

Introduction

The Lower Arsenal Mixed Use Specific Plan (LAMUSP) documents the vision crafted by community members, a multi-disciplinary consultant team, and City staff for a 50-acre portion of the Lower Benicia Arsenal. This vision embodies community desires to encourage a high-quality place that is befitting of the project area's historic character and significance and seeks to recognize the important role the Arsenal may play in defining Benicia's community identity.

To this end, the plan envisions that the project area may evolve and mature into an environment that incorporates renovated and rehabilitated historic structures and landscapes, new, complementary buildings that are carefully sited and designed, and an improved, interconnected network of streets and open spaces - in short, an environment that can support a diverse and compatible mix of uses in the spirit of community livability and sustainability.

Purpose of the Specific Plan

The Lower Arsenal Mixed Use Specific Plan Area is clearly recognized as an important historic asset. However, current conditions consist of a wide variety of uses that are not always compatible. Existing development ranges from light industrial facilities and a small lodging and events center to residential units and an artist colony. While past development patterns have created a somewhat unique atmosphere, it is not necessarily conducive to either business development and retention or to new residential development. It is the purpose of this Specific Plan to enhance the distinct and historic characteristics of the Arsenal and to create a finely integrated mixed-use district with a cluster of high-quality, interconnected, and compatible places.

The Lower Arsenal Mixed Use area is designated for mixed-use development in the 1999 Benicia General Plan, which provides the following guidance:

Lower Arsenal Mixed Use - This category includes residential, live/work, office, retail, public, quasi-public and limited industrial uses. The purpose of this category is to continue to encourage a mix of compatible uses in areas of the Lower Arsenal; to promote the upgrading of existing buildings; the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings; and to allow new, compatible buildings to house mixed use. The Lower Arsenal Mixed Use category permits a maximum FAR [Floor Area Ratio] of 2.0.

The Specific Plan was crafted using input gathered from community members, stakeholders, City staff, and a team of consultants through a series of interviews, workshops, and charrettes. The goal of this public input was to create a vision for the implementation of the Arsenal mixed use land use designation in the General Plan and for the continued preservation of the Arsenal Historic District in accordance with the Arsenal Historic Conservation Plan¹.

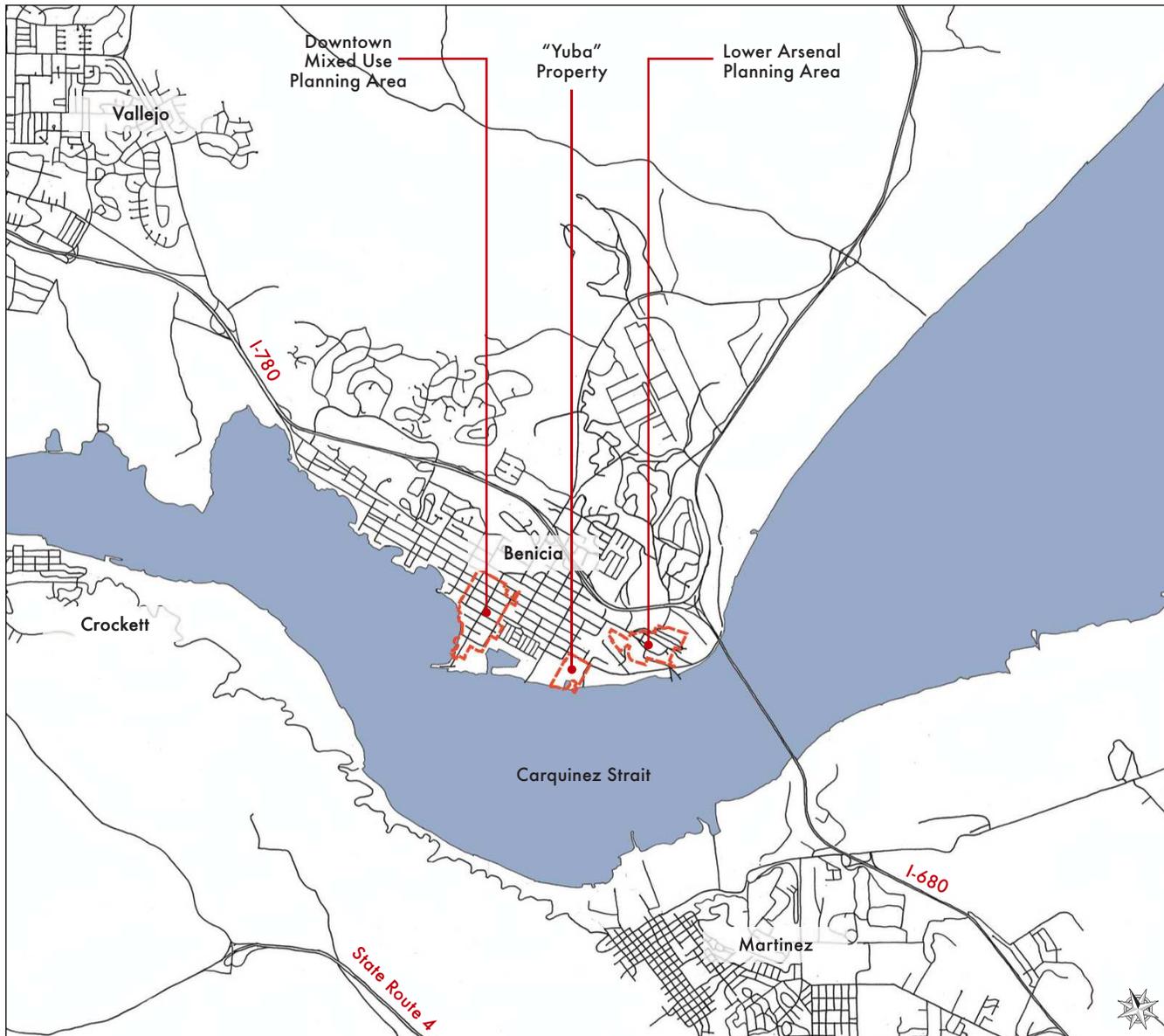
Goals and Policies

In order to achieve this vision, the LAMUSP contains a comprehensive and cohesive set of goals, policies, programs, and development standards that describe the desired development form for the plan area. The overarching goals of the plan include:

- Preservation, enhancement, and promotion of the Arsenal Historic District.
- Restoration of the project area into a unified ensemble of high-quality, 19th and 20th-century architecture through major restoration and rehabilitation of existing historic buildings and sites, and the careful placement and integration of new structures.
- Integration of arts, culture, and historic identity into future development plans for the project area, including enhancement of opportunities for the arts community, development of a destination campus, establishment of heritage tourism, and renovation of period architecture.
- Establishment of an integrated system of scenic trails, paths, and circulation routes connecting key destinations within the project area, the Arsenal Historic District, and throughout the city.
- A framework to ensure that public services keep pace with new development and that development pays its fair share of infrastructure costs.

A full set of goals, policies, and programs can be found in Chapter 5: Financing and Implementation (See also Chapter 6, Appendix A for General Plan Consistency).

(1) The LAMUSP boundary and Arsenal Historic District Boundary are not coterminous. Part of the Historic District is outside of the Specific Plan area and is, therefore, not covered by this Specific Plan. In these areas where the Specific Plan does not apply, the Historic Conservation Plan will continue to be the controlling document.



Location and Overview

The City of Benicia is located in the northern region of California, approximately 35 miles northeast of San Francisco and 57 miles southwest of Sacramento. Benicia is situated within Solano County. However, due to its close proximity, the city is closely linked to Contra Costa County which is located just south of Benicia. The city currently has approximately 28,000 residents, with a relatively low annual growth rate of roughly one percent.

Above: The Lower Arsenal Mixed Use project area is a 50-acre portion of the Benicia Arsenal, located in eastern Benicia in the northern Bay Area. The "Yuba" Property comprises 22 acres and is located south and west of the project area.

Benicia is on a peninsula of land that consists primarily of rolling hills that rise to an elevation of 1,160 feet. To the northwest, Sulphur Springs Mountain creates a natural boundary, while the Union Pacific Railroad and Suisun Marsh border the eastern edge of Benicia. The remaining edges of the City are created by the Carquinez Strait, which acts as a division between Solano and Contra Costa Counties. Benicia is connected to Contra Costa County to the south via the Benicia Bridge (I-680) and can also be accessed from the west using I-780. The Carquinez Strait is a crucial Northern California waterway that connects San Pablo Bay and San Francisco Bay with the San Joaquin river delta. Use of the Strait allows ocean-going ships to access the Port of Benicia or continue on to ports in the Central Valley.

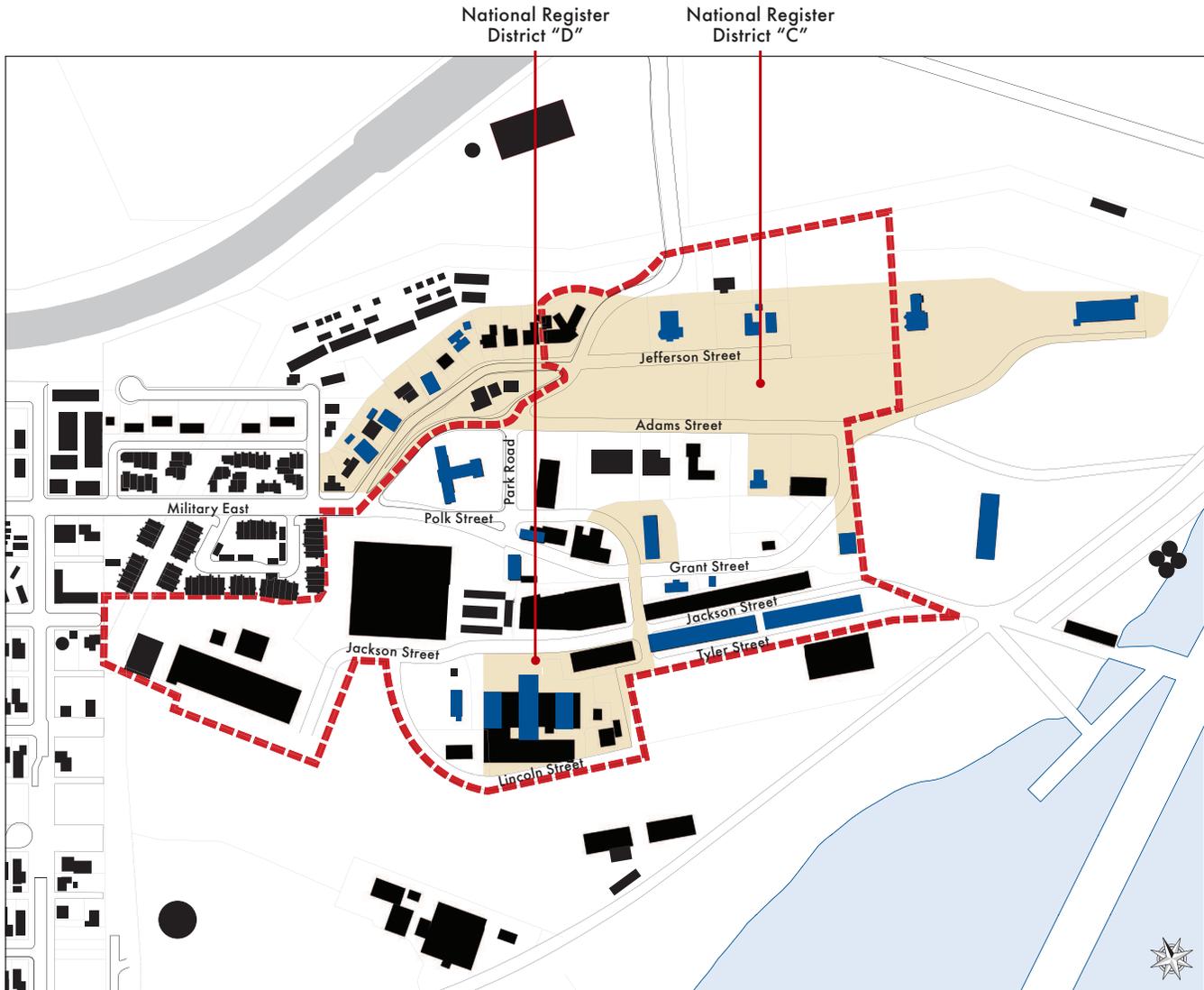
The project area is located in the lower portion of the Arsenal on the east side of Benicia and occupies approximately 50 acres of land. The Port of Benicia separates the Specific Plan Area from the Carquinez Strait. The Port is privately owned and operated and primarily functions as an automotive distribution facility. Port operations occupy approximately 675 acres of land along the shoreline, and the facility is capable of storing up to 42,000 vehicles at any one time.

The Arsenal once acted as one of America's key military installations. It was in service from 1849 until the early 1960s, and played a major role in the development of the City. The main development throughout the lifespan of the Arsenal consisted of three different military installations. These installations were made up of the Benicia Barracks (1849-1924), the Quartermaster's Depot (1849-1858), and the Arsenal, which was in service the longest of the three installations, from 1850 until 1964.

The Specific Plan Area still contains a variety of historic structures and landscapes left over from its military past, including eight buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places lying within two distinct districts (National Register Districts "C" and "D"). The 1993 Arsenal Historic Conservation Plan identifies an additional eight buildings within the project area designated as Landmarks, Potentially Contributing Buildings, and Contributing Buildings, as well as several historic landscape and urban design elements, including the cork oaks of the Jefferson Ridge.

Portions of the Arsenal have changed ownership throughout the years, leaving land within the project area as both publicly and privately owned. The Arsenal was decommissioned in the early 1960s, and the land was transferred to a public agency, the Surplus Property Authority of Benicia. Between the time the Arsenal was decommissioned and 1975, little development occurred within the Arsenal. However, in 1975 Benicia Industries obtained the land from the City and began making plans for development. As an agreement with the City, it was decided that historic structures such as the Clocktower Building, Commanding Officer's Quarters (also known as the Commandant's House), Camel Barns, and the Second Powder Magazine would remain in public hands to ensure their preservation.

The non-contiguous, 22-acre "Yuba" site, located southwest of the project area, was also considered as part of the planning process. Initially developed by the Pacific Mail and Steamship Company in 1850, it later became home to the Benicia Agricultural Works in 1879 and Yuba Manufacturing in 1914.



Above: Map of the LAMUSP project area shown in relation to the area's historic resources. The project area includes a large portion of National Register District C, including the Jefferson Ridge, the Officer's Duplex (1874), and the Lieutenant's Quarters (1874). District C extends beyond the project boundary to the west (including the four historic Officers' Quarters along Jefferson Street) and to the east (including the Commanding Officer's Quarters dating from 1860 and the Clocktower from 1859). The project area includes all of National Register District D, which extends from the Barracks (1872) south to the suite of Blacksmith Shops (1876-1884).

Buildings shown in blue on the plan include the buildings given National Register District recognition in 1974 as well as those designated as Landmarks, Potentially Contributing Buildings, and Contributing Buildings in the 1993 Arsenal Historic Conservation Plan.

Key

- National Register Districts
- Buildings of Historic Significance
- Planning Area Boundary

Summary of Process

An intense public process and extensive data collection phase was conducted for the LAMUSP. The evolution of this plan is the result of site visits, document review, interviews, meetings, a design charrette, and community cooperation and input.

Plans and Documents

The following documents were reviewed and considered during the initial data collection phase of the planning and design process: Benicia General Plan and EIR, Zoning Code, Arsenal Historic Conservation Plan, and Benicia: Portrait of an Early California Town, by Robert Bruegmann. The consultant team also consulted the University of California, Berkeley Fire Insurance Map database and internet-based aerial mapping resources.

Site Tour and Project Kickoff

The consultant team met with City staff, discussed project goals, and toured the project areas on August 3, 2006. The purpose of this visit was to gain a general understanding of context, constraints, and opportunities as well as to document various conditions in and around the project areas, such as traffic and circulation, building form, architecture, public realm, pedestrian access, and others. As part of this process, members of Opticos Design prepared physical analysis diagrams and base maps.

Discovery Interviews and Visioning Workshop

Initial public input was gathered over a two-day period (August 22 and 23, 2006) through a series of nearly ninety interviews with key stakeholders. This two-day session culminated in a Visioning Workshop, which was open and accessible to the public, in the evening on the second day.

The consultant team interviewed property owners, business owners, residents, and representatives of organizations, such as the Benicia Historical Society. The interviews were private, 30-minute sessions aimed at getting an in-depth understanding of community concerns and priorities.

At the Visioning Workshop on August 23, 2006, the consultant team presented initial physical and background analysis of the study area and received valuable information from community members. After the consultant's presentation, the audience was broken out into smaller groups to discuss particular and relevant sub-topics, such as housing and appropriate land use typologies, and to identify particular areas that need to be preserved and areas that deserve attention. This information was used to guide the design process and to define a series of overriding design principles.

The interviews and workshop produced many commonalities in perception and understanding among the participants and provided good direction for City staff and the consultant team. The following summarizes some of the major types of comments received:



Top: Project kick-off walking tour with City staff; Center: Community member presenting design ideas at initial visioning workshop; Bottom: Team members discuss arsenal plan on site.

Arsenal

- Preserve historic character
- Protect and encourage artist community and artist live/work space
- Improve circulation and tie the upper and lower Arsenal together
- Develop the Arsenal as a complete neighborhood with businesses, shops, and housing
- Give more attention to maintenance, both landscaping and buildings
- Investigate funding mechanisms to maintain historic buildings and to improve infrastructure
- Encourage shops/businesses that specialize in historic preservation (e.g. wood-working, blacksmiths, etc.)
- Provide more park space and/or a public square

“Yuba” Site

- Create a mixed-use area with neighborhood serving retail
- Encourage craft shops (like existing glass blowing shop)
- Consider the feasibility of a waterfront hotel or restaurant
- Connect Yuba with downtown and the Arsenal
- Link H Street through to the Arsenal
- Try to reuse some of the existing building materials



During the Visioning Workshop community members were given small maps of the project areas and asked to prioritize positive aspects, negative aspects, and significant opportunities in each project area. These ideas were then transferred to larger maps in small focus groups.

The above drawing illustrates a summary of maps produced by each focus group, which can be read as a “scatter graph” that can help to visually communicate areas of community consensus and contention.

Areas with a concentration of dots are of particular interest. The cluster of glass workshops and galleries along H Street and the Arsenal Ridge are notable positive community assets. The boat slip at the south end of the “Yuba” site and the potential connection at H Street east to Bayshore represent notable opportunities.

Key

- Positive Aspects
- Negative Aspects
- Key Opportunities



The same exercise specific to the LAMUSP project area also produced interesting results. The above map suggests strong positive community support for Arts Benicia and the presence of artists and art-related uses in the Arsenal. Strong support was also illustrated for the “Arsenal Ridge” open space, as well as many of the historic buildings in that upper area, including the Commanding Officer’s Quarters and the Clocktower.

- Key**
- Positive Aspects
 - Negative Aspects
 - Key Opportunities

Many community members expressed negative feelings about the “demolition by neglect” of many of the historic buildings in the area, including the barracks (Bachelor Officers’ Quarters) building along Grant Street. The prospect of change, in the form of new development on currently vacant parcels, was received with mixed feelings by community participants.

Significant opportunities included the improvement of the “Arsenal Ridge” area, and the restoration of open space west of the Commanding Officer’s Quarters.

Physical and Economic Analysis

After the Visioning Workshop, the consultant team conducted four weeks of intensive physical and economic analysis. Physical analysis included the creation of maps tracing the Arsenal's historic development, land use patterns, transportation and circulation systems, and built fabric. Economic analysis included research on demographic and market conditions in the project area.

Community Design Workshop

For the second workshop, members of the consultant team returned to Benicia for a five-day intensive working session to establish an illustrative vision plan and a land use "regulating" plan for the area. During this time the design team worked to produce an urban design plan for the study area that responded to interactive community input. The process was designed so that "feedback loops" were ongoing and immediate, keeping infeasible ideas from being fully developed and concentrating on the community's desired results for the plan area.

The community design workshop allowed for a variety of interaction among the consultant team and members of the community. This interaction occurred through organized presentations, informal evening pinups, group discussions, and facilitation of stakeholder meetings. Physical improvements, infill building types, and implementation strategies, among other topics, were discussed and illustrated.

During the design workshop, the appropriate strategy for Form-Based Coding was also explored. Based on community, stakeholder, and staff input, the consultant team developed primarily a "zone-based" code, which sets different standards of form and intensity for designated areas. However, the code also pays careful consideration to building types, focusing on the use, mass, height, and bulk of different building types and how they may be used to implement the plan.



***Top:** Public meeting during the Community Design Workshop held at the Arts Benicia Gallery. **Middle:** Community members listen during one of the public presentations; **Bottom:** Team members discuss Arsenal plan.*

Organization of the Specific Plan

The LAMUSP is organized into five sections that address the various issues important to the plan area and the topics required by California Government Code for specific plans.

1. Introduction

The Introduction describes the vision and purpose of the plan and sets its context within the City. Chapter 1 also establishes ways in which the Specific Plan supports the goals and objectives of the Benicia General Plan and the Arsenal Conservation Plan.

2. Land Use Vision

The Land Use Chapter contains the vision for the future of the Arsenal and introduces the Form-Based Code in Chapter 3. This Chapter also discusses the primary opportunities and key challenges posed by historic patterns of development. However, the focal point is a detailed description of the proposed design for each of the zones in the Code.

3. Form-Based Code

This chapter describes the physical design of the Specific Plan Area, including the layout and design of streets, the location and extent of the land uses planned for the area, and the development standards that will shape new structures. This plan, unlike some conventional codes and specific plans, is “Form-Based” in that it places a primary emphasis on the physical form and character of new development, with a strong but secondary emphasis on the uses within the buildings.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Graphically oriented “Building Form Standards” clearly describe the required urban and architectural design patterns, allowed land uses, and development intensities that may be achieved under the Specific Plan. “Architectural Standards” guide the architectural character of new buildings within the Specific Plan area to ensure their compatibility with the existing context. “Open Space Standards” describe and regulate the public space network for the plan area. “Street and Circulation Standards” describe and regulate the design of publicly-accessible rights-of-way, focusing on a circulation system that balances the use of all travel modes, including automobiles, pedestrians, bicycles and transit.

The Form-Based Code is intended to supersede the City’s Zoning Ordinance for the Specific Plan area.

4. Infrastructure and Public Services

This Chapter provides a summary of infrastructure systems and public services necessary to support the Specific Plan. The Chapter describes water supply and distribution, wastewater collection and treatment systems, storm drainage systems, solid waste disposal, energy, and emergency services for the area.

5. Financing and Implementation

The Financing and Implementation Chapter describes the steps leading to implementing and financing of the Specific Plan, including identification of the capital improvements required, financing strategies and other implementation measures to protect the artist community and to preserve and enhance the historic resources.

Relationship to the Benicia General Plan

Government Code Section 65454 requires that a Specific Plan be substantively consistent with the General Plan and that it contain a statement regarding its relationship to the General Plan. The plan area is currently designated as mixed-use in the City’s General Plan, which calls for a variety residential, live/work, office, retail, public, and limited industrial uses. It is the goal of the Specific Plan to develop a mixed-use area consistent with the General Plan.

The General Plan also emphasizes the concept of sustainability in carrying out the vision of the plan. The LAMUSP exemplifies sustainability principles by prioritizing the preservation of historic resources, the protection of the artist colony, economic revitalization, and the protection of the natural resources in its goals and policies.

A discussion of the Specific Plan’s consistency with key goals and policies of the City’s General Plan is provided in Chapter 6, Appendix A.

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