



**FILE:** Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan  
**DATE:** September 15, 2022  
**TIME:** At or after 1:05 p.m.  
**STAFF:** Brian Oh, Comprehensive Planning Manager

**Title:**

Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan - Draft Environmental Impact Report (Public Hearing)

**Recommended Action:**

Conduct a public hearing to receive comments on the adequacy of the Sonoma Developmental Center draft Environmental Impact Report (No Action)

**Summary:**

In December 2018, the State of California closed the Sonoma Developmental Center, a residential care facility that had been in operation for 125 years. During the closure process, the State enacted a statute authorizing the County of Sonoma to adopt a specific plan guiding redevelopment of the 945-acre campus. The statute prescribes that the plan focus on: 1) open space preservation; 2) affordable housing, including units serving people with developmental disabilities; and 3) economic feasibility. The statute provides three years from enactment to complete the process – 31 December 2022.

The purpose of this hearing is to receive public comments on the adequacy of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) and the analysis of potential impacts and associated mitigation measures contained therein. After this hearing, additional comments from the public and stakeholder agencies will be accepted in writing until 5:00pm on Monday, September 26, 2022. After this hearing and the close of the public comment period, staff will prepare written responses to all comments received at this hearing and also to the written comments received during the comment period. These responses will be included in the Final EIR. After preparation of the Final EIR (FEIR), a public hearing will be scheduled for the Planning Commission to consider certification of the FEIR and a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors for adoption of the final Specific Plan and certification of the FEIR.

**Discussion:**

Background:

Established in 1891 in the heart of the Sonoma Valley, the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) site consists of a developed campus covering approximately 180 acres and approximately 765 acres of agriculture, recreation, and ecologically valuable natural areas adjacent to the Sonoma Valley Regional Park and the Jack London State Historic Park. Embedded in the natural areas is an extensive existing system of trails and access roads and a water system consisting of two reservoirs, aqueducts, springs, storage tanks, a treatment plant, pipelines and a



water intake in Sonoma Creek. SDC was the oldest facility in California created specifically to serve the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and was sited at its current location for its picturesque, therapeutic setting, gaining national renown as a place of healing and community. In 2018, the State of California officially closed the facility, and relocated clients to smaller, community-based care facilities. SDC was also the valley’s largest employer until its closure, with ties to adjacent communities of Glen Ellen and Eldridge.

Following the closure of the SDC facility, the California State Legislature enacted Government Code Section 14670.10.5 that outlines the State’s goals and objectives for the SDC Specific Plan and authorizes Sonoma County to lead the planning process. In light of the statewide affordable housing crisis, State law stipulates that the SDC Specific Plan prioritize housing, especially affordable housing and housing for individuals with developmental disabilities. The legislation also acknowledges the importance of the significant open space areas of the SDC site and requires permanent protection of the SDC site’s open space and natural resources, along with protection of the Eldridge Cemetery located on the property. Other required components of the planning process include involvement of the community in order to reduce uncertainty, increase land values, expedite marketing, and maximize interest of potential purchasers, and ensuring economic feasibility. The legislation contemplates that these efforts will require environmental review and amendments to the County’s General Plan and zoning ordinances. Under Section 14670.10.5, “specific plan” means a comprehensive planning and zoning document for a defined geographic region of County of Sonoma. Under California law, specific plans create a framework for development in a given area and establish a link between implementing policies of the general plan and the individual development proposals in a defined area. All subsequent public works projects, zoning regulations, subdivision and development must in turn be consistent with the specific plan.

### Vision Statement

The former Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) site has emerged as a culturally and ecologically vibrant and resilient community. A core 180-acre developed area is surrounded by a vast protected open space of oak woodlands, native grasslands, wetlands, forests, creeks, and lakes that provide habitats and wildlife movement corridors; agricultural land; and recreational open space integrated with the surrounding park systems. The developed core area comprises a complementary mix of housing, commercial, and institutional uses. The SDC site is financially independent and supporting infrastructure is up to date and well maintained. A variety of housing—including affordable, workforce, mid-income, and market-rate housing; senior housing; housing for people with developmental disabilities; and in new and adaptively re-used buildings—will foster a diverse and inclusive community. New development complements the adjacent communities of Glen Ellen and Eldridge. Residents enjoy pedestrian access to essential services and parks, and seamless connections to surrounding open spaces. Employment opportunities reflect the site’s legacy of care and emphasize innovation, research, education, environment, and ecology, together with supporting commercial and visitor-serving uses. Sonoma Valley’s former largest employment hub is reinvigorated as a regional model for sustainable development.

### Guiding Principles

**Promote a Vibrant, Mixed-Use Community.** Promote a diverse and integrated mix of residential development and employment uses, including research, education, office, retail, and small businesses, to promote optimal development patterns and site revitalization in the Core Campus, and provide economic opportunities for Sonoma Valley communities.



**Emphasize a Cohesive Sense of Place and Walkability.** Establish a cohesive visual landscape with consistent streetscapes and improved sidewalks within the Core Campus. Locate land uses and enhance the existing street network to encourage development of a walkable and pedestrian-friendly environment with gathering spaces, diverse activities, and connections within and to surrounding communities and regional trail systems. Ensure that new development complements the adjacent communities of Glen Ellen and Eldridge.

**Integrate Development with Open Space Conservation.** Promote a sustainable, climate-resilient community surrounded by preserved open space and parkland that protects natural resources, fosters environmental stewardship, and maintains and enhances the permeability of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor for safe wildlife movement throughout the site. Support the responsible use of open space as a recreation resource for the community.

**Balance Redevelopment with Existing Land Uses.** Use recognized principles of land use planning and sustainability to gauge how well proposed land uses protect public trust resources and fit the character and values of the site and surrounding area, as well as benefit local communities and residents.

**Promote Sustainability and Resiliency.** Promote sustainable development practices in building and landscape design. Plan infrastructure efficiently and sustainably, conserving water and creating opportunities for water reuse and recharge. Proactively plan for community safety in natural disasters, especially ensuring that emergency plans and egress routes are in place with adequate capacity, and landscapes and buildings are designed with fire defenses.

**Support Housing Development and Provide a Variety of Housing Types.** Promote housing to address Sonoma County’s pressing housing needs and the State’s key development objectives for the site. Support a range of housing opportunities, including affordable housing, workforce housing, mid-income housing, housing for individuals with developmental disabilities, senior housing, and market rate housing.

**Balance Development with Historic Resource Conservation.** Preserve and adaptively reuse the Main Building and the Sonoma House complex, conserve key elements of the site’s historic landscape, and strive to maintain the integrity of the historic district to the west of Arnold Drive by adaptive reuse of contributing buildings where feasible. Support a cohesive community feel and character, while allowing a diversity of architectural styles.

**Promote Multi-Modal Mobility.** Promote car-free circulation within the site and promote transportation connections between the SDC site and the larger Sonoma Valley and Bay Area, including through transit access, safe sidewalks and crossings, and regional bicycle routes. Ensure that new development takes into consideration resultant traffic and levels of transportation activity from when SDC was operational.

**Ensure Long-Term Fiscal Sustainability.** Ensure that the proposed plan is financially feasible and sustainable, as financial feasibility is essential to the long-term success of the project. Ensure that the proposed plan supports funding for necessary infrastructure improvements and historic preservation while supporting the Sonoma Valley community’s needs and galvanizing regional economic growth.

**Embrace Diversity.** Accommodate the needs of people of diverse backgrounds, interests, and income levels, creating an inclusive, accessible, inviting, and safe place that preserves SDC’s legacy of care and creates opportunities for marginalized communities.

Summary of Draft EIR and Significant Effects:



The Draft EIR addresses environmental impacts associated with the proposed Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan that are known to the County of Sonoma, were raised during the Notice of Preparation process, or identified during preparation of the Draft EIR. The Draft EIR discusses significant and potentially significant impacts in terms of several environmental categories including aesthetics, greenhouses gases, noise, transportation/circulation, and vehicle miles traveled, and considers cumulative impacts as well. These impacts are summarized in the Executive Summary of the DEIR, which includes a table outlining the level of potential impacts, and where further discussion can be found in the document. In addition to the Draft Specific Plan, the Draft EIR and its Appendices can be accessed on the project website at <https://www.sdcspecificplan.com/documents>.

A Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) studies and describes potential impacts on the environment and measures that could mitigate impacts. A DEIR also studies what would happen if the project were not adopted, known as No Project, as well as alternative projects that may have lesser environmental impacts. This DEIR studies the following:

<i>Proposals Studied by the DEIR</i>				
<i>Plan/Alternative</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Housing (units)</i>	<i>Jobs</i>	<i>New road connecting Arnold Drive and SR 12</i>
Proposed Plan	2,400	1,000	940	Local road connection
No Project: Low Development Alternative	1,800	750	700	Emergency access connection only
No Project: High Development Alternative	3,000	1,250	940	Local road connection
Reduced Development Alternative	1,800	750	600	Emergency access connection only
Historic Preservation Alternative	1,080	450	600	No

The DEIR studied 62 project impacts to the environment. Staff concludes that 60 of 62 are less than significant, and two are expected to be significant and unavoidable.

3.5-2 Implementation of the Proposed Plan would cause a substantial adverse change to the significance of a historic district, as defined as physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the historic district or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of the historic district would be materially impaired pursuant to § 15064.5.

3.14-2 Implementation of the Proposed Plan would conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b) pertaining to Vehicle Miles Traveled.



Alternatives Comparison

The Reduced Development Alternative, No Project Low Development Alternative, and No Project High Development Alternative have the same outcomes of significance. The Historic Preservation Alternative would also have similar outcomes, except with less than significant historic resources impacts. Overall, the Historic Preservation Alternative is the environmentally superior alternative, although significant impacts of the Proposed Plan and the two alternatives are largely comparable, and the Historic Preservation Alternative would be less superior in some environmental features such as energy use, biological resources, and wildfire risks. Additionally, this alternative would not support key project objectives related to increased housing supply, varied housing opportunities, community vibrancy, and long-term fiscal stability to the same degree as the Proposed Plan.

The Proposed Project fulfills the project objectives most completely, including providing greater levels of housing including affordable housing, and superior financial feasibility, with overall environmental impacts that are largely comparable between the Proposed Plan and the alternatives, with the exception of greater preservation of historic resources in the Historic Preservation Alternative.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is intended to achieve several objectives:

1. Inform the public and local decision makers about the potential environmental impacts of proposed projects
2. Identify ways that environmental damage can be avoided or reduced;
3. Prevent significant, avoidable environmental damage by requiring changes in projects, either by adoption of project alternatives or through the use of mitigating actions; and finally
4. Disclose to the public why a project was approved, if it would cause unavoidable significant impacts.

**Next Steps:**

Following the end of the public review period for the DEIR on Monday, September 26, 2022, a Final EIR (FEIR) will be prepared. The FEIR will respond to comments received during the public review period and to oral comments received at this public meeting. The Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors will then review and consider the FEIR at publically noticed public hearings.

Date	Project Milestone
Aug 10, 2022	Public comment period begins on the DEIR
Sept 15, 2022	Planning Commission hearing on DEIR (No vote)
Sept 26, 2022	Close public comment period on DEIR
Oct 2022	Planning Commission on FEIR (Action)
Nov 2022	Board of Supervisors on final EIR and Specific Plan (Action)

**Attachments:**

1. Notice of Availability, August 2022
2. State Legislation - Government Code Section 14670.10.5, 2019

