



January 19, 2022

Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
575 Administration Drive
Room 102A
Santa Rosa, California

Via e-mail:

To the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors:

This letter provides the comments of the Valley of the Moon Alliance (VOTMA) on the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) Specific Plan Alternatives Report prepared by Dyett & Bhatia and published by the County in early November 2021, along with freshly released Permit Sonoma materials prepared for the January 25, 2022 Board of Supervisors meeting. The Valley of the Moon Alliance (VOTMA) is an organization supported by hundreds of neighbors formed to protect and preserve the Sonoma Valley.

1. The Alternatives.

VOTMA agrees with the Sonoma Land Trust and both Municipal Advisory Councils in the Sonoma Valley that the draft alternatives A, B, and C released by the County do not meet several essential principles that are integral to both the success of the SDC Specific Plan and its acceptance by the local community.

We likewise see the newly released Permit Sonoma alternative as only a minor re-working of the first three alternatives, with the same basic scale and scope of housing, and the same deleterious traffic and other impacts for the Glen Ellen area of the Sonoma Valley.

2. Broader impacts and costs to the County.

In reviewing or approving any of the four alternatives now under consideration, the Board should be careful of the implications each has for the future public works program of the County, and for the County's associated expenditures in that respect. The greatly increased housing densities proposed that would be concentrated on Arnold Drive would inevitably result in increased expenditures out of the County budget for upstream road widening, intersection construction and signaling systems, sanitation trunk-line and pump-station improvements, policing and fire and ambulance response costs, maintenance and service costs, etc. All would

be a cost burden to the County as a whole, and all would affect residents of all of the Districts of the County over the long term.

3. Appeal to the State.

We believe the County should make a vigorous effort to negotiate a time extension for the 2019 SDC planning agreement with the California Department of General Services, to give the community and government agencies more time to develop an appropriate Specific Plan that is acceptable to the people of the Sonoma Valley.

4. Resolution with the State regarding the clean up costs associated with the project.

From public comments, and from the Alternative Plans presented as “financially feasible” by the County’s consultants, it is clear that the implied costs of cleanup and restoration that are embedded in the SDC property have become a significant driving force in the design of, and particularly the scale of, the alternatives for the site. That in turn has led to high densities and an increasing incompatibility with the rural and neighborhood character of the surrounding Glen Ellen and Eldridge area.

We ask that the Board of Supervisors make a vigorous effort with the State, as the present owner of the property, to clarify and define how those implied costs will be handled in any future transfer of the land to an agency or private developer, and what provisions the State will make to clean up the property before such transfer is made. An early determination in that regard could change the face, and the density, of the alternatives as now proposed.

5. Provide adequate time to review the new alternative.

We ask that the Board of Supervisors provide the community with more time to digest and comment on the new alternative released by Permit Sonoma on January 15. At least six weeks is needed for the community to review, meet and comment, and the review process should occur before a Preferred Alternative is selected and before the CEQA/EIR process begins.

The Board should also not approve any of the proposed alternatives at this time, and should instead direct Permit Sonoma to continue to work with the Planning Advisory Team and the community to develop a “reduced density alternative” that would be available for public review and comment for an appropriate period of time, and only then would be presented to the Board for consideration. An excellent starting point for an acceptable framework for such an alternative is the January 5, 2022 letter from the North Sonoma Valley Municipal Advisory Council.

Whatever new alternative is developed, there needs to be adequate time for public review and comment on that new alternative. No acceptable alternative is presently ready for approval. Further, the EIR that will be required for this plan will be subject to very close scrutiny by VOTMA, The MACs in the Sonoma Valley, SVCAC, the Sonoma City Council and others. It is better to get things right at the beginning than to rush ahead before there is broad support for a plan.

6. Governance plan.

VOTMA also believes that more time is needed to consider what governance structure should be developed to oversee and manage this unique piece of land once it is transferred from the State. Establishment of such a structure would allow the County to proceed with the approved development plan with a higher degree of confidence, including confidence that the community will continue to have a voice in the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter.

Kathy Pons, President of Board of Directors

Valley of The Moon Alliance