

## Equestrian Center at SDC

Dear Editor,

This letter is in response to the Kenwood Press April 15<sup>th</sup> article on the future of the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC). In the past few years, there have been many newspaper and internet documents published about future plans for the SDC. Millions of dollars have been spent by the County and State on these reviews which, thus far, have focused on the SDC site's infrastructure and ecology. There has been only one formal proposal for the land surrounding the SDC. It is the one for the California Equestrian Park and Event Center (CEPEC) - a unique public park. The documents produced for this project include: *Environmental Impact Report*, *Economic Analysis*, *Business Plan*, *Master Plan*, and *Comparative Analysis of Different Uses for the SDC land*. These documents demonstrate how CEPEC would be self-sustainable, provide substantial revenue for the county, create jobs, recreation, education, internships, land monitoring and maintenance, as well as venues for equestrian competitions, wildlife research, veterinary services and historic and ecological displays. These reports were created from private funding at no cost to the County or the State.

The unique characteristic of CEPEC is that it was designed from comments received from the public during focus groups, surveys, town hall meetings phone and one-on-one interviews. More than one thousand of these individuals have signed a petition supporting CEPEC on the SDC land.

At the most recent public meetings, concern was raised that the CEPEC proposal appeared exclusively for equestrians and horses. That is not accurate. CEPEC will also include venues and activities other than equestrian such as: specific trails for hikers and bicycles, community meeting facilities, and historic and wildlife research opportunities and exhibits.

The planning meetings that have been provided to the public have suggested using the SDC surrounding land for open space. The CEPEC project provides an opportunity to retain a majority of the land around the SDC for open space. The planned footprint of the equestrian facilities will actually occupy less space than the building of the former Eldridge Farm.

The original proposal for CEPEC was submitted to Sonoma County and the California State legislators in 2015 with revisions submitted in 2017 and 2019. In January this year (2021), an updated memo and attached data were sent to State and

County representatives as well as the agency hired by the County to propose future types of use of the SDC main campus.

Another unique aspect of the CEPEC proposal is that it will meet the objectives of the SDC founders (services for the disabled and recreation facility) as well as the State. It would provide services for the public not available in the current 56 parks in Sonoma County. These include:

- Substantial revenue for the county and region
- Employment of full and part time personnel
- Short start up time
- Educational programs in business, veterinary care, horsemanship, wildlife, etc.
- Internships
- Equine assisted therapeutic programs for the disabled, children, veterans, and the public
- Facilities for horse riding, training, competitions, and hiking
- Veterinary hospital
- Exhibits of SDC history, local wildlife exhibits, equine and local wildlife art
- Maintenance and monitoring of the land and facility for safety
- Fire protection and maintenance of fuel vegetation

In summary, CEPEC would provide much more than is provided by the current parks in the County. It would continue the use of the former SDC Eldrige Farm, fulfill the perpetual goals of the founders of the SDC, and needs and wishes of many people in and beyond the County. I believe that the community has an obligation to honor the needs and wishes of these stakeholders.

Additional information is at the CEPEC website: [www.cepec.us](http://www.cepec.us)

--Wanda Smith, Oakmont