

SDC Remains At Risk

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The future of the Sonoma Developmental Center continues to hang in the balance, as a Napa developer proceeds with plans for construction of almost a thousand new living units, including a plethora of single-family homes and a row of two-and-three-story housing units lining parts of Arnold Drive.

The result of that plan, as evidenced by the graphic you see here, would be rows of buildings 35-feet tall, destroying the scenic



integrity of the SDC campus and turning the road through the property into a shaded tunnel.

The number of homes proposed would also turn the existing wildlife corridor into an urban landscape utterly at odds with the goal of preserving one of the most important passageways for wildlife, linking the Mayakamas Mountain range with Sonoma Mountain and the migration pathways to the west and east.

The development plan, dubbed Eldridge Renewal by Rogal Projects managing Partner Keith Rogal, is targeting a backdoor shortcut to County approval, called the Builder's Remedy. Without that so-called remedy, Rogal would be limited to the County's development plan which set the number of homes at 620, still about 200 more housing units than organized opponents of the plan agree is viable to preserve the site's environmental, cultural and historic integrity. The 620 ceiling could have been raised by virtue of certain density bonuses, but it would never have gotten close to the 930 units (or more) Rogal plans to shoehorn into SDC.

The Builders Remedy was a legislative strategy to spur local jurisdictions – cities and counties – to complete the housing elements of their General Plans by a January deadline. Those jurisdictions that failed to meet the deadline would have to allow builders freedom to develop without being restricted by existing zoning laws. Sonoma County missed its housing element deadline by about 24 hours and Rogal was waiting in the Remedy wings.

Rogal appears to be proceeding with the assumption that a decision by Superior Court Judge Bradford DeMeo, throwing out the SDC Environmental Impact Report as utterly inadequate, will eventually be resolved by modest fixes.

But opponents of the project have officially objected to Rogal's plan, arguing to the Sonoma County Planning Department that provisions in the Builder's Remedy legislation should block development that would have negative impacts on areas adjacent to waterways and other aquatic features. Sonoma Creek, the largest waterway in the Sonoma Valley, runs through the project property, and is an essential part of its wildlife corridor.

Rogal's dilemma appears to be that he can only justify a project as big as SDC if it has enough homes to guarantee substantial profit. But even a cursory look at the project plans reveal that the result will be urban densities, and population impacts that will destroy the appearance, the ambiance, the historic value and the environmental integrity of not just SDC, but of adjoining property.

The population generated by 930 (or more) homes will reach a projected 2,200 or more, with at least that many vehicles, plus all the dogs, cats and other assorted pets typically found in a town that size. Glen Ellen, and it's Eldridge appendage, will become incrementally unrecognizable.

In the weeks ahead, we are committed to an extensive analysis of every aspect of a project we are convinced should not, and cannot, be built.

Meanwhile, to learn more about the SDC debacle, plan to attend the third and last showing of the documentary film, "Small Is Beautiful," at the Sebastiani Theatre on Sunday, October 20, at 5 p.m.