

Kenwood Press
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Sonoma Developmental Center update: State officials deflect questions on mowing, maintenance

By Tracy Salcedo

Readers of the Kenwood Press continue to ask important questions about upkeep of the former campus of the Sonoma Developmental Center. Among the most urgent queries: When will the rest of the high grass be mown? What is being done to curb vandalism? What can local residents do to mitigate the neglect?

A recent walk around the campus has revealed that California Conservation Corps workers have been chipping away at mowing the high grass. While the grass has been cut on the frontage along Arnold Drive, within the campus itself clearing is haphazard, with flammable vegetation still within the five-foot perimeter of many building exteriors and out of compliance with fire code mandates for defensible space. Fire hydrants remain out of service, shrouded in plastic. Buildings show signs of neglect, including broken windows, open doors, and disintegrating, mold-infested facades.

Once again, we reached out to California's Department of General Services, which is responsible for the property, with specific queries, including:

- Can you provide an update on when fire hazard mitigations, including grass-cutting and dead and downed tree debris removal, will recommence?
- Can you provide an update on when fire hydrants on the north end of campus will be operational again?
- Can you provide an update on when repairs will be made to ensure the buildings are secure from vandalism, theft, and possible arson?
- A reader has noted that the signage at the main entrance to the facility, which may have historic value, has been knocked over and is worried someone may be attempting to steal it. Can you comment? Is there a way to secure signage on the property so it can't be stolen?
- Readers have voiced frustration with the lack of maintenance on the site and offered their services online and via email to help maintain and protect the property. Can you comment? Offer advice and recommendations?

Fallon Okwuosa, assistant deputy director with DGS, responded with a "kind reminder that the Sonoma Developmental Center property is currently subject to a disposition process as required by state law. At this stage, due to ongoing litigation, the state is unable to provide further information or specific updates about the property."

Status of Specific Plan and EIR

Planners with Permit Sonoma continue work on a second specific plan and draft environmental report (EIR) for redevelopment of the 180-acre campus, which is expected to be released sometime this summer, but as of press time, they have not provided a specific date. The first EIR and specific plan were jettisoned by Sonoma County's Board of Supervisors after a Superior Court judge determined the environmental report was out of compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

According to the timeline on the SDC webpage on the Permit Sonoma website ([https:// permitsonoma.org/sdcproject](https://permitsonoma.org/sdcproject)), the planning agency will accept public comments for 60 days following release of the draft.

The focus of the current specific planning process and EIR is the proposal submitted by Eldridge Renewal, which was selected by DGS to purchase and develop the property. The development partnership plans to construct 990 dwelling units, including single family homes, duplexes, apartments, a 150-room hotel complex totaling 120,000 square feet, and 130,000 square feet of commercial space. Because Eldridge Renewal's plan was submitted under the auspices of California's "builders remedy" legislation, officials are limited to holding five public hearings on the proposal.

"The public is encouraged to participate and provide comment at these hearings," the Permit Sonoma website states. "The dates for the hearings are yet to be determined but will be publicly noticed at the appropriate time in compliance with State Law."

In addition to the CEQA lawsuit, which is ongoing pending submission of an EIR that complies with the law, plans for the campus are subject to a second lawsuit challenging, among other things, the validity of Eldridge Renewal's selection by DGS as the preferred developer. That lawsuit recently was greenlighted to proceed through the courts when a judge rejected DGS's request to toss the complaint.

Who to contact

More questions and comments will crop up as the process continues. Here's a list of decision-makers and planners you can contact with questions and concerns about maintenance of the site:

- California Department of General Services (DGS): [DGSRESDAMBGeneralInquiries@ dgs.ca.gov](mailto:DGSRESDAMBGeneralInquiries@dgs.ca.gov)
- Senator Chris Cabaldon: Senator. cabaldon@senate.ca.gov
- Assemblymember Damon Connolly: assemblymember.connolly@assembly.ca.gov
- Gerald McLaughlin (DGS): [gerald.mclaughlin@dgs. ca.gov](mailto:gerald.mclaughlin@dgs.ca.gov)

If you want to chime in on the planning process for the site, reach out to:

- Supervisor Rebecca Hermosillo: Rebecca.Hermosillo@sonomacounty.gov. You can send your queries to all county supervisors if you choose; their email addresses are online at sonomacounty.gov.
- Permit Sonoma Director Scott Orr: scott.orr@sonomacounty.gov
- Permit Sonoma SDC Planner Wil Lyons: [Wil.Lyons@sonomacounty. gov](mailto:Wil.Lyons@sonomacounty.gov).

Your best, most thorough, source for all things SDC is EldridgeforAll.org. You can sign up for the newsletter, which will keep you informed of all calls to action on the site.