

Change of course needed at SDC

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By Teri Shore —

In response to the large-scale development recently proposed by the State of California and its chosen developer for the historic campus at the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC), more than two dozen community leaders and constituents from Sonoma Valley and across the County sent a letter to our state representatives calling for a public meeting and a change of course at SDC.

The project plan submitted by the SDC developer, with sign-off by the state Department of General Services (DGS) as the property owner, calls for 930 residential units (mostly market-rate), a large hotel and 410,000 square feet of commercial space including a convention/event center.

It is overall larger than even the unpopular SDC Specific Plan approved by the county.

Worse, the plan for a sprawling complex was unexpectedly submitted under state housing streamlining provisions of SB 330 and state law known as the “Builder’s Remedy.” This maneuver is clearly intended to shortcut county planning and public review despite promises from our state representatives that the future of SDC will be driven by the community.

We believe that the filing by DGS as the owner of the property with the chosen developer [Grupe+Rogal partnership, aka Eldridge Renewal] is a bad faith abdication of the legislative directive to give priority in the disposition of that property, via a

community process, to affordable housing and the preservation of the natural resources and wildlife in and around SDC.

The proposal rejects years of public input to scale back development at SDC ,and voters' longstanding desires to put new homes and other development into existing cities and towns.

If you think traffic is bad now with the Highway 12 detour, it will get way worse if massive urban-style development is allowed to move forward at SDC and elsewhere. And what about wildfire evacuation? Total gridlock? Lives lost?

What's essential now is for our state elected officials to hold a public meeting in Sonoma Valley as soon as possible to clarify the many questions everyone has about the SDC developer's plan and the provisions of SB 330 and the Builder's Remedy. It should include the California Department of Housing & Community Development, who can best explain what the housing streamlining means at SDC.

While everyone very much supports the State Legislature's intentions to transfer the 750 acres of open space to state and regional parks, it has not yet been completed. And allowing a massive development in the heart of the wildlife corridor and open space with inadequate environmental protections puts those lands at high risk of degradation of habitat, water, air and wildlife.

We would think that the California Air Resources Board, a leader in the climate fight, would be shocked to know that the state is allowing a massive sprawl development on state property.

The community is seeking leadership at the state level to stop the SDC catastrophe in its tracks.

The state needs to stop pointing the finger at the county; and vice versa. We need our state representatives to work with the community on legislation that would revise existing state law to scale back housing and development at SDC in line with the visions that have been put forth over and over again.

Nothing is inevitable. State laws and plans can be changed. It happens all the time. We have some ideas.

There is room for new homes in the City of Sonoma, the Springs and other cities and towns in Sonoma County without sprawling into the greenbelt and wildlife corridor at SDC. Doing so is in direct conflict with longstanding state, regional and county policies for city-centered growth, reduced driving, and preserving open space.