

Work on SDC maintenance and environmental report ongoing

By Tracy Salcedo

In a community scarred by wildfire, watching the grass grow high and dry out on any property as fire season approaches raises alarm bells. When the property is the former campus of the Sonoma Developmental Center, with an owner that discontinued funding maintenance of the site in July 2025, the alarm bells become a cacophony.

But while the grass was still tall and just beginning to turn gold as March crept to its sunny close, an official with California's Department of General Services (DGS), which holds the deed to the 180-acre campus, said plans to mow are in progress.

"DGS has a contract with a vendor to provide landscaping services at the SDC property," said Monica Hassan, deputy director with DGS, in email correspondence. Scott Orr, director of Sonoma County's planning agency, Permit Sonoma, was more specific: DGS is "pursuing a contract amendment with [the California Conservation Corps] for brush clearing/ fire abatement."

DGS has also entered into a contract with Broderick General Engineering to fix the water leaks that plague the aging infrastructure on the property, Orr said. "This work is ongoing, with at least six repairs made and several more pending."

Aside from inundating portions of the grounds with water, a number of fire hydrants on the campus have been placed out of service because of a water leak and are now draped in orange plastic hoods.

"We received an update 10 days ago that all hydrants north of the Frederickson building were out of service," said Steve Akre, chief of Sonoma Valley Fire District, in email correspondence. The Fredrickson building is located just north and west of the junction of Harney and Arnold Drive, near the former institution's main gates.

"As soon as we were made aware of the hydrant issue, we immediately added water tenders (6,000 gallons+) to any fire response at the SDC," Akre said. "This is done automatically through REDCOM (our dispatch center). While this doesn't replace the value and capacity of the hydrant system, it is what we can do to best address the current situation. Sonoma Valley Fire is well trained in the use of water tenders as our primary water supply, as we have many areas of the fire district that do not have hydrants."

Akre referred questions about when or if water would be restored to hydrants for fire protection to the Valley of the Moon Water District, which did not respond prior to the press deadline. Onsite fire services were discontinued as of July 2025.



Inoperable fire hydrants covered in orange plastic surrounded by overgrown grass are all over the former SDC campus. Photo by Tracy Salcedo



Many of the abandoned buildings throughout the SDC campus have been vandalized, leaving them vulnerable to unauthorized entry. Photo by Tracy Salcedo

Hassan also addressed questions about vandalism on the property, which has included broken windows that could allow entry into abandoned buildings.

“DGS is working with the security company that is providing 24/7 patrols of the large SDC property to address reports of damage to the property and make repairs as expeditiously as possible,” she said. “Local residents should continue to contact the on-site security company and/or CHP (California Highway Patrol) if they have any concerns.”

Though DGS announced no money would be forthcoming from the state for maintenance of the property as of July 2025, Hassan explained that “DGS continues to maintain the SDC property and pays for security and maintenance activities with available funding.” She said that because the property is subject to ongoing litigation and is also “currently subject to a disposition process pursuant to state law,” referring to the proposed sale of the campus to the Eldridge Renewal development team, “the state is unable to provide additional information regarding the property at this time.”

Permit Sonoma Director Orr was able to provide a brief update on the status of the redevelopment proposal submitted by Eldridge Renewal, which is in the process of environmental review. The developer plans to build 990 dwelling units, 130,000 square feet of commercial space, and a hotel/conference center on the site.

“The draft is proceeding and is on schedule for an early summer 2026 release,” Orr said.