

## Looking Back and Moving Forward: The Glen Ellen Forum's SDC/Eldridge Committee Takes Stock

It's been nearly a year since the Glen Ellen Forum's SDC/Eldridge Committee hosted a workshop to explore the community's hopes and goals for transformation of the Sonoma Developmental Center in Eldridge. In the year since the workshop, which drew 260+ participants, the committee has done its best to advocate for Glen Ellen's vision with movers and shakers in the policy and political arenas. Now, with SDC in warm shutdown and questions swirling in the void, we thought we'd look back at what's been accomplished, where things stand, and next steps.

To date, the committee has:

- Synthesized and collated feedback and follow-up input from the April 2018 workshop, which focused the committee's mandate on preserving the property's open spaces, advocating for site-specific land-use planning for the campus, and promoting governance that includes a strong Glen Ellen voice.
- Participated in the state's site assessment process with consultant Wallace Roberts & Todd (WRT).
- Strengthened working relationships with the Sonoma Ecology Center, the Sonoma Land Trust (SLT), and the Glen Ellen Historical Society, and fostered collaboration with the SDC's Parent Hospital Association (PHA).
- Represented the Glen Ellen Forum at SDC Coalition meetings.
- Sent letters to county and state officials, appointed and elected, reiterating the community's goals and asserting its willingness to be proactive in all aspects of the property's transition.
- Met with county supervisors and attended public meetings to support countywide understanding of the impacts redevelopment will present locally, and to reiterate the importance of comprehensive planning for the site.
- Talked with and/or attended meetings with other organizations with aspirations for the property or its assets, including the Eldridge Ecovillage Association, CEPEC, and the Valley of the Moon Water District.
- Circulated a petition asking then-Governor Jerry Brown and state officials to support the community's priorities and ensure adequate funding for the planning process. To date, more than 3,500 signatures have been collected. A letter-writing campaign took place in tandem with the petition drive. The petition and letters will be delivered to state officials.
- Supported SDC staff, the PHA, the Eldridge Portrait Project, and the SLT in commemoration events honoring closure of the 127-year-old institution.

Arguably the most productive thing the committee has done—and the most promising thing we'll do moving forward—is participate in the SDC Coalition's Leadership group. The Coalition is a broad-based collection of organizations—county offices, nonprofits, fire and water districts, and others—convened by Supervisor Susan Gorin to help guide and support Sonoma County as it grapples with the complexities of Eldridge's redevelopment.

We can say, without hesitation, that Supervisor Gorin and county staff hear Glen Ellen loud and clear. When we bring issues to their attention they listen and, more importantly, translate our concerns to officials at the state level. Through these contacts, as well as the letter-writing and petition campaigns, we are confident officials at the state level also know who we are and are aware of our priorities.

In April 2018, the community clearly stated that Eldridge's open space lands should remain open, and that redevelopment should be compatible with the surrounding community and honor the site's cultural, historic, environmental, and economic legacy. Preservation of the open space, protection of the wildlife corridor, and recreational access are all in good hands, with stewardship of those resources spearheaded by the land trust, the ecology center, county parks and open space departments, and local nonprofits including Jack London Park Partners and Sonoma Mountain Preservation. The committee will continue to support these efforts.

Ensuring redevelopment of the campus is thoughtful and harmonious within its community and historical context is the bigger challenge. Securing governance that includes a local voice and initiating interim use on the property also remain tricky and delicate. We believe a community-driven visioning and planning process, as promised by state and county officials, needs to take place before any special interest land-use proposal is considered. We are prepared and determined to help make this happen, in any and all ways possible.

Looking ahead, we will host another community workshop to consolidate an enduring and actionable vision for Eldridge. The goal is to build consensus among ourselves and within the broader community—Sonoma Valley, Sonoma County, and the greater North Bay—to guide thoughtful and responsible transition of a place so central to our identity, well-being, and prosperity.

Please let us know if you have specific questions or concerns you'd like us to address before the visioning effort begins. We may not have answers, but we've got ears—our own and those of our colleagues on the SDC Coalition and beyond. We've created a website, [EldridgeforAll.org](http://EldridgeforAll.org), where you can learn more, sign up for action alerts, subscribe to a blog, and become better educated about all the issues surrounding the future of this complex and beautiful property. We look forward to your feedback.