

County postpones review release

Environmental impact study for Sonoma Developmental Center expected in spring

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Permit Sonoma, citing the need for “additional environmental analysis and technical studies,” has announced that the long-awaited draft of the environmental impact report for the development of the Sonoma Developmental Center will not be released in 2026.

“This additional analysis has extended the environmental review timeline beyond what was previously anticipated, and the Draft EIR will not be ready for release in 2026,” officials announced over the weekend on Permit Sonoma’s SDC development website.

As recently as Aug. 3, during a standing room-only meeting in Glen Ellen which was packed by residents who live near the center, the county said it expected the draft report would likely be released in September.

Scott Orr, director of Permit Sonoma, the county’s consolidated land-use planning and development permitting agency, said Monday, Aug. 31, the draft will now likely be released in spring 2027.

“For the EIR we’ve got multiple different technical analyses that are proceeding at the same time and they all need to hit the finish line at the same time for the draft to be released,” he added. “Some of that analysis just isn’t done yet... we can’t release just parts of it.”

Asked to elaborate on the work that is still be done, he said, “So many sections rely on analysis being complete in other sections... things like traffic impacts, land use and ... emergency access and that can have a cascade of effects ... so across the board we’re working to finish things.”

Sonoma County Board of Supervisors Chair Rebecca Hermosillo, who represents the Sonoma Valley region, also sent an email to residents on Friday, Aug. 28, with a similar update on the report’s release.

“I know there is significant community interest in this process,” she said in the notice, “and I believe it is important that we take the time necessary to do this work thoughtfully and thoroughly.”

She did not immediately respond Monday to The Sonoma Index-Tribune's request for additional comment.

One of the Sonoma Valley's largest publicly owned properties, the 180-acre core campus of the former Sonoma Developmental Center is owned by the California Department of General Services.

Its controversial development is tied to the environmental review process.

Wildfire safety, traffic, water and wildlife impacts have punctuated blowback over the project, with court challenges tying up the mandated environmental study accompanying the development.

In 2023, two grassroots organizations, Sonoma Community Advocates for a Liveable Environment and Sonoma County Tomorrow filed a lawsuit against the county for environmental inconsideration in their original plans.

In October 2024, the Sonoma County Superior Court invalidated the EIR and the SDC Specific Plan — ruling that the plans violated the California Environmental Quality Act. By the end of the year, the board of supervisors had voted for Permit Sonoma to reevaluate the EIR.

In February 2025, the DGS picked Eldridge LLC — a joint partnership between two California-based development firms, The Grupe Company and Rogal & Partners — to develop the 180-acre core campus.

The current overview process would gauge the environmental impacts of Eldridge LLC's developmental proposal that would add 990 housing units, 130,000 square feet of commercial space and a 150-room hotel on the shuttered Eldridge campus.

A number of Glen Ellen residents, in recent months, have raised continued concerns about the Dept. of General Service's maintenance and upkeep of the SDC property, as well as the effectiveness of its on-site security in the wake of graffiti and other forms of vandalism that have occurred on the property.

The state, in response to resident fears about extensive overgrowth of bushes, trees and grasses increasing the risk of fire, has contracted groundskeepers to come in and cutback the surplus foliage.

It is unclear though, whether security has been increased on the property, in the wake of the complaints about vandalism and damages to the various buildings that some nearby residents believe to have been caused by copper thieves.

Though disappointed that their wait for the EIR findings will continue into 2027, some area residents reached Monday said they are opting to stay "hopeful."

Sharon Church, who has lived in Glen Ellen for over 30 years, said Monday that she is giving officials the benefit of the doubt.

“I hope the EIR delay is indicative of a new honest approach by the county to get it right. There will be two new county supervisors in addition to Supervisor Hermosillo,” she said. “I remain hopeful.”

Debbie Lammers, president of the Glen Ellen Forum which organized the Aug. 3 community meeting where Orr spoke, said, “The Sonoma Valley community has been laser-focused on the SDC matter and is disappointed but hopeful that the outcome may result in a specific plan that takes all the factors identified by the community into consideration and would be supported by our communities.”

Glen Ellen resident Anne O’Brien said she believes it’s too “early to pass judgment.”

“I can say I’m in two minds. I’m disappointed its not released but yet the optimist in me is thinking, ‘Well, perhaps the county realized it hadn’t taken all factors into consideration.’ because there were so many problems with the first one that was released and they don’t want to have the same problems occur,” she said. “I’d rather have something that’s right and useful than something that would have to be rejected again.”