



PARENT HOSPITAL
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SONOMA DEVELOPMENT CENTER CLOSURE PLAN STOPS FAR SHORT OF COMMUNITY VISION

September 21, 2015. On September 15 2015, the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) released its Draft Closure Plan for the Sonoma Development Center (SDC). The Center currently houses nearly 400 individuals with developmental disabilities, including some of the most severely disabled people in the State. The State's draft closure plan for SDC fails to capture the comprehensive approach put forward by the SDC Coalition, a local group that represents diverse Sonoma County interests. The Coalition's initial review of the draft found that it does not contain sufficient details or meaningful commitments to ensure the well-being of the hundreds of people who will be forced to move off the Center by the end of 2018.

Kathleen Miller, President of the Parent Hospital Association (PHA), stated "PHA is very disappointed that the Department of Developmental Services has chosen to ignore the united voice of the SDC residents, families, and the larger Sonoma community. The plan makes clear that their goal is to pursue a fast track to closure. The Department appears to have little interest in creating a safety net for those who continue to fail in community settings or to provide the full array of on-site health care services that our family members desperately need."

The Draft Closure Plan was mandated as part of the 2015-2016 State Budget, and a final version will be submitted to the Legislature for review and approval on October 1st. Susan Gorin, First District Supervisor for Sonoma County, expressed her concern about the Plans deficiencies. "We have spent months crafting a set of recommendations that are focused on the best interests of the SDC residents, employees, and the broader community. We hoped to see these recommendations reflected in the draft closure plan, and will continue to work with the State to make sure that our voices heard."

Supervisor Gorin, the Parent Hospital Association, the Sonoma Land Trust and the Sonoma Ecology Center serve as a steering committee for the Transform SDC Project. This effort has defined a

vision for SDC to *“Create a public-private partnership driven by community ideas and values that showcases the site's history, maintains critical services for the developmentally disabled, provides opportunities for creative reuse of SDC's assets, and preserves the natural resources and open space of the site.”* “The Draft Plan stops far short of our vision,” said John McCaull of the Sonoma Land Trust. “We appreciate the State’s recognition that they do not intend to sell or transfer SDC as surplus property because of its natural resources and historical importance, but we need to start planning for the future now, and that means retaining permanent health care services on site, and not waiting until all the residents have been moved to begin developing a reuse strategy.”

The Sonoma Land Trust and the Sonoma Ecology Center have been particularly focused on the natural resource, water and wildlife corridor benefits that SDC provides to the Sonoma Valley. The Plan expresses the state’s interest in “identifying potential options for the future use of the SDC campus,” but as Richard Dale of the Ecology Center sees it, “The future of the SDC campus is a unified vision that serves the needs of the people and the land. We can’t have closure and then planning. They need to happen concurrently.”

With the submittal of the Draft Plan to the Legislature on October 1, the focus of the Transform SDC Project will shift to educating state elected officials on Sonoma County’s vision, and practical steps to achieving our goals. “We are certainly not giving up,” said Supervisor Gorin. “The Legislature has to approve this Plan, and our local legislative delegation is united with us in their support for a comprehensive plan that prioritizes the safety and wellbeing of SDC residents, retains the unique expertise of SDC employees to serve the region, and preserves land that is of statewide environmental significance. We are confident that working together we can transform this plan into something that works for SDC families and the entire community.”

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