

# Sonoma Developmental Center housing plan sees another major setback

*Following a series of judicial rulings, county supervisors on Tuesday decertified an “environmental impact report” and related county zoning changes for the large, state-owned property near Glen Ellen.*



**DANIEL JOHNSON**  
INDEX-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER  
December 3, 2024, 6:47PM  
UPDATED 24 MINUTES AGO  
3 minute read

A citizens' lawsuit to derail a massive redevelopment of the shuttered Sonoma Developmental Center reached the corridors of the Sonoma County Board of

Supervisors on Tuesday, prompting additional delays in what county leaders hoped would be one of their largest housing initiatives in years.

Following a series of judicial rulings earlier this year, supervisors unanimously agreed to decertify an “environmental impact report” and related county zoning changes for the state-owned property near Glen Ellen, abutting Jack London State Park. They also repealed approval of another document, called the “specific plan,” that had guided a developer’s vision for the project.

Board members reached their decision after discussing the subject, and getting an earful from the public on it, for more than 100 minutes.

“It is my opinion and the opinion of the Glen Ellen Historical Society that we support the board’s proposal to decertify the EIR and set aside the specific plan,” said Teresa Murphy, vice chair of the Glen Ellen Historical Society, which has been among the most vocal opponents of the Sonoma Developmental Center proposal and also has been among a coalition of groups fighting it in court.

“It’s time to redraw the plan according to the wishes of the community, which is a scaled-down version which has many advantages, including health and safety, and climate and wildlife protection,” Murphy also implored to county supervisors. “It’s also the opinion of the Glen Ellen Historical Society that there has not been sufficient review of the vast historical resources at SDC, making these assets vulnerable to complete destruction.”

Besides Murphy, more than a dozen other opponents of the project voiced deep concerns about it, citing traffic, wildfire and environmental concerns. Initially, Permit Sonoma, county government’s planning and code-enforcement division, approved placing 1,000 housing units on the 180-acre SDC core campus, part of what once was a 945-acre site. Portions have since been set aside as park land.

In January 2023, residents took that plan to court. A coalition called Sonoma Community Advocates for a Livable Environment that month sued Sonoma County, alleging that the project, as approved, failed to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act.

In April 2024, Sonoma County Superior Court Judge Bradford DeMeo ruled that the county didn’t define the number of housing units allowed, respond to community concerns in the draft environmental impact report or adequately gauge impacts on biological resources and wildfire evacuation. DeMeo also ruled that the county didn’t fully consider the impact of another large development proposal just to the south, at the Hanna Center, a child-welfare campus that also is proposing selling off some of its land for a 600-home development alongside retail and commercial space.

The judge issued a writ in October that all but compelled the county to decertify the environmental impact report and related zoning amendments for the Sonoma Developmental Center. As a result, county staff and attorneys suggested abandoning the “specific plan,” arguing the county would be powerless to enforce it on the SDC developer: Eldridge Renewal LLC, led by Napa-based builder Keith Rogal. That set the stage for Tuesday’s decision by the supervisors to abandon the environmental impact report and specific plan.

What happens next is difficult to predict. The project, at the very least, faces a complicated road ahead, with the supervisors’ action appearing to push back a final decision on it for months.

Neither Rogal, nor anyone from Eldridge Renewal, publicly addressed the board Tuesday.

Board members and Sonoma Valley residents voiced a need for the State of California and the developer to engage with residents about the SDC’s future and the scale of the project.

Meanwhile, county leaders decried that the State of California, which continues to own the property as the sale to Eldridge Renewal is pending, might be requesting \$2.3 million from county government because the project has not met deadlines.

“I appreciate the discussion and I think we’re getting to a place where we need to go,” said Supervisor Susan Gorin, who represents District 1, which includes Sonoma Valley. “I can’t help but state that the State has made an intentional disinvestment from the property for decades, so for them to expect a developer and the county to come up with a financially feasible plan with a detailed infrastructure is immoral.”

*Reach the reporter, Dan Johnson, at [daniel.johnson@sonomanews.com](mailto:daniel.johnson@sonomanews.com).*