



**Sonoma Development Center**  
Q&A for [www.transformsdc.com](http://www.transformsdc.com)

**1. Question: Why is SLT involved in the transfer of SDC's open space lands and how long have they been engaged in the process?**

Answer: Sonoma Land Trust has led the process to transfer of the Sonoma Development Center's open space lands. SLT's primary focus has been on preserving the natural resources of the property and protecting the critical linkage on the campus for the Sonoma Valley wildlife corridor between Sonoma Mountain and the Mayacamas. We have invested over \$500,000 in research and advocacy to help inform the planning decisions around this critical wildlife pathway. If done correctly, development should not prevent large mammals such as mountain lions, black bears, deer, coyotes, bobcat, fox, and other wildlife from using SDC for safe passage across the Sonoma Valley.

Sonoma Land Trust and the SDC Coalition Lands Committee authored the 2019 SDC Land and Water Protection Proposal which was supported by California State Parks, California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Sonoma County Regional Parks, Ag + Open Space, and several local NGO partners. This Proposal made a set of recommendations and a \$5 million funding commitment for the transfer of the areas outside of the existing campus to state and county park ownership. SLT will be spending \$600,000 in grant funding from the Community Foundation of Sonoma County for any necessary acquisition costs for the SDC property, (in coordination with Ag + Open Space), and to rehabilitate, restore, and improve the property's trail system.

**2. Question: What is SLT's opinions on County's Specific Plan for development on the SDC campus?**

Answer: SLT has always believed that carefully planned and equitable redevelopment at SDC can be compatible with protecting the Sonoma Valley wildlife corridor. We strongly support the appropriate location and density of affordable housing development within the current SDC campus footprint, and that any development should take place within the environmental constraints of the site.

As of December 16, there were several critical improvements in the certified plan to protect the wildlife corridor, however much work remains to be done before they can properly execute the plan. There are several outstanding questions that will become a priority once a developer has been chosen.

For example, while the board did not take up the Planning Commission's recommendation for



additional protections for Sonoma Creek, they did add some additional requirements to provide the necessary 100' setbacks and offer expanded protection around the creek. Sonoma Creek is at the heart of the wildlife corridor and is a large mammal highway and important stream for salmon and steelhead. The setbacks and protections reflect the board's commitment to enhancing wildlife permeability throughout the property. We will work with the selected developer to ensure that the latest science and site data will be deployed to set design standards for wildlife-friendly siting and usage of roads, parking lots, lights, and anything that will generate excessive disturbance for this sensitive environmental area.

The EIR has been approved, however to rectify the problems and gaps in the CEQA process and Specific Plan FEIR—and to reassure the public that needed environmental review will occur before any development begins—SLT has urged the Board of Supervisors to adopt an additional condition of approval requiring the preparation of a Project-level EIR based on a development plan prepared by the buyer of the SDC campus and vetted through a comprehensive community engagement process.

### **3. Question: Why are wildlife corridors so important?**

Answer: The Sonoma Valley wildlife corridor is part of the larger, 75-mile-long Marin Coast-Blue Ridge Critical Linkage, which has been identified in the Bay Area Critical Linkages Project and Conservation Lands Network as a continentally important wildlife linkage. SDC's land harbors vital habitat connectivity for native plant and wildlife species. This is necessary for providing key ecological benefits to humans, such as forest health and water resources, and to help moderate the effects of climate change on our region. Habitat fragmentation, often caused by poorly planned development, is the major cause of extinction today and is considered by many scientists to be the largest threat to preserving the world's biodiversity.

This corridor narrows down to a critical "pinch point" in the Sonoma Valley between the Mayacamas and Sonoma Mountain, and the narrowest part of that pinch point is precisely located on the SDC property. The most important ecological benefit of the SDC property is to provide an unbroken connection from Sonoma Mountain to the Mayacamas, which have already been significantly impacted by habitat loss and fragmentation due to an accelerating development and wildfires in the area.

### **4. Question: What will SLTs role be moving forward after the transfer of the open space to the County and protections for the wildlife corridor have been successful accomplished?**



Answer: As a major conservation landowner in the Sonoma Valley and near the SDC campus, SLT manages lands that include large parts of the wildlife corridor. We will remain engaged as a funder, technical science advisor and partner in the management and protection of the natural resources of SDC. We also work closely with state and local agencies on a regional fire program through the Sonoma Valley Wildlands Collaborative. Including the management of SDC's open space lands in this program will reduce fire risk and improve environmental health for surrounding communities.

**5. Question: What will SLTs role be in the redevelopment of the SDC campus and the DGS surplus property sale process?**

Answer: SLT has made a commitment to not only addressing the climate and biodiversity crises, but to also support an increase in the amount of affordable housing in Sonoma County by developing the SDC campus in an environmentally responsible manner. SLT has provided advice and support for two proposals submitted to DGS for the ownership of the SDC campus. A housing consortium led by The Related Group, Burbank Housing and Lewis Homes submitted a very thoughtful and visionary proposal as Sonoma Community Partners. In addition, the Glen Ellen Historical Society submitted a proposal entitled "The Next 100 Years" which calls for the establishment of an Independent Special District to govern SDC. If either of these bids are accepted by the state, SLT is ready to enter into an MOU to implement a community engagement plan, collaborate on research and design of environmental performance standards and further refine and improve the SDC Specific Plan and environmental documents.

**6. What has SLTs involvement in this process achieved?**

Answer: The low cost/no cost transfer of 750 acres of open space including Camp Via, Fern and Suttonfield Lakes and diverse natural habitats that will be added to the state and county park systems will be a remarkable achievement that reflects over ten years of collaboration with our partners to achieve this goal. Our equally important objective is to ensure the permeability of the SDC campus for wildlife movement and health. We have succeeded in securing additional protections for the wildlife corridor in the Specific Plan, and we will be engaged in a historic effort in the coming years to remove buildings and expand the Sonoma Creek habitat areas along the northern boundary of the campus.