly ironic, self-congratulatory description of the Plan DeMeo dumped:

Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan adopted!

December 2022

“In what the press described as ‘... one of the most ambitious and large-scale redevelopments in Sonoma County history’, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors in a marathon nine-hour meeting, adopted a Specific Plan for the shuttered 150-building, 900-acre site – California’s first campus for the developmentally disabled, and until recently Sonoma Valley’s largest employer. The plan will help transform the site, located in one of the most picturesque settings in the Bay Area, into a vibrant, walkable, mixed-use community of several thousand residents, jumpstart economic rejuvenation with nearly 1,000 jobs, and serve as a model of sustainable development. The State of California for the first-time ever partnered with a local community to drive the vision of a State-owned property, through a special legislation passed by the State. Dyett & Bhatia led the Plan and the EIR in an engaging process that routinely saw meeting attendance in the hundreds.”

While the California State Legislature may have thought it was gifting a benign but hollow process of local participation to the Sonoma Valley instead of quickly dumping SDC on the used real estate market, what they actually did was gift Keith Rogal, and the wealthy interests he represents, with a free pass to a big pot of easy profit while incrementally destroying the quality of life in Glen Ellen, Kenwood, the Springs – most of Sonoma Valley, as a flood of homes, largely unaffordable to the demographic most in need of housing, is dumped on a bucolic and environmentally-sensitive wilderness corridor, choking the two entry and exit routes with unmanageable traffic, and raising the specter of a wildfire catastrophe.

Judge DeMeo threw that plan out because the holes in its EIR were big enough to drive a D-9 Cat through. And now the County has invited

Dyett & Bhatia – a consultancy with no understanding and no vision for a plan that would truly benefit Sonoma Valley – back to the party to create a Zombie Specific Plan and EIR.

They say the only way to kill a Zombie is by bashing it in the head. It's time to find a very big hammer.