

Eldridge Village, A Complete Community

A powerful, coherent vision can help elevate the goals of the project above niche interests. Funders, progressive developers, and community volunteers are often attracted to sites that have a compelling vision. This compelling vision can help bring significant resources to the project and help it avoid potentially divisive local politics.

Sites of significant acreage without a central, coherent vision are often parceled off to various, unrelated users. At best, this new development misses an opportunity to create something that is greater than the sum of its parts. At worst, a divided strategy can result in lengthy negotiations over boundaries and resources, slowing or sometimes halting a project entirely.

“SDC Transformation Study,” Potrero Group

In this critical time of intense global pressure of rapidly growing population, shrinking land and resources, and dramatic earth changes due to climate change, the sudden availability of the beautiful Eldridge property can be seen as an opportunity to do something wonderful, a gift to the community and a fulfillment of some of our most cherished dreams. But due to its rarity and beauty, it can also become an object of our personal ambition and subject to exploitation for personal and/or corporate profit. Purchased with taxpayer money in 1890 for \$53,000, the property is now worth millions, and millions more could be made from a shining resort with pool, gardens, horses and all amenities for the pleasure of the elite. But even theirs will be a vanishing pleasure when global warming kicks in in 30 years; and nothing we have done so far, in the four decades since the first warnings were brought before the public, has done much to arrest its fearsome progress.

We want our beautiful county to remain the same. Ducking the realization that it is already much changed, we focus on keeping at bay the lesser but significant threat of commercial development in the service of tourism, bringing more empty dollars to the already rich, evicting the poor working classes from their meager tenancy on this planet and increasing the untended ranks of the homeless while ruining the planet for the rest of us.

At Eldridge, we have the opportunity to demonstrate that the dreary course of destruction rolling relentlessly toward us can be reversed.

Our times call for the progressive implementation of a new paradigm for living together peaceably on this verdant planet. Here in Sonoma County we are blessed, not only with good soil and glorious scenery but with creative, artistic and intelligent people who are committed to envisioning a better world and who have explored new ideas like new economies, local food networks, explorations in consciousness, organic diets and healthy living. We know that a “better world is possible.” The question is how to summon the political will, which can only come from the grassroots.

This proposal is an offering – an attempt to initiate a process of sincere, person-to-person discussion and sharing. What can we do with 834 acres that will unify our community and replenish our earth?

We suggest that Eldridge Village become a model eco-community based on a new way of living on our sacred planet.

A Model EcoCommunity

We envision Eldridge Village as a modern intentional community employing the latest renewable and sustainable technology, growing much of its own organic produce for its residents and neighbors, and living lightly on the earth. Its carbon footprint will be as low as possible. It will be people-centered rather than profit-centered, democratically and transparently organized, a place for families, where children are safe and elders are respected, where local arts and entertainment and sports take the place of celebrity-worship and where respect for the natural world is paramount. Here we will welcome all peoples who share our vision, especially members of our Latino community, so central to Valley life, and Native Americans of the region.

At the center of the community, though separate from the residential sectors, will be an **Eco Research and Information Center** where projects conducted on the property will be documented and assessed using measurable objectives and outcomes such as those set out by the One Planet Living Principles and which are already in application at a number of centers similar in intent to the one we are proposing. The standards may be accessed here:

<http://www.bioregional.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Goals-and-Guidance-for-Communities-Jan-2017.pdf>

With the research center will be a small conference or **retreat center** where workshops, lectures and weekend retreats will be held.

This complex on the property will provide validation and oversight of the systems employed on the land and will also contribute to the financial support of the whole project.

Governance

A Trust would be created for the purposes of administering the project which would include the interested active parties, including the Sonoma Land Trust, the Sonoma Ecology Center, the Eldridge Committee, the Board of Supervisors and/or the Community Development Commission, and our group, Transition Sonoma Valley. A **Community Land Trust (CLT)** would be well suited to be the structure.

CLTs were created during the 1950s as a way to help black farmers obtain land ownership. Since that time, several hundred CLTs have been employed to govern land-based housing communities.

With an agricultural easement on the developed section of the property protecting it in perpetuity and a conservation easement on the open space area, the CLT would hold title to the land. The Trust leases land to tenants on the property, be they residents, business owners, farmers, or independent nonprofit agencies. Usually the lease is for 99 years. Tenants own the improvements on the property such as the buildings, fences, and other improvements, but not the land itself. Upon termination of the lease, the tenant may sell those improvements, but the land remains in the Trust.

A variety of housing types is recommended, including apartment buildings and individual residences, to be discussed in greater detail in the section on housing.

A CLT is managed by a Board of Trustees, which will include equal representation of officials of the Trust, the residents, members of the surrounding community, business owners, and the staff.

The benefits of ownership by a CLT include the following:

- 1) As the land is held by the trust in perpetuity and can never be sold, the price remains stable, with land leased to residents, farmers, and businesses for 99 years. This kind of stability is desperately needed to control escalating land prices in the surrounding community where property has become increasingly available to people of growing wealth.
- 2) The shared administration of the Trust will emphasize participatory democracy.
- 3) Environmental standards can be set, maintained and revised as necessary, as the property is not going to be placed on the market and tenants participate in decision-making.
- 4) Members of the community develop strong bonds with each other and with the surrounding community.

[Champlain Land Trust](#) is a good example of a large community managed by a CLT. More information may be found at [Sustainable Law Economies Center](#) in Oakland and at the [National Community Land Trust Network](#). The Equity Trust in Burlington, Vermont, is available for consultations regarding structuring the CLT.

We can envision all participants being brought together within this structure, including Transition Sonoma Valley, sponsors of this report; the Sonoma Ecology Center; the Sonoma Land Trust; and the Eldridge Committee of the Glen Ellen Forum representing the immediate surrounding community of Glen Ellen; and of course representatives of local government.

Other small grassroots organization endemic to the area, like the Sonoma Valley Housing Group, may also find their place within this structure. Nonprofits working in the fields of ecology, wilderness protection, farming, health, indigenous cultures and related fields may be housed on the property.

FINANCING

We will be consulting with Cutting Edge Capital in Oakland who can help us design a plan to secure needed funding. We will be looking to social impact investors to help us find funding for the costs of clearing unusable facilities while building new worker housing for construction workers who will be employed in the process of the rebuilding Sonoma from the recent fires, which will include building new housing at SDC.

A resource for finding these investors is the book, *Born on Third Base* by Chuck Collins, who is a Fellow at the Post Carbon Institute in Santa Rosa and head of the [Program on Inequality and Common Good](#) at the think tank, Institute for Policy Studies.

We will consult with the CDFI Coalition ([Community Development Financial Institutions](#)) and the [Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investments](#) as well as other organizations dedicated to providing funding for the common good.

We understand that there are a number of funders for the common good who would be very interested in a project like the one we propose.

Green Living

Renewable energy

The Community would meet all or most of its energy needs from a MicroGrid similar to the system at [Stone Edge Farm](#), just west of Sonoma. The MicroGrid would consist of a system of power lines that connect a network of electrical services and integrate various forms of distributed energy generation (solar, microturbine, hydrogen fuel cells) and storage (batteries and hydrogen) with real time monitoring and control. It would be capable of operating normally, connected to and importing electricity from the larger utility grid, or disconnected from the grid, in island mode. It would also be capable of exporting energy onto the larger utility grid.

To provide for residents and the farm, the Village at Eldridge will utilize its own ample water and perhaps its own sewer system, generating its own energy (micro-grid), entirely from renewable sources, including solar and wind.

Services and work opportunities will be available on the site so that this is not a “bedroom community” relying on cars for commuting to the larger towns and cities. As much as possible, food, water, and energy will be produced on site.

Every use will be evaluated for greenhouse gas impacts and carbon footprint. Every effort will be made to engage residents in managing the property, and to develop methods of transportation on the land, and on the roads to neighboring towns, that do not use fossil fuels.

Water system

Wallace Roots and Todd, who have been retained by the state to assess the existing infrastructure at SDC, have released their report. We will need to consult a highly trained water resources engineer to re-design the water delivery system using state-of-the-art sustainable practices. The

pipes will not be pvc plastic because of the risk of fire; in the October fires, plastic piping melted in the Fountaingrove area and polluted the water supply. We will employ water catchment systems, drip irrigation, protection of riparian areas, and will support diversity of plant and animal life.

Food and Farming

Part of the property was once used to grow food for the facility as was common in many children's hospitals. It should be very easy for it to become licensed as an organic farm.

Organic, regenerative farming, in addition to being healthier for people and planet than conventional farming, enriches the soil and actually draws down carbon from the atmosphere.

Climate change continues to loom ominously on the horizon of the near future. Every day scientists release new reports confirming that global temperatures are rising dramatically and we are seeing the impacts of climate change sooner than predicted, but for lack of political will little is being done to research and deliver new models for reducing our impact on the planet. The technologies exist. Scientists like Mark Jacobson have shown that with political will, this country could become completely converted to renewables by 2030; see [The Solutions Project](#).

The ability of the soil to draw carbon down from the atmosphere is also being demonstrated. According to [Regeneration International](#), a recent study in [Scientific Reports](#) reveals that:

By better managing farmland soil, the amount of carbon stored in the top 30 centimeters of the soil could increase an extra 0.9 to 1.85 gigatons each year...This is equivalent to carbon globally emitted by the transport sector (1.87 gigatons of Carbon); and equivalent to 3 – 7 billion tonnes of CO2 which could be removed from the atmosphere. For comparison, the US emits 5 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent each year (Edgar database, 2015).

You will find an article explaining the study in more detail [here](#).

The work of Paul and Elizabeth Geiser on [Singing Frogs Farm](#) in Sebastopol shows that using farming techniques like the 22 methods outlined by the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS), a large quantity of food can be produced using limited irrigation and producing more income than the average winery.

Our agricultural county no longer produces food for its residents. Although there has been no survey, the Ag Commissioner estimated in 2016 that about three percent of the food we consume in the county is actually grown here. Thus we remain dependent on the Safeway trucks bringing food from as far away as 1500 miles while we grow wine grapes and export our wines all around the globe. As should be obvious, this system of exports and imports sustained by fossil fuels increases our carbon footprint; further, it greatly limits our ability to feed ourselves. Reversing this situation is going to be difficult as **young farmers cannot afford land to grow food.**

In view of all the pressures on land use in this county, with more pressures since the October fires destroyed some 5,800 homes, it is mandatory that this model community create livable spaces within the increasing restrictions and challenges posed by climate change, and that its carbon

footprint be as low as possible. To do so, the community must achieve some degree of food independence, also known as food sovereignty. We should produce as much of our own food as possible.

Services and work opportunities will be available on the site so that this is not a “bedroom community” relying on cars for commuting to the larger towns and cities. As much as possible, food, water, and energy will be produced on site.

Housing and other buildings

Affordable housing is essential and desperately needed in our county, which has one of the highest homeless rates in California.

Housing will be created in phases, starting with existing buildings on the property to be used by workers who want to be part of this community. Buildings found to be unusable by WRT Consultants, who assessed the property’s infrastructure this fall, will be torn down. Others can be retrofitted.

Housing will be clustered so that there is no sprawl and as much open space as possible may be used for gardens, play areas, enjoyment of natural environment and so forth. Varied sizes from tiny homes to apartments and individual homes will offer a range of leasing prices. Some provision for people to build their own houses could be incorporated into the whole.

Construction on the property, instead of being imposed upon it by developers and planners, will evolve progressively, in accord with the community’s financial and personal resources, and will emphasize variety, creativity, and natural materials.

There will be a large **community room** with full electric kitchen and some indoor recreation space for indoor exercise, games, a library, a theatre for movies, concerts etc.

There will also be a **meditation center** on the property for meditation, yoga and small classes.

A small independent **health clinic** would be included, and also a cooperative **childcare** center run primarily by the families using the service.

A historical society, as proposed by the Eldridge Committee of Glen Ellen, could certainly be included.

Services and Rehabilitation for the unsheltered

One additional possibility will be to create a rehabilitation program for people who have been chronically homeless but are motivated to learn new skills and rebuild their lives. We will look to the Homeless Garden Project in Santa Cruz, CA, which has been working with homeless people interested in learning to grow food.

Cooperative child-care center and charter school

Children of residents who work on the property will be offered childcare and schooling on site. (Children of residents employed elsewhere may be included if space permits.) Schooling will emphasize care of the earth, learning from nature, practical DIY skills, physical activity, music and

arts, which children may undertake in following their interests (basic principle of Montessori and Waldorf schools) as well as the required study of reading, writing and computing,

Work

People who live on the property will have priority for employment on the farm, in small businesses (such as a restaurant featuring fresh, organic and “down home” meals) and nonprofits, in the school and health center, and on the many aspects of property management.

Transportation

Within the property, there will be plenty of bike and walking trails that are also useable by small electric vehicles (such as scooters, jeeps etc).

An electric bus or van system from the Village to surrounding towns will be necessary.

Village Life

A caring, peaceful community...

We recognize a deep need for real communities where personal and direct relationships with one another prevail; where nature and care of the earth take precedence over profit; where economic models based on sharing and trust are employed; where youth are given an opportunity to play a role in creating a better future for humanity, and where people of color and immigrants will be valued participants.

Summary

We need to put food, water, energy, equality and housing at the top of our agenda for a livable society, emphasizing those basic elements of life as the foundation for a free society, while wine and tourism are enjoyed as luxuries that enhance but do not sustain life. [People before profit.]

With the help of innovative and local community stakeholders, some of whom are listed below, we believe we can co-create a more detailed proposal of what such a project might look like and how it can become economically self sufficient while demonstrating a replicable model for living more lightly on the land. Please JOIN US!

Sincerely,

Stephanie Hiller

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Resources

In Sonoma County and the wider Bay Area there are many organizations working on the issues we have identified in this project description, and we hope they will be allies endorsing and assisting this effort. Some, but by no means all, of these resources are listed below.

Regenerative farming, soil carbon, and Community

Marin Carbon Project, Petaluma, www.marincarbonproject.org

Marin Agricultural Land Trust, www.malt.org

Sonoma Valley Housing Group, Advocating for affordable homes in the Valley.

Sustainable Economies Law Center, Oakland CA – legal advice on forming a community land trust

California Association of Family Farms (CAFF) – farm policy

DRAWDOWN, Sausalito, CA, www.drawdown.org; “100 solutions to reverse global warming,” Paul Hawken

PostCarbon Institute, Santa Rosa, CA – alternative energy, new economies, Richard Heinberg et.al. www.postcarbon.org

Singing Frogs Farm, Sebastopol, CA – regenerative organic farm

Trathen Hechman, Daily Acts, Petaluma CA – permaculture, new economies

Solar Living Institute, Hopland, CA – energy, cooperatives, farming, new economies

Permaculture Institute, Sebastopol CA

Occidental Arts & Ecology Center, Occidental CA – farming, community building, residential community

Living Mandala, Oakland CA – community building

Praxis Peace, Sonoma CA – cooperatives

Sonoma Land Trust

Sonoma Ecology Center

Information Sources:

Yes! Magazine, www.yesmagazine.org

Communities Magazine, Life in a Cooperative Culture <https://www.ic.org/communities-magazine-home/>

<http://www.ecovillage.org>

Regenerative Farming

www.regenerationinternational.org

www.permaculture.org

www.transitionnetwork.org and Rob Hopkins book, The Transition Handbook

www.transitiontowntotnes.org - where it all began

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jun/15/transition-towns-way-forward>

New economics

Sustainable Economies Law Center, Oakland, theselc.org

Schumacher Center for New Economics, www.centerforneweconomics.org (origins of the CLT and many other resources)

The Next System Project, www.nextsystem.org

CLTs - community land trusts:

Sustainable Economies Law Center, Oakland, www.theselc.org

Lake Champlain CLT, Burlington, VT, one of the first and largest CLTs

<https://www.facebook.com/lakechamplainlandtrust>

Equity Trust, Burlington VT, www.equitytrust.org

Northern California Community Land Trust, Berkeley, <https://nclt.org>