

Op/Ed:

It's Time to Talk Redevelopment of the SDC

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Mark your calendars. In December 2018, Glen Ellen's world will shift (again). That's when the Sonoma Developmental Center closes.

Add another date: April 16, 2018. That's when the SDC/Eldridge Committee of the Glen Ellen Forum will host a workshop at Dunbar Elementary School to update the community on the status of that closure process and discuss how we, as local residents, can have a voice in transforming the Eldridge property.

In the wake of October's firestorms, we are wounded and rebuilding. We were determined even before the fires to have a say in how our community is governed, to come together and make our opinions heard at the county level. The Glen Ellen Forum was born of that desire. Now, after the blazes and with the Eldridge property on the brink of redevelopment, there is opportunity as well as danger.

What happens on the Eldridge property is integral to both how Glen Ellen currently defines itself and how our community will be defined for generations to come. We must be proactive in defining the future of our home.

Proactive is the key word here. The SDC/Eldridge Committee is convinced Glen Ellen must generate its own vision for redevelopment, not simply react to proposals—or rumors of proposals. To that end, in collaboration with the Glen Ellen Historical Society, the Sonoma Land Trust, and the Sonoma Ecology Center, we have been working on a governance vision for redevelopment of Eldridge that can serve as a framework for the state. The priorities include preservation of open space, a historic district that would include a museum, library, and memorial park, wildlife corridors, recreational opportunities, and accommodating facilities for educational, business, community, and housing resources at a size and scale consistent with existing land use and that do not result in sprawl or overload infrastructure.

That vision will be the focus of the special meeting on April 16 at Dunbar. All players—local residents, neighbors from throughout the Sonoma Valley, property owners, business leaders, representatives of Sonoma County government, representatives from the State of California—are invited.

Here's the upshot: Both Sonoma County and the State of California are in favor of a "community-driven" process. Glen Ellen is the community that can, and should, have its hand on the steering wheel. However, a number of things are in play here. One is time. We all want a thoughtful plan for redevelopment, one that allows us to make wise and durable decisions that

not only meet the demands of the state, but are also sustainable and, most important, compatible with the semirural character of the community. Putting such a plan in place by the end of 2018 is a formidable task. We must start now.

Then there are the rumors: We've all heard them. Among them we have heard that Sonoma State University has expressed interest in the campus. But exactly what is proposed has not been presented to the community, and we look forward to hearing more from SSU leadership on their ideas.

That said, the SSU proposal underscores exactly why Glen Ellen must be proactive. This proposal—and others—are out there, but we don't know what they are. With colleagues and neighbors who will help facilitate the April 16 conversation, our goal is to solidify a cohesive, homegrown vision and plan for governance that the state, the county, and other players can't ignore.

Glen Ellen's world is shifting, but this time, let's not be taken by surprise. Join us on April 16, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., in the Dunbar School multipurpose room, 11700 Dunbar Road in Glen Ellen. For more information on the meeting, contact the forum's SDC/Eldridge Committee chair Alice Horowitz at forum@glenellen.org. For more information on the closure and redevelopment of the SDC, visit the Glen Ellen Forum's SDC/Eldridge Committee page at glenellenca.org and Transform SDC at transformsd.com. You can also learn more at the Glen Ellen Historical Society at www.glenellenhistoricalsociety.org and the Sonoma Ecology Center at sonomaecologycenter.org.