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August 4, 2015

Ms. Diana Dooley, California Health and Human Services Secretary
C/o DDS Developmental Centers Division
Attn: Cindy Coppage,
1600 9th Street, MS 3-17
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Transforming Sonoma Developmental Center in Glen Ellen, CA

Dear Secretary Dooley,

When considering the transformation of the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) in Glen Ellen, Greenbelt Alliance urges you to engage in a collaborative process between Sonoma County, guardians of the residents, the Transform SDC Coalition, conservation organizations, community members and the state. Doing so will allow us to shape the future of SDC together through dialogue, compromise and a willingness to be innovative and take the necessary time to get things right.

As a first step in this direction, Greenbelt Alliance joins with the Transform SDC Coalition in urging you to include a vision and mission statement for a “transformed” SDC in the proposed closure plan that reflects the community vision expressed at the May 2nd Transform SDC Workshop in Sonoma.

Two key action items that must be prioritized in the SDC plan include:

- On-site housing and health care services for existing clients must be developed concurrently with transformation of the facility.
- Protecting the invaluable natural resources lands of SDC must be developed concurrently with transformation of the facility.

Greenbelt Alliance supports the creation of a public-private partnership to oversee the SDC driven by community ideas and values that showcases the site’s history, maintains critical services for the developmentally disabled and preserves the natural resources and open space of the site.

Greenbelt Alliance is the champion of the places that make the Bay Area special. We defend the region’s natural and agricultural landscapes from development while helping ensure neighborhoods within our cities and towns are amazing places for everyone.

Lands at Risk

While the San Francisco Bay Area has had tremendous success in protecting natural and agricultural lands, more than 322,000 acres of opens lands in the nine counties remain at risk of development. Some

of these places lack protection measures. Others may have strong protections in place but experience repeated attempts to loosen or remove those protections due to high development pressure. Protection policies also expire after a set amount of time, such as after 20 years, and must then be renewed—opening the door to losing such protections.

In Sonoma County, large areas of natural and agricultural lands have been protected through open space acquisitions, parks, easements and county policies. Yet more than 115,000 acres of natural and agricultural lands remain at medium or high risk of development, according to the 2012 Greenbelt Alliance report titled *At Risk: The Bay Area Greenbelt*.

Unfortunately, the 950 acres of the SDC property now must be added to the total of lands at risk from development given the potential closure and selling off of the SDC lands by the state of California. If sold to the highest bidder, these precious lands could be developed without regard for the residents of the facility nor the natural lands that provide Sonoma Valley with clean air, clean water and a healthy environment.

SDC is situated in the heart of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor, one of California's more biologically diverse critical linkages for wildlife. The 950-acre SDC site is a key link in the 10,000-acre wildlife corridor from Sonoma Mountain east across Sonoma Valley to the Mayacamas. It is also a regional pinchpoint for open space lands that stretch from the new Berryessa-Snow Mountain Wilderness Monument to the Golden Gate Recreation Area and Marin Headlands along the coast.

The SDC lands on their own support a mosaic of plant communities including mixed evergreen forests and redwood groves, deciduous oak woodlands, riparian corridors along Sonoma Creek, grassland with scattered mature oaks, and wetlands.

The rich assortment of vegetation provides habitat to a range of common and rare species including 129 bird species, 11 species of amphibians, 16 species of reptiles and 43 species of animals.

These lands also provide recreational opportunities for SDC residents, and in the future, for the community and visitors including walking, bird-watching, horseback riding and enjoyment.

Until permanent protection for these natural lands is achieved through the transformation of SDC, open space district acquisition, designation as a state or county park, conservation easement or other means, policy mechanisms should be considered to protect its current mostly undeveloped status.

The SDC natural lands are adjacent to existing county community separator lands around Glen Ellen protected by zoning policies that prevent subdivision and commercial development. Greenbelt Alliance urges you and the county to consider adding the SDC lands to the community separator zoning overlay as part of the voter-backed renewal of these county polices in November 2016 as an immediate avenue for protection. We would be happy to brief you in detail on this county process and conservation opportunity.

Greenbelt Alliance urges the Department of Developmental Services to take a long-term, regional view of the Sonoma Developmental Center facilities and its natural lands and work toward a resolution that meets the needs of the current residents, the community, and the environment.

Sincerely yours,



Teri Shore
Regional Director for the North Bay

Cc: Senator Mike McGuire
Supervisor Susan Gorin
Sonoma Land Trust

Resources: Transform SDC website <http://transformsdc.com/>
Sonoma Developmental Center Draft Resource Assessment, Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District, April 2015
At Risk: The Bay Area Greenbelt, 2012, Greenbelt Alliance <http://www.greenbelt.org/>