

516 7th St W
Sonoma CA 95476
August 28, 2018

Governor Jerry Brown
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: The future of the Sonoma Developmental Center

Dear Governor Brown,

I wish to congratulate you on your innovative spirit in moving toward a more participatory approach to the use of public lands. You've been a great governor.

Some time ago, when the closure of the Sonoma Developmental Center was decided, you chose to explore a collaborative process with the county and the community of Sonoma Valley. According to Daniel Kim of the Department of General Services, such an approach "has never been tried before." Here in Sonoma Valley, we are deeply committed to making this process work. We hope the state will keep its word.

Last year, I wrote a proposal to create a climate-resilient, environmentally sustainable Village in the campus area of the property. Now known as Eldridge EcoVillage, the concept received encouragement from a number of local groups including Transition Sonoma Valley, the Sonoma Valley Housing Group, EarthCare of the First Congregational Church, the Sonoma Democratic Club, Sonoma Valley Peace & Justice and the Sonoma Land Trust. You may download the report at the Transition Sonoma Valley website, <http://transitionsonomavalley.org/the-future-of-eldridge/#more-7479>

As you know, the housing crisis is intense, and the fires have pushed our county to its financial limits. Almost a year after the big burn, we still have some 10,700 people who do not have permanent housing as a result of the fires, and our homeless rate, which had been declining, is now rising.

At the same time, rents have risen astronomically. Even before the fires, the cost of housing reached unaffordable heights, and in response, as I'm sure you know, the state passed three bills to address the problem. According to the LA Times, September 4, 2017, "The bills expect to raise billions in funding to help finance the construction thousands of new homes for the state's low-income residents." Could some of those funds be used to transform some of the buildings into housing?

We are not interested in building a high-density ticky-tacky development. Nor do we want a big hotel, a winery with events center, a golf course, or any other form of luxury development. Our goal is to create a multi-income, multigenerational community that will use 90% renewable energy, protect its water sources, employ earth-friendly building materials, and generate a spirit of engagement and sharing among its members. (Since the

entire infrastructure at SDC has to be replaced, it provides a perfect opportunity for a truly renewable upgrade.) The community would provide some of its own resources, and some of its fresh organic food, in a natural environment designed to fit the contours of the land, protect its water supply, improve its soil, and provide places for children to play and learn from nature. It will offer jobs in the construction and maintenance of the community, in farming, and in the many environmental nonprofits we hope to house there. As a multigenerational community, the Village will offer purposeful engagement for active seniors eager to share their skills and experience and be appreciated and respected for what they know. We support the call by other local groups to preserve the adjacent wild lands.

Ours would be a community California would be proud of, a model for others to adapt to their particular needs in adjusting to a changing climate, a center for the development of new sustainable technologies, offering training towards careers in regenerative agriculture, eco building, and community-building; and we see it as part of your legacy, for it has been your foresight and daring that has allowed California to make the strides it has made to protect the climate and develop a climate friendly lifestyle.

All of these principles are in use by others, providing a wide base of experience from which to draw. One Planet Living, for example, has developed a number of similar projects all over the world, one of them not far from the SDC, (<https://www.bioregional.com/somo-village/>). A developer in nearby Healdsburg does environmental design along similar lines, Jim Heid of Urban Green (www.urbangreen.org). Some of the consultants who worked with the Wallace, Roots and Todd assessment of the SDC could provide expertise. Sonoma County is full of progressive environmental leaders whose work is on the cutting edge of climate-resilient culture. Here in the Valley are hundreds of people who once worked at the SDC, or whose family members were cared for there; perhaps thousands use its beautiful trails through undeveloped grasslands and forests. With them, we are committed to the success of its next phase.

We look to the state to help us continue to collaborate to develop this site for the local community. Help us proceed in the generous spirit of the two mothers whose disabled children were the inspiration for this unique experiment in the care and education of children with developmental issues. The urgency of our time demands nothing less.

Again, thank you for your strong leadership on behalf of our great state, and for the climate.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Hiller
Chair, Eldridge Eco Village Association

Cc:

Senator Mike McGuire

Senator Bill Dodd

Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry

State Senator Marc Levine

Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Former Supervisor Ernie Carpenter

Former Supervisor Mike Reilly

John McCaull, Sonoma Land Trust