

Revised plan for SDC redevelopment submitted

By Tracy Salcedo

Eldridge Renewal Inc. has revised its application to redevelop the campus of the former Sonoma Developmental Center, hoping to satisfy county officials who had deemed its first application incomplete.

The revised application adds 32 more proposed dwelling units on the site, bringing the total from 930 to 962, with 200 of those rental units “affordable to lower-income residents.” The application also provides further detail into how water would be used on the property, as well as sewage and wastewater disposal, power generation, and fire resiliency.

The first application submitted by Eldridge Renewal, a partnership between Rogal & Partners, spearheaded by Napa-based developer Keith Rogal, and the Grupe Company, a Stockton-based housing developer, was deemed incomplete by Permit Sonoma, the county planning agency, in March. In a 25page document, county planners requested the developer provide more detail on aspects of the plan and bring elements of the application into compliance with the SDC Specific Plan, which was approved by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors in December 2022, following a three-year, \$3 million planning effort.

Eldridge Renewal is the potential purchaser chosen by the state of California’s Department of General Services (DGS), which is responsible for selling the shuttered institution.

In addition to the change in housing numbers, the revised application reduces commercial square footage from approximately 400,000 to 375,000 “at full buildout,” and provides greater detail about specific features of the redevelopment. For example, potential uses for the iconic redbrick Main Building, illustrated floor-by-floor, include food stalls, an event hall, a movie theater, a coworking space, a private library, an art studio and gallery, and public community space.

While the developer’s plans for transformation of the 180-acre campus have been elaborated upon, they still vary significantly from the SDC Specific Plan. Among the most significant divergences: The number of dwelling units, the Specific Plan calls for 620 on the site; and the location of a four-story resort hotel, which the developer has located on a rise in the northwest corner of the campus, adjacent to the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor, as opposed to in the campus core.

Permit Sonoma distributed the revised application for comment by other agencies, such as Sonoma Valley Fire and Sonoma Water/ Valley of the Moon Water District, which were due back by July 2.

“The public can submit comments at any time and is able to comment until a decision is made on the permit and environmental documents,” said Permit Sonoma Marketing Specialist Adrian Tamblin, in response to questions emailed to the agency.

“After completing our review, we will identify any missing submittal requirements on July 12,” Tamblin said. “The response will be posted on our permits online webpage.”

Because the application falls under the auspices of SB 330, which streamlines approval for housing development to address California’s critical housing shortage, Tamblin explained that while public hearings will be required before the project is reviewed, “there can be a maximum of five for a project like this, so none are being scheduled until the application is complete.”

Asked about the applicability of the so-called builder’s remedy, which also fast-tracks development of affordable housing, Tamblin said, “The Builder’s Remedy is a provision of the Housing Accountability Act. Essentially it provides that when a county does not have

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a certified housing element it cannot deny a housing development project for low-income households based on inconsistency with the general plan or zoning. ...

The County will determine if the Builder’s Remedy applies to the resubmittal when it issues the completeness response on July 12.” The resubmittal was not available as of press time.

In terms of the applicability of recent litigation, in which a Sonoma County superior court judge found the environmental impact report for the SDC Specific Plan fell short of compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Tamblin noted that the final judgment has yet to be issued and the county doesn’t comment on pending litigation. “Once the Eldridge Renewal application is complete, the County will determine the appropriate path for complying with CEQA,” Tamblin said.

The Redwood Chapter of the Sierra Club also commented on the resubmittal. “Given the size and scale of the Eldridge Renewal proposed development, Sierra Club believes that any further planning by the County of Sonoma must be delayed at least until the EIR is revised and approved by the courts,” the letter states.

The Sierra Club also expressed concern about the larger scale of the development in the application, noting, “We have urged scaling back the development and stronger environmental protections throughout the public process. Once again, these concerns have been ignored or dismissed by the development application.”



One of many diagrams, figures, and documents submitted by Eldridge Renewal Inc. in response to Permit Sonoma’s request for more detail on aspects of Eldridge Renewal’s original application. This diagram illustrates possible future uses for the historic Main Building on the former Sonoma Developmental Center campus. Source Permit Sonoma

Developer Keith Rogal did not respond to a request for comment prior to the press deadline.

The revised project application can be viewed at <https://share.sonoma-county.org/link/2Au7Nbcc7AY/>. Public comment should be directed to planner Wil Lyons by emailing Wil.Lyons@sonoma-county.org.