

My name is Neal Fishman. I am a board member of the Sonoma Land Trust and have participated in a number of the SDC coalition meetings over the past several years. I have come to understand some of the issues affecting residents of SDC, as well as the recreational and habitat issues.

We get it. We know that you have your marching orders to close SDC and save the State some money. We also know that operators of community care homes as well as many families and health care professionals have lobbied hard for a couple of generations to bring this about. It is their sincere belief that private care homes confer a greater degree of autonomy and respect for individuals than do institutions.

But I have also come to believe through many conversations, especially with Kathleen Miller, that there are some individuals that do better in institutional settings, or at least in settings with highly experienced and trained staff. These type of settings are not readily available for either permanent or crises placement in California.

But the great cost of keeping SDC open trumps the fact that it does offer services to this special category of resident, albeit in an institutional setting. So you are set to close the place.

Our coalition asks you to consider an alternative, one that still saves the state money, still gives great care to this special population, and also meets the aspirations of the county and local citizens for the SDC property.

But to get to this place, you will have to change what you are doing. You may have to open your eyes and step out of the box that you are in based on your agency and department roles.

Here is the bottom line first: If SDC closes, and this precipitates a process to sell the SDC property to the highest bidder, there will be hell to pay from a local perspective. There will be permit and planning issues from the county. The local community will come unglued. Any developer or vineyard interest that tries to do something on that site should automatically add ten years to their timeline. The price of the property that the state will get when they do put it up for sale will be very low, due to this development uncertainty.

Instead the State should make its money by retaining the site, and using it for what the community is fully prepared to see it used for. For uses similar to its long history as a care institution, and at a much higher level than today.

Our coalition wants to see a reuse plan for the SDC site done now, while there are still residents on the property, and in time to help those most vulnerable secure housing and staff that can deal with their health care issues on site. We are not wedded to an institutional setting necessarily. Private providers using experienced staff in new facilities built on the SDC campus is one possible solution. These and off site providers could then use medical facilities on SDC that could remain here.

Additionally the community may be open to ancillary facilities that might also help the bottom line for the State. Perhaps some workforce housing, or very limited commercial businesses. We also want to open the site for more recreational uses by the community. And we want the wildlife corridor that runs through the site protected and expanded.

We know that you also want these things if possible. But your process does not allow for this to be fully integrated with the closure plan which is directed more at the current residents and how to remove

them from the site, than it does to find alternatives that might keep them on site.

At the same time the state wants to find a long range disposition of the property that also returns the most money to the state in the fastest surest way. But currently, this is not within DDS' jurisdiction or the statutory closure process.

We have our agenda, of course. Keep residents in good situations with skilled staffing. Open the site for recreation, keep wildlife habitat. Ensure appropriate development on site that does not overload community resources or hurt the other causes.

You have yours. Close the institution, save money, place residents as best as possible given the available non institutional alternatives.

These are not mutually exclusive ideas. In fact they can be synergistic, if you are listening and broadening your outlook, not just reacting to the need to follow the Governor and the Department of Finance's need to save money now.

Work with us to see what needs to be done to develop this joint vision, taking the land disposition as part of the closure plan. If the current closure and surplus property laws don't work, lets work together to propose a change next year that will allow us to work together, in concert.

The residents at SDC do not have cookie cutter minds or situations. Neither do you. Wake up from the dream of yourself as your title and your agency, hemmed in by current law and the State's financial situation. Step out of the boxes that you are in and join us. We have done this and it works.

The environmental side of this issue could well have just waited for SDC to close and then done a full court press on the governor and legislature and probably get much of what we want for this site. But we have chosen to step out of boxes and work together with workers, residents, and parents to develop a holistic approach to SDC. I urge you, as people, not titles, to do the same.