

Dear Department of Developmental Services,

I fully support the “Desired Elements for the SDC Closure Plan” submitted by the Sonoma Developmental Center Coalition and the Transform SDC Project on August 7, 2015.

As a resident of Glen Ellen for more than 25 years who works in cultural and natural resources, I am very interested and concerned about the future of the Sonoma Developmental Center lands.

From a historical perspective, Glen Ellen and Eldridge/SDC have grown up together, side by side. It’s hard to imagine either without the other and Glen Ellen would certainly be a different place, perhaps a much poorer place without our sister community next door.

Any change to the SDC land is going to have a tremendous effect on Glen Ellen. I can imagine a number of nightmare scenarios, but I can also imagine a very forward-thinking and inspiring outcome that enriches the local community, Sonoma County and the surrounding region, and beyond.

The Coalition began to articulate such a vision a couple years ago and the community came together at the Transform SDC Workshop in May 2015 to express a common vision.

As I see it, there are three key goals that must be accomplished in the transition:

- Protecting current clients at the Developmental Center—this must be paramount.
- Protecting the natural resources of the site—the wildlife corridor, the water resources, and the recreational opportunities.
- Protecting the cultural resources—architectural and other features that tell the story of SDC and society’s changing viewpoint and treatment of the 'differently-abled.'

The most promising model I know of for accomplishing this is the transformation of the San Francisco Presidio. Of course, SDC is different. But creating a public-private partnership driven by community values and ideas holds great promise for accomplishing those key goals.

SDC was created 125 years ago. It changed an agricultural property into a state-of-the-art facility to serve the most vulnerable people in our society. The fact is we are all vulnerable. If done with proper care and foresight, in another 125 years my great-grandchildren will still know this as a priceless place, one that enhances the mental, physical and economic health of the whole community and is an example of what can happen when people come together in a spirit of cooperation.

Sincerely,
Arthur Dawson

Glen Ellen resident & Historical Consultant (Baseline Consulting)