



**FILE:** Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan Project  
**DATE:** October 27, 2022  
**TIME:** At or after 1:05 p.m.  
**STAFF:** Brian Oh, Comprehensive Planning Manager

**Title:**

Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan Project and Final Environmental Impact Report (Public Hearing)

**Recommended Actions:**

1. Complete a public hearing for the Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan Project and Final Environmental Impact Report
2. Approve a resolution (Attachment 1) recommending that the Board of Supervisors certify a Final Environmental Impact Report for the Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan, and adopt a statement of overriding considerations and findings of fact pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)
3. Approve a resolution (Attachment 2) recommending that the Board of Supervisors adopt general plan amendments to maps and policies of the Land Use Element and other elements to enable the Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan, adopt the Specific Plan, and approve zoning code and map changes

**Summary:**

In December 2018, the State of California closed the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC), a residential care facility that had been in operation for 125 years. During the closure process, the State in 2019 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) housing, prioritizing affordable housing and homes for individuals with developmental disabilities; and 3) economic feasibility. The statute provides three years from enactment to complete the process by 31 December 2022.

Anchored by SDC's Community Engagement Strategy, the Specific Plan planning effort included a series of community workshops, a Board of Supervisors workshop in January 2022, focus groups, and public review of draft content as key input to the draft Specific Plan and Environmental Impact Report, which was released on August 10, 2022. A Final EIR and key Specific Plan policy revisions were published on October 18, 2022.

On October 27, 2022, the Sonoma County Planning Commission will conduct a public hearing to consider making recommendations to the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors on the Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan Project (inclusive of the Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan adoption, General Plan amendments, and zoning ordinance and map amendments) and FEIR. Subsequently, the Board of Supervisors will conduct its own public hearing, which will be noticed on a later date.



## **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 and located between the unincorporated communities of Glen Ellen and Eldridge. 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 with a one-time \$3.5M funding allocation to complete work by December 2022. 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.

### Vision Statement

The former 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.

### Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan

A Specific Plan is a comprehensive planning and zoning document for a defined geographic region. Under California law, a Specific Plans creates a framework for development for a defined geographic region and establishes a link between implementing policies of the general plan and the individual development proposals in that defined region. All subsequent public works projects, zoning regulations, subdivision and development must in turn be consistent with the Specific Plan.

The SDC Specific Plan is organized in seven chapters across six topics:

- Open Space and Resources, and Hazards
- Mobility and Access
- Land Use
- Community Design
- Public Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure
- Implementation and Financing

Staff published a draft Specific Plan on August 10, 2022 for a 45-day public review. Based on input received during that period, a revised set of Specific Plan policies is being presented to the Planning Commission as Attachment 3.

The revised plan continues to call for:

- Open space protection for 700 acres and preservation of Sonoma Creek
- 1,000 housing units with 283 units of affordable housing
- More than 900 jobs that will provide diverse living-wage jobs across 410,000 square feet of non-residential development
- Walkable core with transit, pedestrian and bike paths to provide alternatives to automobile use
- Institutional uses focusing on research and education driving employment
- Commercial, recreational, and civic uses for residents, employees and the greater Sonoma Valley
- New road connection between Arnold Dr and SR-12
- New public facilities such as a fire station and community center

Additionally, in response to public and Planning Commission input, key changes in the final Specific Plan include:

- Revised policies to further prioritize affordable housing and housing for individuals with developmental disabilities
- Revised permitted uses for key areas such as the preserved open space and Core Campus



- Expanded policies addressing the wildlife corridor
- Clarifying environmental and permitting actions for future project applicants

## Sonoma County General Plan and Zoning Ordinance and Map Analysis

### *General Plan*

In the words of the California Supreme Court, the general plan serves as “the land use constitution” for the community. It guides the county’s land-use policy balancing environmental protection and sustainable development for the next generation. Adopted in 2008, the County General Plan includes a number of goals and policies to inform redevelopment of the SDC campus. Staff has completed a General Plan analysis and concludes that the Specific Plan is consistent with the County General Plan, with amendments to the maps and policies of the Land Use Element and other elements as needed to enable enactment and implementation of the Specific Plan. The Specific Plan expands preservation of open space and natural resources, allows for a manageable amount of population and growth with a mix of housing types and affordability, and provides essential amenities to the Sonoma Valley area. The Plan reaffirms the General Plan’s commitments to maintaining growth, development and conserving resources, particularly in Sonoma Valley with its unique characteristics by conforming with a number of key General Plan policies such as:

### Land use

- Policy LU-20ff: Consider future public uses of the Sonoma Developmental Center and Skaggs Island properties as a priority if they are declared surplus and offered for sale to local agencies, particularly park, recreation, and open space uses and affordable housing.
  - County of Sonoma is achieving this policy through completion of the terms defined by the State and County partnership to complete planning and disposition of SDC.

### Circulation

- Policy CT-7qq: Consider intersection improvements such as signalization and left turn lanes at various intersections along Arnold Drive to reduce congestion, provided that the improvements are consistent with the designated road classifications.
  - SDC Specific Plan is requiring intersection improvements consistent with the designated road classification at Arnold Dr. and Harney Av.

### Public facilities and services

- Policy PF-1f: Avoid extension of public sewer services outside of either a sphere of influence or Urban Service Area. To the extent allowed by law, consider exceptions to this policy only: (1) Where necessary to resolve a public health hazard resulting from existing development, or (2) Where appropriate to allow farmworker housing or an affordable housing project providing exclusively lower income housing on properties adjoining urban service boundaries.
  - The Core Campus parcels east of Arnold Dr. are in an existing urban service area. The Core Campus parcels west of Arnold Dr. have existing public sewer services, and therefore do not require an extension of service.
- Policy PF-2c: Use the following standards for determination of park needs: Twenty acres of regional parks per 1,000 residents countywide and five acres of local and community parks per 1,000 residents in



unincorporated areas. A portion of State parklands may be included to meet the standard for regional parks.

- The Specific Plan exceeds the minimum standards for both regional, local and community parks for the proposed plan.
- Policy PF-2g: Require dedication of land or in-lieu fees as a means of funding park and fire services and facilities.
  - The Specific Plan requires dedication of land, or in-lieu fees as a means for funding park and fire service and facilities.

#### Open space and resource conservation

- Policy LU-10a: Establish maximum densities and/or siting standards for development in designated Community Separators, Scenic Landscape Units, Scenic Corridors, Biotic Habitat Areas, Habitat Connectivity Corridors, and Riparian Corridors.
  - The Specific Plan proposes design and development standards, including maximum densities. Additional standards are proposed in alignment with Arnold Dr., which is a Scenic Corridor. The area is also identified as a Habitat Connectivity Corridor. Policies, design and development standards are proposed to allow movement across the landscape by expanding the wildlife buffer, preserving critical open space resources within the wildlife corridor, and ensuring permeability of the campus for a critical linkage between Sonoma Mountain and the Mayacamas Range. Additionally, the Plan proposes expansion of the existing Riparian Corridor for both Hill Creek and Sonoma Creek.

#### Zoning Ordinance

The current zoning designation for SDC is PF B7, F2 HD LG/MTN RC50 SR VOH.

#### Base Zone

- Public Facilities, sites that serve the public or community needs

#### Combining Zone

- B7 Combining District, which restricts subdivision of lots
- Historic Combining District, which applies to the property west of Arnold Drive, requires County Landmarks Commission approvals for any alterations or demolition of buildings within the boundaries of a historic district
- Floodplain Combining District, applied to properties which lie within the one hundred-year flood hazard area, specifies development standards and flood protection regulations
- Riparian Corridor Combining Zone, which seeks to protect critical habitat area along riparian corridors and prohibits grading, vegetation removal, agricultural cultivation, structures, roads, utility lines, and parking lots within any stream channel or conservation area
- Scenic Resources Combining District, which applies to most of the property, specifies that land within community separators and scenic landscape units should site structures below ridgelines, be screened by vegetation, and that development should be clustered
- Valley Oak Habitat Combining District, which applies to most of the Core Campus area, requires protection of valley oak trees and replacement of any large trees removed



- Local Area Development Guidelines for Taylor/Sonoma/Mayacamas Mountains, which are intended to reduce visual impacts of residential development, and contain standards for siting, screening, grading, landscaping, and architectural design of residential structures

The Specific Plan requires the three following changes to ensure that the zoning and Specific Plan are consistent.

1. Amend the base zoning designation from Public Facilities (PF) to Special Purpose Zone, Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC)
2. Change from B7 to B6 for Core Campus parcels
3. Replace Local Area Development Guidelines (LG/MTN) with Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan - Development and Design Standards for Core Campus parcels

The specific general plan amendments and zone text and map amendments are described in greater detail in Attachment 2.

#### California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

The Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan Project has been environmentally reviewed pursuant to the provisions of the CEQA, the State CEQA Guidelines, and the County’s Local CEQA Guidelines. An Environmental Impact Report was prepared.

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.

According to CEQA Guidelines 15021 (d), “CEQA recognizes that in determining whether and how a project should be approved, a public agency has an obligation to balance a variety of public objectives, including economic, environmental, and social factors and in particular the goal of providing a decent home and satisfying living environment for every Californian. An agency shall prepare a statement of overriding considerations as described in Section 15093 to reflect the ultimate balancing of competing public objectives when the agency decides to approve a project that will cause one or more significant effects on the environment.”

#### Final Environmental Impact Report

On October 18, 2022, County staff published a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR), which includes three components: a summary of the changes included in the FEIR, County responses to comments received during the public review period, and an errata (new information added to clarify, amplify or make insignificant modifications to the Draft Environmental Impact Report).

The Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) reaffirms the environmental analysis completed for the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR), which addresses environmental impacts associated with the proposed SDC Specific Plan that are known to the County of Sonoma, were raised during the Notice of Preparation process, or



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identified during preparation of the DEIR. The DEIR discusses significant and potentially significant impacts in terms of several environmental categories including, but not limited to, aesthetics, greenhouses gases, noise, transportation/circulation, and vehicle miles traveled, and cumulative impacts. 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. The FEIR, the DEIR and the DEIR Appendices can be accessed on the project website at <https://www.sdcspecificplan.com/documents>.

The DEIR studies and describes potential impacts on the environment and measures that could mitigate impacts. It also evaluates what would happen if the project were not adopted, known as a No Project Alternative, as well as alternative projects that may have lesser environmental impacts. The following table provides a high-level summary of the alternatives.

<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, and the FEIR reaffirms that 60 of 62 impacts are less than significant, and the following two impacts are expected to be significant and unavoidable.

1. Transportation (Significant and unavoidable impact; project and cumulative)  
 Implementation of the Proposed Plan would conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b) pertaining to Vehicle Miles Traveled (Impact 3.14-2).

The VMT modeling results produced by the Sonoma County Transportation Authority (SCTA) travel demand model indicate that residential uses in the Plan area with implementation of the Proposed Plan would on average generate 15.2 VMT per capita, which is a decrease from the existing average of 20.0 VMT per capita. Under future conditions with buildout of the Proposed Plan, the VMT per capita would further reduce to 14.9. While these metrics indicate improvement in residential VMT per capita compared to existing development, they fall short of the applied 13.2 VMT per capita threshold of significance.





2. Historic Resources (Significant and unavoidable impact; project)

Impact 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.

The Proposed Plan includes policies and actions that encourage the preservation of the historic character of the Core Campus. This includes retention, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of buildings, structures, and landscape features in the Core Campus area, as well as the prioritization of preserving historically contributing resources. Although some of the historic character would be preserved, demolition of some contributing resources to the historic district are assumed in the Proposed Plan. Additionally, a number of Specific Plan policies would help reduce these impacts to the maximum extent practicable, but there are no mitigation measures available to avoid impacts entirely. As such, this impact would remain significant and unavoidable.

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 Plan 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.

Next Steps

Following the conclusion of a public hearing held by the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors will consider the recommendation of the Planning Commission and hold its own public hearing on the Project and FEIR as the final decision-making body, which is expected to be held on December 16, 2022.

**Attachments:**

1. Resolution - Recommending that the Board of Supervisors certify the FEIR for the Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan Project and adopt findings and a statement of overriding consideration pursuant to CEQA
  - a. Findings of Fact
  - b. Statement of Overriding Consideration
2. Resolution - Recommending that the Board of Supervisors adopt the SDC Specific Plan, and approve amendments to the General Plan and Map, and Zoning Ordinance
  - a. Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan



- b. General Plan Amendments
  - c. Zoning Ordinance Amendments
  - d. General Plan consistency analysis
3. SDC Specific Plan goals and policies, revised October 2022
4. Supplemental Responses to Public Comment - FEIR
5. Public Comments

