

Why we filed the SDC lawsuit

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Mountain lions and now black bears pad their way across Sonoma Valley via an ancient wildlife corridor that threads through the lands of the former Sonoma Developmental Center. Endangered salmon swim and spawn in Sonoma Creek that runs through the middle of the historic old campus. Families from Sonoma and the Springs explore the open trails and access nature close to home. The oak woodlands and grasslands of the SDC lands serve as a greenbelt buffer as wildfires rage down from the hills above.

These are the reasons that we filed a lawsuit against the County of Sonoma.

The county and its consultants failed to fully study or provide measures to prevent the significant environmental and human harms that will result from building a new town in the middle of rural Sonoma Valley at SDC. In fact the SDC Environmental Impact Report (EIR) contains zero enforceable measures to address the harms to the environment, climate and community from the giant new development.

Instead the county claims that there will be few if any negative environmental or wildfire safety impacts and that the SDC Specific Plan will be “self-mitigating,” even with up to 1,000 homes (per the EIR), 2,500 residents and cars, a hotel, 400,000 square feet of commercial space, restaurants, retail and visitor events. That approach fails to meet even the most fundamental requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). It cannot stand.

Allowing SDC development to go forward at this scale with a flawed EIR undermines decades of open space protection, city-centered growth and sprawl prevention – the very policies that make Sonoma County so popular. A lawsuit is our last resort to protect these lands from overdevelopment, and stop the county from skirting CEQA.

Our lawsuit (scaledownsd.org) will force the county and the state to do the studies and revise the EIR and Specific Plan to meet mandates of state environmental law. In the process we hope to protect the SDC's history, natural resources and waterways forever for mountain lions, bears, salmon and the people of Sonoma Valley and the State of California.

— Teri Shore, Sonoma,

Teri Shore is part of the Sonoma County Tomorrow legal team working with the CEQA attorney.