

SDC Public Comment

My name is Collin Thoma and I am the Systems Change Advocate with Disability Services and Legal Center (DSLCL). I also sit on the Sonoma Valley Collaborative Council and support their priorities for the project. I will be providing feedback on the report through a Disability focused lenses to help make sure the SDC accessible to all.

A priority in the final plan is to make sure that a good majority of the housing units built are affordable and accessible. There is a strong need for affordable and accessible housing in the Disability community. This is because many people with disabilities are lower income and may rely on Supplemental Social Security Insurance (SSI), Social disability Insurance (SDI) and/or other public benefits. This makes it harder to find housing as they are limited to affordable units and, the ongoing housing crisis makes finding an affordable unit even more challenging. It is also really hard to find housing that is accessible to those who use a wheelchair, scooter, walker or have another physical disability. These two problems make it much harder to find a place to live and, is one of many challenges and barriers people with disabilities have to face.

For the amount affordable housing the minimum should be 50% and close to 100% as possible. There should also be a relatively even mix of single and multifamily homes. These affordable homes should also stay affordable even if there is an increase in living in the area. For accessible housing an easy way to do this will be to create homes in Visitability method. The three main aspects of Visitability are to have a zero-step entrance(s) ideally at the front door, 32-inch pathways and doorways, a bathroom with grab bars and enough space to accommodate for a wheelchair. A benefit of building home using the Visitability method is it will not increase the cost of construction as the main features are minor adjustment. Building a home that uses the Visitability features from the start will also be much cheaper than remodeling a home with Visitability elements. Furthermore, the features of Visitability are small enough that if a family doesn't have a disability they will hardly notice those elements. A Visitable home will also make it easier for residents to age in place. The redevelopment of the SDC presents a great opportunity for build Visitable homes and will help pay homage/respect to the former patients of the SDC. While it is good to see an effort to create a good amount of housing units all the alternatives should have more housing built. A way to increase the number of housing units is to make at least some of the commercial buildings be mixed use.

An important aspect that was not mentioned in the plan and needs to be a high priority is to make sure the county has a robust evacuation plan. As already defined in the plan the area is in a very high fire danger area with limited roads to evacuate the area. With the increase of people and traffic it will put a strain on the road network in the area. If a good plan is not in place it can increase the traffic which can make an evacuation more dangerous. Furthermore, it can be harder and can take longer to evacuate people with disabilities. This is because they may need to bring medicine and/or medical equipment which can be bulky. If they have a physical disability then they will need to have a vehicle that can support them and their mobility device and may require assistance getting out of their home. Finally, if someone has a cognitive and/or mental disability they may need help in making sure they pack the right supplies. In addition, they may become confused or overwhelmed during the evacuation which may result in them needing more assistance.

Another priority needs to be improving the infrastructure in the area. Adding additional bus routes should be considered to provide easier access to Santa Rosa, Petaluma, to the coast and, other parts of the county. In addition to creating more routes there should also be more frequent buses. Having good public transit will not only reduce traffic it will also make it easier for people with disabilities who don't drive to get around the county. It could also allow them to visit parts of the county that wouldn't have been possible with good transit. For crosswalks that are on (or will be on) busy street like Arnold Drive should have signals that have both audio and touch queues when it is safe to cross. For the time to cross needs to be closely considered as it may take some with a physical disability longer to cross. There should be consideration on having a backup generator (if financially feasible) in case of a loss of power or a PSPS event. Having a backup generator will be good to have as people with disabilities may have medical equipment that needs power and without it puts their health and safety at risk.

The hotel isn't a good fit in the plan it does fit in with the characteristic of the area and is an attraction that isn't that inclusive (for residents and tourists) as it is more geared for attracting tourists. I understand the hotel is in the plan to help pay for the project but other alternatives should be considered. Instead of the hotel a museum with the history of the SDC or public event space both with paid admission should be considered instead. This will also allow for both locals and tourists to enjoy. A museum will do a good job in pay homage and respect to those who

lived and died at the SDC. If the museum is not created then something will need to be created to pay homage and respect to past SDC residents.

The three alternatives had some good parts to them but none were perfect and the creation of another alternative is needed. With that said below are the good parts from each alternative that I would like to see in whatever final plan will be.

Alternative A: The Community Hub/resource center (this should be a priority to have in the final plan) should have services such as childcare, elder services, and mental health services. Having these services are important as some of these services may not be available in the valley. If these services are provided it would make it much easier for those who need them to access them.

Alternative B: The empathies on perseverance, I understand that this will be expensive but given the SDC history it's important to have some preservation of the existing buildings. This alternative had the best housing numbers.

Alternative C: The proposed use of the main building and should be persevered. It was good to see the large amount square footage for commercial use buildings which can help increase job opportunities in the area. However, this should only be done if some of these buildings is mixed use given the large amount of square footage for these commercial buildings.

In all plans it was good to see the creation and preservation of open space for trails and paths. A majority of these trails and paths should be paved and for those that are not should have a hard surface like hard compacted dirt. This will allow for those who use a wheelchair, scooter or walker to use these trails/paths. This is important to have as not having accessible trails is yet another barrier that people with disabilities face and will allow for everyone regardless of mobility level to enjoy the great trails around the SDC.

Thank You,

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