

Three SDC development alternatives released

After one workshop and one revision, supervisors will pick a preferred plan in January

By Jay Gamel

After years of intense professional study and growing consternation among local residents, three alternative scenarios for building homes and businesses at the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) were released, in digest form, for publication on Nov. 1.

The initial fact sheet indicates that 700 acres will be protected, including an extensive wildlife corridor that links southern Sonoma County to the Napa County line. It also promises a “walkable core” with transit, pedestrian and bike paths; housing; institutional uses “focusing on research and education;” commercial, recreational, and civic uses;

and some agricultural uses.

The alternative development scenarios envision heavy housing development on the remaining 245 acres — from a low of 990 housing units in Alternative A to 1,290 units in Alternative B, with a middling 1,190 in Alternative C. Twenty-four (24) percent of the units in each scenario would be allocated to affordable housing.

First District Supervisor Susan Gorin had not seen the report as of Oct. 26, and could not comment about the specific numbers or alternatives outlined. “I trust that the environmental review and public approval process will appropriately analyze the impacts of employment,

services, and housing on the site to help size the potential uses and scale on the site,” Gorin told the *Kenwood Press*.

The full report is expected to be available to the public as of Nov. 1 at www.sdcspecificplan.com/documents.

A public workshop has been scheduled for Nov. 13 from 10 to 11:30 a.m., followed by a Spanish Language Town Hall on Nov. 16 from 5:30 to 7 p.m. On Nov. 17, the alternatives will be discussed in a public joint meeting of the Springs Municipal Advisory Council (SMAC), the North Sonoma Valley Municipal Advisory Council (NSVMAC), and the Sonoma Val-

ley Citizens Advisory Commission (SVCAC). The joint meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. All will be virtual with access links posted at www.sdcspecificplan.com/events.

The SDC was a state-run facility that cared for people with developmental disabilities for over 100 years before being formally shuttered and designated as surplus property in 2018. Acknowledging the 945-acre property as unique and of major concern to adjacent rural Glen Ellen residents, the California Department of General Services (responsible for disposing of surplus state property) agreed with Sonoma

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County to develop a Specific Plan for its future disposition, a plan that specifically acknowledges the need to preserve the open space and to consider local input on future development plans.

In spite of delays caused by COVID-19 and extreme wildfire damage throughout the county in 2020, including in Sonoma Valley (where the SDC is located), and despite having three project directors in two years and general difficulty in pursuing “business as usual” over the past two years, the project consultant, Dyett & Bhatia, is expected to provide a formal document outlining three possible development alternatives for the 245-acre portion that considers retaining some existing buildings and some of the extensive infrastructure at the site, including a shuttered water treatment plant and central heating system.

According to the county summary of the report made available on Oct. 25 (embargoed for release until Nov. 1), Alternative A preserves the greatest number of historic buildings, offers the lowest density housing, and provides the second highest number of jobs of the three proposals.

“Alternative B creates the most housing units and creates a walkable mixed-use core,” the document states.

The third alternative, “C,” includes a regional

innovation hub expected to yield the highest number of jobs. The three scenarios project 610, 590, or 950 jobs. The basis for those projections was not detailed.

Alternative	Total Housing Units (Including Affordable)	Affordable Housing (Inclusionary and Additional)	Jobs	Historic Building Area (Total Reused) (sf)	Recreational Open Space (acres)	Other Open Space (acres)
SDC Historical Use	3,700 (clients)	-	1,900	372,000	4.8	23.5
Alternative A: Conserve and Enhance	990	240	610	339,000	8.0	29.0
Alternative B: Core and Community	1,290	310	590	242,000 (342,000)	5.5	35.0
Alternative C: Renew	1,190	280	950	148,000 (249,000)	5.0	41.0

These figures are a quick summary of the first draft of three alternative possibilities for developing SDC lands provided by Permit Sonoma in advance of the actual report, which should be available Nov. 1. At this stage, all plans are flexible and subject to public review over the coming weeks and months.

“Like all specific plans, these jobs are projections based on the designated land use,” Bradley Dunn, director of policy for Permit Sonoma and spokesperson for the department, stated in response to written questions. “Permit Sonoma believes that the site would be able to support an employer or employers that have the number of listed jobs.”

According to Dunn, “all three alternatives

have about 40,000 square feet (SF) of office space in each alternative and an additional 40,000 SF of research and development space in Alternatives A and B. Alternative C increases that to 255,000 SF [of] research and development space.” Alternative A also has 120,000 SF of public/institutional space.

Community facilities that could serve visitors from the surrounding area are included in all three alternatives, Dunn noted. “We are still studying whether a hotel would be included in all three scenarios.”

Each alternative includes preservation of the “Main Building and the Sonoma House (as well as six support structures),” Dunn said, adding that “converting some existing buildings to housing is explored.”

The alternatives will be modified by Permit Sonoma staff after public input is taken; then the Sonoma County Board

of Supervisors will pick one of the three alternatives. A Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) will be prepared and considered by July 2022, with a public Planning Commission hearing 30 to 45 days after that. The final Specific Plan is expected to be adopted by September 2022, by both the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.