



SONOMA DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER SPECIFIC PLAN PLANNING ADVISORY TEAM MEETING #3 SUMMARY

Friday, September 11, 2020

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

The Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) Specific Plan Planning Advisory Team (PAT) Meeting #2 opened at 1:00 pm. All of the PAT members were present, as well as John Mack, Scott Orr, Cecily Condon (Permit Sonoma), Supervisor Susan Gorin, Emmanuel Ursu (M-Group), Greg Jennings (BKF), Kevin Feeney (KMA), Ruth Todd (Page & Turnbull), and Rajeev Bhatia, Jossie Ivanov, and Hazel O’Neil (Dyett & Bhatia).

Rajeev Bhatia of Dyett & Bhatia (D&B) opened the meeting by discussing the Background Report, which received comments from the PAT that D&B is working to incorporate. The purpose of this meeting was to hear key findings of the background report from the consultant team.

Market Demand and Financial Feasibility

Kevin Feeney of KMA gave a presentation covering the Market Demand chapter of the Background Report (Chapter 9). State law requires that the Plan look at economic feasibility; Feeney explained what that means for development, and how those components influence what developers will be able to build on the SDC site. He briefly covered KMA’s findings on current market demand, and recommended that due to open space considerations, market rate housing should target medium to high density. KMA will not be able to make further recommendations until the rest of the planning team has come up with preferred land uses. KMA’s next step is to put together a feasibility analysis, and they will be working with land use planners on the capacity of the site and other priorities that come out of community engagement in order to test feasibility for different alternatives.

PAT members asked clarifying questions about KMA’s methodology for calculating demand and feasibility. D&B pointed out that there is a huge demand in Sonoma County for affordable housing. KMA explained that development is a balance of the upfront cost of construction and the asking price of different homes and rental rates, and stated that many developers try to phase construction for this reason. KMA pointed out that most households in Sonoma are housing burdened, and so demand for affordable housing is there, but in order to build it there will need to be a cost analysis, and there will need to be creative funding sources, hence the conservative estimate for multifamily housing. PAT members suggested looking into different types of housing that might qualify as affordable, i.e. assisted living, or multi-generational single family homes with in-law units, and that KMA look into land use provisions in other Bay Area communities that have encouraged these types of uses in their plans. PAT members asked about the feasibility of preserving run-down single family homes that have charming character but require significant investment, and KMA thought this would not be feasible given the small number of homes; while there is market demand for renovated homes, other alternatives for those specific sites might be a more efficient use of land and resources. PAT members also asked about how the recommended medium to high density housing would be balanced with the rural character of the SDC site and surrounding communities, and



expressed concern that the SDC site is very far from employment centers. D&B replied that this is a challenge that will be figured out in the alternatives phase of the Plan, and that any development would be cohesive with the buildings on the core campus. One PAT member asked about the land cost, and how that would influence development. KMA responded that providing a return on the land hinders the ability to fund services, and that if the land were to be sold by the State at a low cost that would free more funding for services; the Plan's role is to make sure that housing and infrastructure priorities would be supported before return on land.

Historic Preservation

Ruth Todd of Page & Turnbull presented on the architectural background report (Chapter 10). She covered the historic nature of the SDC site and how it adds complexity to the project. She explained that in the last year or so, the State Preservation Office designated the SDC site as a historic district and that the boundary of the designation is the entire project area. If the site is to keep that designation, about 2/3 of the historic buildings (defined as being built during the period of significance, from 1891 to 1949) will need to be kept intact. She discussed some of the opportunities and constraints of the historic district status, including available tax credits, notable interior spaces, and the landscape elements that reinforce the site character.

PAT members asked questions and made comments about the historic designation and planning considerations. D&B directed PAT members to a 2019 letter from the State that lists the rules and concurrence of the SDC site; the letter concurs that the site *is* a historic landmark, which is the highest tier of historical significance, that the entire SDC boundary counts as the boundary of the historic landmark, and that any structure built between 1891 and 1949, when the SDC Superintendent retired, are considered historic resources within the landmark except for a small northwestern woodland portion. P&T explained that there are two buildings on the site that are individually eligible for historic resource designations (the PEC building and the superintendent's residence), but they are also only two of the 75 buildings that make up the historic district designation. One PAT member asked about the historic landscape, as many community members wished to see that preserved in the survey. Todd explained that the landscape provides character defining features, and those are summarized in the background report. The more those features are preserved, the easier it is to add respectful infill that enhances the character of the site. PAT members asked about what would happen if there was not an interest in maintaining the historic landmark status, and at what point in the process that would happen. Todd said that there would be significant impact under CEQA, and that the EIR would have to explain mitigating steps about the loss of those historic resources. The PAT discussed that this conversation ties together with the market demand, and if there is a certain amount and type of development that must happen to make the site economically viable, it could make the historic designation infeasible, and this would have to be identified in the EIR. The planning team said that they will need to look into State regulation 5024, which mandates that state-owned properties respect historic regulations.

Infrastructure

Greg Jennings from BKF presented on the existing infrastructure of the SDC site, which he described as its own self-contained city that had its own water treatment facility, sewage system, and water supply. He said that some of the infrastructure could be made operational again, but that it would be easier to tie into existing sewer and water lines in the Sonoma Valley; rehabilitating the



old infrastructure would add a significant cost to development due to upgrades for the pipes and within the buildings. However, there is an opportunity on the site to create a self-sustaining water district, which may be desirable given an overall demand for water in Sonoma County. He said that there could be hybrid approaches, in which aqueducts on site are used for irrigation, or recreational uses. BKF found that the SDC site needs an entirely new sewer district, and there will need to be a capacity study that happens soon in order to reach an agreement with the Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District. The SDC site will need to follow the groundwater recharge plan that Sonoma Valley set, and to replace the storm drain system. In order to perform the next steps of capacity assessment and drawing an infrastructure plan, BKF will need to know more about what type of development and land use will be on the site. John Mack noted that most of the water system is in the open space area.

PAT members discussed the language of the State statute which retains water rights on site. Several PAT members asked about what would be required if the SDC redevelopment was going to operate wells and aqueducts. BKF says that water would probably be run by a public or semi-public water agency, such as California Water or the Sonoma Water Company (SWCA). The PAT asked BKF who would pay for the studies that would be required to bring existing infrastructure up to current standards, and whether all of the replacement would make a site more expensive than putting in new infrastructure at a vacant site. BKF presumed that this would be the agency overseeing development or the County of Sonoma, unless the land was bought by a private developer, in which case the developer would likely pay for the necessary studies and operation costs. Infrastructure will require a master plan to be implemented in phases along with development, and there would be a large base cost to putting in new pipes. The water system will be significantly more expensive than the sewer system due to the pressures needed for firefighting. Another PAT member asked if BKF knew whether SCWA and other utility providers had sufficient capacity to serve a large redevelopment at the SDC site, to which BKF replied that once the planners have an idea about the kind of development that will be happening, then they would ask the agencies if they have capacity, but clarified that any plans for development would need to check with those agencies about whether they have capacity to serve the area. A PAT member asked if the existing infrastructure can be abandoned in place and cost of removal if necessary. BKF responded that the existing system can be abandoned in place and that there would be little if any additional costs associated with avoiding the old infrastructure when the new infrastructure is installed. Another PAT member inquired about the design of the dams that created the reservoirs and the process of ensuring that they are safe. BKF noted that a geotechnical engineer would assess the condition of the dams and that the State conducts periodic inspections. In response to a PAT member's question about the size of the sewer and water main, BKF noted that the size of the main pipes in Arnold Drive are large enough and in good condition. The PAT was concerned about sustainability, and whether the Specific Plan would call for measures such as gray water reuse, and water collection for irrigation.

Other Chapters

Jossie Ivanov from D&B presented on key takeaways from other chapters in the background report.

- **Community Facilities:** the site has good access to safety services, and open space. However, the level of service needed would be figured out depending on what uses are built on the site. There are no foreseeable capacity issues for schools, but transit access will be important to get future residents to schools several miles away. There is a lack of community resources



and gathering spaces nearby, so the site presents an opportunity to build a community center, as well as health services. There is strong community interest for health services on the site.

- Biological and natural resources: the wildlife corridor is important, and the plan will need to figure out how to manage the relationship between residents and animals, as well as balance water needs between habitats and development. The specific plan will not look at trail design, but could look at signage and recreational policies with the site and nearby areas.
- Natural and man-made hazards: Wildfires are one of the key issues for the planning area, so water sources will need to be available and dependable, and the County will need to have safe evacuation routes and procedures in place. There are hazardous materials on site, and asbestos and mold in many of the buildings will affect adaptive reuse considerations. The buildings will also require seismic retrofits.

PAT members wanted to know if there will be a “no project” alternative, which would mean leaving the site as is with no future uses. One PAT member asked if there would be more studies of hazardous materials on the site, and if lead were to be found in the soil, who would pay for the clean up. D&B replied that they are going to do borings with geotechnical engineers.

A PAT member commented that water infrastructure and water rights are important critical path questions.

Next Steps

There will be a community workshop on September 30. Some PAT members will conduct interviews with their constituents who aren't comfortable with technological participation. Dyett & Bhatia will present to the County board of supervisors and planning commission to get public feedback on the vision and guiding principles sometime in mid-November. After that meeting, the project team will begin to develop alternatives and complete those by January of 2021. The project team is working on an adaptive reuse analysis now. The next PAT meeting will cover findings from the community workshop and the adaptive reuse analysis, and is scheduled for late October.

PAT meeting #4 closed at 3:16 pm.