

An Eco-Community for Eldridge Village

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 from 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. It is 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 pools, gardens, horses and all amenities for the pleasure of the elite. But even theirs will be a vanishing pleasure as global warming, already locked in, catches up with us over the next 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 as much if not more compelling and resilient than it is today. 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 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.

At Eldridge, we have the opportunity to demonstrate that together and with enough will we can reverse the environmental destruction rolling relentlessly toward us.

Our times call for the 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 investigated 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 Eco-Community

Our objectives are: 1) to build a complete and self-sustaining community with the lowest possible ecological footprint in the central (developed) part of the campus, embraced by preserved wildland and open space stretching all the way up Sonoma Mountain, 2) where onsite housing is affordable and in balance with the number and type of jobs the community can support, and, 3) to ensure that the majority of the property remains open for use by all Californians and their guests, instead of being privatized only for the benefit of those who can afford to pay for access.

We envision Eldridge Village as a modern, self-supporting, 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. From the outset, its carbon footprint will be as low as possible, transitioning toward zero net carbon by 2030. 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 empty materialism and where respect for the natural world is paramount. Here we will welcome all peoples who share our vision, especially members of our Latino and Native American communities who have always been central to the vitality of this region.

At the center of the community, though separate from the residential sectors, will be at least one core revenue-producing land uses. Many possibilities exist, such as: an Institute for the Study of Epigenetics (the interaction of genes with the environment); a Senior Retirement center for active adults interested in contributing their skills to the community; a Retreat Center and

Healing Sanctuary for persons recovering from a medical or psychological breakdown; or 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>

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 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 State would continue to hold title to the land and the CLT would hold a 99 year lease. The Trust would in turn grant shorter term leases of land to tenants on the property, be they residents, business owners, farmers, or independent nonprofit agencies. Tenants own the improvements on the property such as the buildings, fences, and other features which they can sell when they choose to leave, and the lease transferred upon termination, 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 up to 99 years. This kind of stability is desperately needed in communities with escalating land prices like ours.
- 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 local grassroots organizations, 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

Infrastructure

According to the assessment done by Wallace, Roberts, Todd (WRT, LLC), who released their report in April, much of the plumbing and electricity will have to be repaired or replaced. What a perfect opportunity to install the newest technology for management of power and water with the least waste and without reliance on fossil fuels.

Renewable energy

The Community would meet all 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 connecting a network of electrical services and integrating various forms of distributed energy generation (renewable solar PV, solar thermal, biogas microturbines, small-scale wind and hydropower, hydrogen fuel cells, etc.) and storage (batteries, thermal energy storage, and hydrogen) with real time monitoring and control. It would be capable of operating either 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 to the larger utility grid. The existing propane and natural gas systems would be abandoned and not replaced. This would completely eliminate the cost of replacing this costly infrastructure, as well as the risk of making any stranded investments in these inherently explosive and soon-to-be obsolete fossil fuels.

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

To provide for residents and the farm, the Village at Eldridge will utilize, maintain, and expand its own ample water system. Future capabilities may include increased storage, water recycling, groundwater recharge, conjunctive use, and other proven methods. To ensure the CLT can be compensated for the full and fair value of this increasingly scarce resource, surplus water will only be sold to others under short term contracts, for example, on a

wholesale basis to nearby water districts, or on a retail basis to directly adjacent agricultural customers.

WRT observed that much of the existing plumbing system is barely functional. 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 techniques required by the County's Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance, and other best practices where feasible, including grey water reuse, rooftop and landscape water catchment systems, drip irrigation, etc., all in protection of riparian areas so as to support a diversity of plant and animal life.

Waste

Solid waste will be source separated, at diversion rates comparable to current state and local mandates. Most food waste will be combined with agricultural wastes and composted on site. Onsite septic systems and composting toilets may also be employed subject to County permits. The technology has advanced considerably, and Home Depot carries quite a range of products <https://www.homedepot.com/b/Bath-Toilets-Toilet-Seats-Bidets-Toilets-Composting-Toilets/N-5yc1vZcb8q>

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.

Every day scientists release new reports confirming that global temperatures are rising dramatically and we are seeing the impacts of climate change sooner than first predicted. The technologies needed to sustain Eldridge already 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 34 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 grocery trucks bringing food from far away distribution centers while we grow wine grapes and export our wines all around the globe. Obviously, 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 unless facilities like Eldridge are made available to them, because otherwise **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.

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 by WRT Consultants, who assessed the property's infrastructure this fall, to be unusable 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 on leased land could be incorporated into the whole.

Construction on the property will evolve in stages, 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, with a museum would 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,

Employment

There will many opportunities to work in the community and residents will have priority to work in the farm, on the many aspects of property management, in the school and clinic, in the museum, in small businesses (such as a restaurant featuring fresh, organic and "down home" meals) and in various nonprofits working to develop solutions to the consequences of a warming planet.

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

Transition Sonoma Valley, transitionsonomavalley.org

Sonoma Valley Housing Group, [facebook.com/affordablehousing](https://www.facebook.com/affordablehousing)

Sonoma Valley Climate Coalition

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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>