



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 7/8/2025

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Permit Sonoma

Staff Name and Phone Number: Tennis Wick (707) 565-1925, Ross Markey, Comprehensive Planning Manager, (707) 565-2543; Wil Lyons, Planner III (707) 565-7388

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisory District(s): First

Title:

Sonoma Developmental Center Mixed Use Development and Specific Plan Memorandum of Understanding

Recommended Action:

Authorize the Director of Permit Sonoma to execute a new Memorandum of Understanding with Eldridge Renewal, LLC (applicant), in a form acceptable to County Counsel, for an update to the Sonoma Developmental Center Environmental Impact Report (EIR) which details roles and responsibilities of the County and applicant related to environmental review and permit processing. (First District)

Executive Summary:

In August 2023, Eldridge Renewal submitted a development pre-application for a mixed use redevelopment of the Sonoma Developmental Center vesting their rights to be processed under the laws in place at that time, including "Builder's Remedy" protections under the Gov. Code § 65589.5(d)(5). A full application package followed on February 16, 2024. The application was deemed complete on March 6, 2025, wherein Permit Sonoma determined the information received was sufficient to begin environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act and process the application. In April 2025, the Board of Supervisors authorized the Director of Permit Sonoma to execute an agreement with Dyett and Bhatia, Urban and Regional Planners (Dyett and Bhatia), to revise the Specific Plan and environmental impact report (EIR) for the former Sonoma Developmental Center in compliance with the Writ of Mandate issued by the State of California Superior Court in October of 2024.

This item presents a new agreement between the County and the project applicants detailing tasks and responsibilities related to the environmental analysis for a revised specific plan and the current development application. Staff recommends that the Board authorize the Director to execute an agreement with Eldridge Renewal, LLC and to commence environmental review of the projects. Costs associated with environmental review will be borne by available funds provided by the California Department of General Services (DGS) to Sonoma County for planning efforts at the site totaling \$956,402. The applicant will be responsible for any costs of environmental review that exceed the remaining DGS funds, up to \$125,000. The applicant will also be responsible for permit processing costs, consistent with the standard County At-Cost agreement signed by the applicant at time of application..

Discussion:

The Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) provided services to persons with developmental disabilities for over 120 years in the heart of Sonoma Valley. At 945 acres, the property includes a large historic campus, agricultural lands to the east, and vast ecological and open space resources. The SDC was the County's largest employer at its peak. In 2018 the State of California officially closed the facility and relocated clients to smaller, community-based care facilities. The State of California, which owns the site, forged a unique partnership with Sonoma County that allows the County, together with the community, to chart the future role of the SDC. On December 17, 2019, the Board of Supervisors approved a contract with DGS to accept \$3.5 million for those services and at the same time authorized a contract with Dyett and Bhatia (Consultant) to provide the County support in preparing the SDC Specific Plan and Environmental Impact Report. The culmination of that process occurred on December 16, 2022, when the Board of Supervisors passed the Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan and certified an environmental impact report that charts the future of the site.

In August 2023, Eldridge Renewal submitted a development pre-application vesting their rights under Gov. Code § 65589.5(d)(5) provision known as the "Builder's Remedy." Under this provision in the Housing and Accountability Act jurisdictions without a substantially compliant housing element are prohibited from denying certain housing projects, even if the project is noncompliant with that jurisdiction's Zoning Ordinance, and General and Specific Plans. Sonoma County's Housing Element was out of compliance at time of submittal. A full application package followed on February 16, 2024. The application was deemed complete on March 6, 2025, wherein Permit Sonoma determined the information received was sufficient to begin environmental review under CEQA and process the application.

On December 3, 2024, the Board of Supervisors voided certification of the Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report and set aside all related SDC Specific Plan approvals as directed by the Writ of Mandamus issued by the California Superior Court on October 22, 2024. The Board further directed Permit Sonoma to revise that EIR in accordance with the Writ and Judgment and bring the EIR back to the Board to consider recertification along with approval of the SDC Specific Plan and related legislative amendments in conjunction with the development application.

In May 2025, the Board of Supervisors authorized the Director of Permit Sonoma to execute an agreement with Dyett and Bhatia in the amount of \$913,997, to revise the Specific Plan and environmental impact report (EIR) for the former Sonoma Developmental Center.

This memorandum (MOU) establishes understandings and outlines tasks, costs, timelines, and responsibilities between the parties, allowing the EIR process to commence. Per the MOU, costs associated with environmental review will be borne by remaining funds provided by the California Department of General Services (DGS) to Sonoma County for planning efforts at the site, and totaling \$685,582 held in the Sonoma Development Center special revenue fund. These funds are to be supplemented by an additional \$270,820 returned from DGS for this purpose, and which is also being considered in a separate agenda item. Combined with remaining funds of \$685,582 total funds available from DGS for this effort are approximately \$956,402,865. The DGS funds will be applied to the County's costs of revising the specific plan as well as environmental review related to the specific plan and the housing development application. The applicant will be responsible for any costs of environmental review that exceed the remaining DGS funds up to \$125,000. The applicant will also be responsible for permit processing costs associated with their housing development application. The applicant will provide input on during the environmental review process, as is encouraged by CEQA. Further the applicant will indemnify the County for any new litigation related to the housing

development application, Specific Plan, or EIR. The County will remain responsible for existing litigation and demonstrating compliance with the previously issued writ.

Upon execution of the MOU and amended contract with DGS, Permit Sonoma will initialize the environmental review process. This will include an initial project scoping meeting during which the public can provide input to inform the scope of the EIR analysis. When analysis has concluded, a draft EIR will be published for public comment. After comment is addressed, the final EIR will be brought forward for review and certification by the Board of Supervisors. Hearings related to the EIR are expected at the Planning Commission prior to Board review and these will be publicly noticed when dates are determined.

Strategic Plan:

Not Applicable

Racial Equity:**Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?**

No

Prior Board Actions:

- April 5, 2019 - the Board authorized the preparation of the Specific Plan effort.
- December 17, 2019 - the Board authorized the contract with DGS to fund the Specific Plan and EIR effort.
- December 16, 2022 - the Board adopted the SDC Specific Plan and EIR.
- June 26, 2024, 2024- the Board authorized return of funds to DGS at that agency's request.
- December 3, 2024- The Board voided certification of SDC Specific Plan and EIR in response to Writ of Mandate and Judgement by California Superior Court.
- May 6, 2025- The Board authorized the director of Permit Sonoma to execute a contract for environmental review and planning services with Dyett and Bhatia.

FISCAL SUMMARY**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

Additional work to complete the tasks will be fully funded by \$956,402 in state funding pursuant to the State GSD-County agreement. Any costs of environmental review in excess of those provided under that agreement will be borne by project applicant, up to \$125,000. Permitting and application review costs will be borne by the applicant, consistent with the standard County At-Cost agreement signed by the applicant at time of application.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

Not Applicable

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Memorandum of Understanding

Agenda Date: 7/8/2025

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

19-20-004 Sonoma Developmental Center Fully Executed

19-20-004.1 Sonoma Developmental First Amendment Fully Executed