



May 1, 2019

To: Sonoma Valley Fund Board of Directors
From: Karin Demarest, Vice President for Programs
Subject: Sonoma Land Trust SDC Proposal

After years of careful consideration, I am pleased to seek your approval of a grant for \$700,000 to Sonoma Land Trust (SLT) to preserve open space and maintain the trail system at Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC). The Sonoma Valley Fund Grants Committee unanimously endorsed this grant at their meeting on April 30.

In 2015, the Community Foundation Sonoma County Board of Directors approved a three-year spending plan for both the endowment and expendable fund from the Todd Trust. In support of donor intent, the plan established a 75%- 25% split of funds between Sonoma Valley and the rest of Sonoma County. Aligned with that split, the spending plan allocated \$750,000 from the expendable fund designated for capital expenses. The Sonoma Valley Fund (SVF) Grants Committee selected “open space, specifically land and trail acquisition,” as the Todd Trust donor intent for which the funds would focus. In 2018, the SVF Grants Committee made a grant of \$50,000 to Sonoma Ecology Center for trail recovery at Sugar Loaf after the devastating fires of 2017. The remaining \$700,000 is now being recommended to preserve the open space surrounding Sonoma Developmental Center.

As a participant in the SDC Land Coalition Committee meetings, the state planning meetings lead by WRT consulting and the recent special meeting of the Board of Supervisors, I am confident that the focus and timing of the SLT proposal is ideal for protecting the unique lands surrounding SDC. This purpose is in full alignment with the Todd Trust donor intent to support charitable activity in the area of open space and trail acquisition.

The transition of Sonoma Developmental Center has been and will continue to be, a very complex process. With a sprawling campus of aging buildings and outdated infrastructure that had served an extremely vulnerable population, planning for the transition focused first on the residents and families whose care was of utmost concern. With that transition nearly complete, attention shifted to the campus itself and the surrounding hundreds of acres of open space lands.

The 200 acre developed campus along Arnold Drive is nested in the middle of a much larger—and much wilder—900+ acre property that stretches from the oak woodlands along Highway 12 to redwood groves high up in Sonoma Mountain’s creek canyons. SDC is also situated in the heart of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor, a narrow linkage of high-quality habitat connecting Point Reyes to the mountains of Napa and Lake Counties.

What makes SDC so special from an environmental standpoint is that the property is surrounded by 9,000 acres of parkland and conservation easement-protected properties. The property is also the center of a large greenbelt between Sonoma and Glen Ellen that creates a natural, open landscape and a buffer against growing development pressures. A 2015 assessment prepared by the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District concluded that SDC is “*integral to the character of the Sonoma Valley, and the ecological health of the North Bay.*”

Under the leadership of Supervisor Gorin, a committee formed to steward the transition of land separate from the buildings and aging infrastructure. The SDC Land Coalition Committee has successfully worked with the state to secure an agreement that protecting the lands of SDC is a priority. At the recent Board of Supervisors meeting, state representatives clearly stated their support of retaining the open space lands. As shared in an article in [the Kenwood Press](#):

“The state has agreed that regardless of what happens with the core campus, 745 acres will be protected for public open space,” Senator Bill Dodd’s Chief of Staff Ezraha Chaaban told the audience at the meeting in the Board of Supervisor Chambers in Santa Rosa. The announcement was met with applause from the room.

With this agreement, the proposal for funding by SLT represents a unique opportunity for the Sonoma Valley Fund to make a major lead grant that would set a course for maintaining the current trail system and securing the transfer of lands to state and local park systems. The \$700,000 grant from SVF would be matched by Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District with a \$1M grant, allowing for the purchase of an open space easement that would protect the land in perpetuity. The negotiations with the state centers on a low cost/no cost transfer of lands into the state and county park system, but the state still expects some remuneration for land it sells off and/or transfers to other governmental entities.

Protecting the lands of SDC is a once in a generation opportunity for the Sonoma Valley and is an opportunity perfectly aligned with the intent of Hazel and Roland Todd. With this grant, we can save hundreds of acres of valuable habitat, abundant water resources, and create a permanent open space and habitat linkage for people and wildlife between Sonoma Mountain and the Mayacamas Mountains. The Sonoma Valley Fund Grants Committee encourages the board to endorse this grant and pass it along for final approval from the Community Foundation Board of Directors.