

Eldridge Vision Workshop

Summary Report

On June 15, 2019, the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) Coalition¹ convened a public workshop at the Hanna Boys Center in Sonoma with three central goals:

- to share with the public and receive feedback on a draft Eldridge Vision Statement and Guiding Principles prepared by the SDC Coalition Leadership team;
- to build support for cohesive community engagement;
- to learn more about the planning framework for the Eldridge Specific Plan.

This report provides a summary of the feedback provided at the workshop, with the hope that it will help guide the specific planning process for redevelopment of the property and clarify the hopes and wishes articulated by the public to date.

Presenters

Milan Nevajda, deputy director of Permit Sonoma, offered a detailed overview of the specific planning process. Other speakers from the SDC Coalition included:

- First District Supervisor Susan Gorin, who offered opening remarks;
- Richard Dale, executive director of the Sonoma Ecology Center, who provided an overview of the SDC's history and spotlighted key players in its evolution;
- Tracy Salcedo of the Glen Ellen Forum, who described how the vision statement and guiding principles were drafted and their intended purpose;
- Mickey Cooke of Sonoma Mountain Preservation, who encouraged further public participation in the process.

Tania Carlone of the Consensus Building Institute facilitated the event.

How Feedback Was Gathered

As individuals and working in small groups, the approximately 170 participants offered detailed feedback on the draft vision and principles by taking part in breakout sessions and/or submitting individual forms soliciting feedback. Respondents indicated their approval of, or provided feedback on, each statement on the individual forms using color-coded dots, green indicating the statement accurately reflected their opinions, yellow indicating they would like to see the statement modified or strengthened. Space was provided for comments, additions, or

¹ The SDC Coalition is a group of Sonoma County agencies and nonprofit partners that have worked together since 2013 on issues related to the closure of SDC, and the reuse, planning, and disposition process for the land and developed campus. Since 2015, the SDC Coalition has hosted numerous public meetings to solicit ideas and feedback on different visions and possible futures for SDC.

observations, many of which are accounted for in the summary and have been retained for future reference (note: not everyone who attended the meeting submitted a form). Each small group, after discussion and reflection, provided workshop organizers with three statements that summarized their primary areas of concern or focus with regard to the vision statement and guiding principles, or redevelopment of the property in general.

An Overview of Responses

The vision statement and the guiding principles as drafted, which represent a distillation of community visioning that's taken place over the last five years, were overwhelmingly supported by participants. The preponderance of comments sought to strengthen key themes. Levels of support and key themes reinforced by participant input for each statement are captured below.

Support for preservation of the open spaces surrounding the campus was resounding. On the flip side, the standout concern revolved around density of housing on the campus. Other themes that evoked repeated comment among participants included preserving the SDC's legacy of care, ensuring redevelopment is environmentally responsible, and exploring the idea of a Presidio-style trust as a governing body for the property.

Demographics

Demographic information was voluntarily provided by participants as they signed in. About 88% of the participants provided information regarding age, ethnic identity, and place of residence. The vast majority of participants self-identified as White/Caucasian, with a handful identifying as Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Native. Most participants fell into the 41-65 age category or the over-65 age category, with 8 participants falling into the 21-40 category. The majority of participants live in the Sonoma Valley, with representation from other Sonoma County locales (Graton, Petaluma, Santa Rosa), the greater Bay Area (Danville, Berkeley, San Francisco), Sacramento, and as distant as Portland, Oregon.

Despite outreach efforts, organizers noted that the following demographic groups were significantly under-represented among workshop participants: the Latino community; Native Americans; and young people.

How Feedback Is Presented in this Report

Representatives from the Consensus Building Institute collated the data from the workshop. The numbers shown with each item below represent the percentage of participants who agreed with the vision statement or guiding principle as written, as indicated by a green dot. Responses from those who provided comment about a statement as drafted, indicated with a yellow dot, are provided in the summary comments. It should be reiterated that yellow dots didn't necessarily signal disagreement, but most often indicated the statement or principle needed strengthening or additions.

Considerations are suggestions offered by participants for planners as they generate (or regenerate) a vision and guiding principles for the site.

All worksheets and data used to develop this summary have been provided to the consultants developing the specific plan under the auspices of Sonoma County and is available for review.



Proposed Vision Statement

Eldridge is a place where people of diverse backgrounds and interests live and work together, where natural resources are conserved and enhanced, concepts of sustainability and resiliency are put into practice, cultural legacies are honored, and compatibility with surrounding communities is preserved.

Summary comments: A substantial majority of workshop participants (83%) supported the vision statement as written or offered comments that strengthened or clarified the themes. Several workshop participants wanted the vision statement to more boldly capture the *cultural, historical and ecological context* of the site. Some wished for a clear assertion that SDC is the “heart of Sonoma Valley,” and noted that SDC’s legacy of care should be emphasized. Others believed terms in the vision statement could be more clearly defined (e.g., sustainability, resiliency, cultural legacy, compatibility, surrounding communities). It should be noted that these terms are expanded upon in the Guiding Principles.



Proposed Guiding Principles

1. Protection of open space on the Eldridge property

Eldridge’s open space and wildlife corridor lands will be permanently protected and managed to ensure environmental stewardship and continued public recreational use.

Summary comments: This principle received overwhelming support (92%). Workshop participants urged not only protection but also improvement of the property’s open space and wildlife corridor, while supporting public access. Many suggested a holistic, integrated approach to development to protect open space and steward water resources. Participants encouraged consideration for complimentary interaction between the site’s developed footprint and open space, such as ensuring creek setbacks are sufficient to protect water quality and habitat, making sure recreation (trail use) does not impact habitat and the wildlife corridor, and keeping open spaces in a natural state, not developed (e.g. no soccer complex or golf course).

2. Principle of sustainability for the future use of Eldridge

Planners and decision-makers will 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 Eldridge must be compatible with surrounding communities and Sonoma Valley's constrained water resources and transportation system, and all development must be supported by sound infrastructure and appropriate public services.

Summary comments: Seventy-five percent of participants supported this principle as written, while others specified that sustainability and regenerative design should be central to all facets of the project, including housing, landscape, transportation, and finances. Eldridge redevelopment should account for and respond to projected climate change; in fact, participants recognize SDC's potential to serve as a model for climate adaptation. Some participants highlighted the opportunity to create a self-sufficient site designed for net-zero energy consumption, local sourcing of resources, and sustainable, on-site production of food crops. Participants spoke to an opportunity to design for a sustainable lifestyle. Supporting groundwater recharge was also mentioned. Other themes included preserving the character of the site's overall ambience, scale, and character while ensuring its financial foundations are sustainable. Provision of public transportation was stressed, both to ensure sustainability and to address many participants' concern about how development will increase traffic congestion (particularly on Arnold Drive and CA 12).

Considerations:

- Specify optimal site density
- Clearly define sustainability

3. A community-led specific plan for Eldridge

Stakeholders will create a specific plan for the Eldridge site that factors in the needs and land use priorities of the surrounding communities of Glen Ellen and Sonoma to ensure that future development will be compatible with existing land uses in Sonoma Valley. The planning process will have financial support from the state, and Sonoma County will exercise oversight and management in coordination with a Technical Advisory Committee and a Citizens Advisory Committee.

Summary comments: This statement garnered 77% support. Some participants noted that community input should drive the specific plan, not the county or the consultants who will develop it. Others noted the "community" should encompass the greater Sonoma Valley and specifically mention the Springs. Some noted the planning process should actively engage local tribes and other Sonoma Valley residents who were not well represented at the workshop (youths and Latinos).

4. Development of housing options

Sonoma County faces an acute housing crisis and the SDC site presents an opportunity to accommodate reasonable housing solutions for the area. An appropriate housing footprint on the Eldridge property should be a priority for the specific plan. Housing should be based on the needs of Sonoma Valley with a workforce housing emphasis, inclusion of an affordable housing component (very low, low, and moderate Income), and housing for vulnerable populations.

Summary comments: This principle generated the most divergent feedback from participants, with 54% indicating their approval as written. In general, participants backed the concepts of affordable, diverse, *supportive* housing options compatible with the surrounding aesthetics and sensitive to the wildlife corridor. Many expressed nervousness about density, and felt housing should be on an appropriate scale to maintain the “small town” feel of Eldridge and Glen Ellen. Participants stated housing should be designed and constructed with sustainable principles. Participants spoke to the need for a range of housing options accessible to underserved populations, including workforce, low-income, homeless (some people suggested construction of tiny homes), middle-income, elders, former SDC clients, and people with disabilities. One person spoke to the value of offering affordable rental options, while another suggested a co-housing model.

Considerations:

- Clearly define affordable housing
- Offer support services to underserved populations
- Emphasize appropriately scaled housing for underserved populations
- Emphasize appropriate scale for compatibility with the surrounding community
- Develop an interim housing plan

5. Development of new educational and employment opportunities for Sonoma Valley

Redevelopment will include replacement of economic and social benefits lost with the closure of the Sonoma Developmental Center. New institutional partners may include universities, colleges, government agencies, tribal entities, and nonprofit organizations, with the goal of expanding educational options, providing job training, and creating economic opportunities close to home. Important themes include providing green jobs and honoring SDC’s legacy as an institution caring for people with developmental disabilities and other vulnerable populations.

Summary comments: While 80% of participants supported this statement as written, many would like to see opportunities for professional jobs on site, and accommodations for small, local, sustainable businesses. Participants shared a range of creative potential uses, including an arts center that could serve as a national model, and a school setting with teachers residing in affordable housing.

6. Preservation of historic and cultural sites

The site's numerous historic, cultural, and Native American resources will be protected following state and local historic preservation guidelines.

Summary comments: Many participants see value in embracing the site's rich cultural history, with 82% supporting the statement as written. This includes ongoing support of the developmentally disabled community, active engagement with local Native American communities, preservation of Native American cultural history, and on-site agricultural production. Participants also asserted the importance of SDC's the legacy of caring, and would like the principle to more strongly emphasize this value. Some participants asserted that these legacies should be foundational to each of the guiding principles.

7. Implementation

A governance entity will be considered for implementing the community's vision for Eldridge, embracing the concepts of environmental and economic sustainability and designed to represent state and local interests for the redevelopment process and ongoing operations.

Summary comments: Sixty-nine percent of participants supported this principle as written. Nine participants specifically recommended a public trust be created to oversee redevelopment, citing the Presidio Trust as a model. Others suggested that the three-year specific planning timeline was unrealistic and that opportunities for interim use should be considered. Most participants agreed the project should serve and benefit the community, and avoid corporate drivers and uses based on tourism. Some suggested that project design and implementation include nonprofit and educational institutions. Others noted the importance for community understanding of the trade-offs among different redevelopment options. Additionally, participants advised transparency throughout the redevelopment process; this should take the form of clear dissemination of information and simple ways to stay informed, such as an e-mail list sign-up.

Other recommendations

- Some participants recommended broadening the spectrum of engaged parties to include tribes, nonprofits, service organizations, educational entities, and SDC clients and their families.
- Many participants emphasized concern about how high-density development and an increase in traffic would affect quality of life.
- Some people advised adding a principle of long-term financial sustainability.
- One person suggested adding a principle for public services (to address site infrastructure, transportation and traffic, and public safety).

- Others suggested recognizing non-monetary benefits of the project, such as stewardship of groundwater water resources.
- Some noted that while redevelopment of Eldridge should be compatible with surrounding communities, it should also remain unique.