



SONOMA ECOLOGY CENTER

Protecting the beauty and biodiversity of Sonoma Valley

September 1, 2015

Department of Developmental Services
Attn: Cindy Coppage
1600 9th Street, Room 340, M.S. 3-17
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Comments on Sonoma Developmental Center Closure Plan

Dear Director Rogers and Ms. Coppage,

Please accept these comments from Sonoma Ecology Center, a member of the Sonoma Developmental Center Coalition, and co-chair of the Coalition's Land Subcommittee.

We appreciate the commitment that DDS and Secretary Dooley have made to support ongoing community participation in this transition process. This collaboration and respect are key if the process is to be adequate to the challenge before us. Furthermore, it lays the foundation for SDC's process to be a model that solves a state and federal need to bring the highest quality care to our most vulnerable population, while preserving and enhancing vital community and state assets.

At Sonoma Ecology Center, our expertise is in land, water, and biodiversity. We've provided local, science based support to our community for 25 years, and for 16 of those years, our offices have been at SDC. We know SDC's lands intimately, and we have helped SDC and the state with many projects and issues over the years, helping the state make choices that are in its interest, and in the interest of the remarkable land it resides on. The place is remarkable.

- It is the heart of one of the last remaining connected wildland corridors across Sonoma Valley, a project SEC's Christy Vreeland started 20 years ago with help from SDC and many partners, to connect large protected core habitat areas on both sides of Sonoma Valley. As documented in the state-wide Critical Linkages effort, this corridor also connects habitats in Point Reyes National Seashore and state parklands on the coast, and the new Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument to the east—two of the most important, biodiversity-rich areas in the California's global biodiversity hot spot. The corridor is key to protecting life in these places, and arguably, to preserving the diversity of life around the world.
- SDC itself has a remarkably rich mosaic of plant and animal habitats--redwood forests, oak woodlands and savannahs, grasslands, riparian forests, streams, lakes, and wetlands. The land supports protected species such as the Northern Spotted Owl, the California red-legged frog, steelhead trout, Chinook salmon, and the California freshwater shrimp, found in only 12 streams in the world. It also supports, bobcat, mountain lion, beaver, otter, gray fox, coyote, golden eagle, and many other species of interest to the state.
- SDC supports water resources, including two cold-water year-round tributaries to Sonoma

PO Box 1486, Eldridge, CA 95431 • (707) 996-0712 • fax (707) 996-2452

Sonoma Garden Park • 19996 7th St E, Sonoma 95476 • (707) 996-4883

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park • 2605 Adobe Canyon Rd, Kenwood, CA 95452 • (707) 833-5712

info@sonomaecologycenter.org • www.sonomaecologycenter.org

Creek, and Sonoma Creek itself— a critical stream for the entire San Francisco Bay region for hosting some of the species just mentioned. The watershed area provides water for the land and life found on SDC, for all the facilities on SDC, and provides crucial flows, groundwater recharge and flood mitigation, for Sonoma Valley.

For the interests of Sonoma Valley, and all the people of the state, **it is critical that these functions are preserved.** We stand ready to assist the state and the community in this effort through the transition process and beyond.

The land provides another function that is less understood, but still vital to people and health. SDC offers a place for its residents to be in nature. From our partners the Parent Hospital Association, we understand this has dramatic therapeutic benefits, and was probably why Julia Judah and Frances Bentley chose the site. Future services on the site should preserve this therapeutic aspect. There are few places left in the state where medical care can access this essential therapy.

A primary function of this transition process should be to assure services to support the residents, their families, and their expert caregivers. We don't want to see a loss of decades of expertise, or the long relationships these experts have with residents and their needs. These expert care providers are also a boon to our community and its economy. Creating an array of services onsite that support housing and care for the special needs of the current residents, and for those outside SDC who need specialized care, could assure their retention and all the benefits this provides.

As the transition of the site occurs, we feel it is essential that concurrent services be developed, to keep residents from having to move out and back, a move that can have devastating consequences for the health and wellbeing of residents.

Any new land development on the site should support and compliment the values mentioned above. Our community is bringing the best minds and resources together to create something unique, complementary, financially viable, and visionary, that respects and references these values.

Lastly, we want to again underscore how this transition process offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity. We urge the state to continue its serious conversation and collaboration with the SDC Coalition and the community, so that together we create something worthy of the passion, and love, for our most fragile, vulnerable community members, that has existed for over a century at SDC—that we create a visionary solution to our current challenge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Richard Dale', with a stylized, looping flourish at the end.

Richard Dale, Executive Director
richard@sonomaecologycenter.org
(707) 996-0712 x106