

# SURVEY SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

The Benicia Downtown Historic District encompasses the central business district of the City as well as the adjacent residential neighborhoods that are associated with the establishment and growth of the City from the late 1840s to 1945. The District extends from C Street on the south to Military West and East L Street on the north. Its western-most boundary extends to West 5<sup>th</sup> Street and its eastern-most boundary takes in a portion of H Street to East 6<sup>th</sup> Street. The area of the Benicia Arsenal, northeast of the Downtown, is also a City Historic District and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The purpose of these Historic Districts is to preserve Benicia's significant historical resources, including some buildings, which also are important in the early history and settlement of California.

Benicia adopted its first historic district in 1969 recognizing the historical commercial area along First Street. In 1987 the City adopted a historic overlay district as a provision of its zoning code. In 1986, a group of volunteers, aided by professional consultants, undertook a reconnaissance survey to identify important historical resources in the Downtown area. As a result of this effort, two existing historic districts were established. In 1991 the City adopted a *Downtown Historic Conservation Plan*. The Plan established a context for the Downtown area based on prevalent architectural styles and building types, defined the current boundaries of the district, and established design guidelines to help preserve the historic character of the Downtown area.

In Benicia, historic buildings play a vital role in establishing the character of the Downtown commercial district and its adjacent residential neighborhoods. The Downtown Historic District encompasses a wide range of architectural styles and the City has a rich heritage of 19<sup>th</sup>- century buildings, including an unusually large number of buildings that survive from the 1860s and 1870s. From the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has an impressive collection of Victorian middle and working class cottages, as well as a good representation of sophisticated high-style mansions. The Downtown Historic District derives its character and significance from individual buildings and groups of buildings that are eligible for listing on the local, California, and National Registers. The importance of historic resources is recognized in the *Benicia General Plan* (1999), which states as a goal to "maintain and enhance Benicia's Historic character" through reusing historic buildings, maintaining an inventory of historic resources, enhancing the economic potential of historic assets, and preserving historic trees and landscapes.

In addition to the City's surveys and plans, local historians have contributed to an appreciation of Benicia's resources and provided valuable information on the City's physical development and the history of many of its more notable buildings. Especially important in this regard are the architectural history of the City by Robert Bruegmann, and the carefully researched history by Richard Dillon.

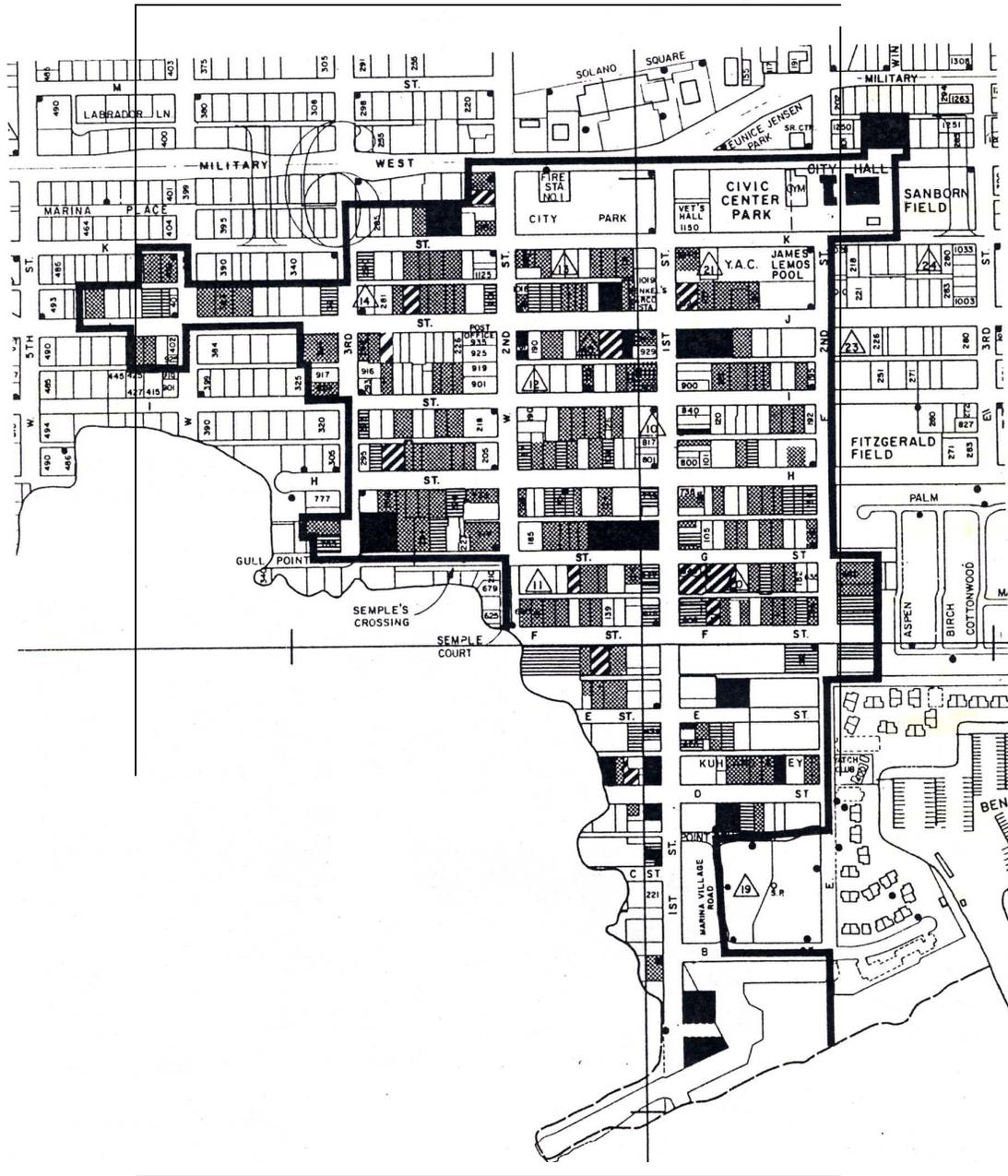
## PREVIOUS SURVEY AND DESIGNATION

The 1986 historic survey covered a broad geographic area lying generally between A Street and Military West and West 6<sup>th</sup> to East 6<sup>th</sup> Streets. The survey identified buildings that were 50 years of age or older, and undertook land use and property record research. Surveyed properties were recorded on DPR 523 forms. Forms included a photograph of each building.

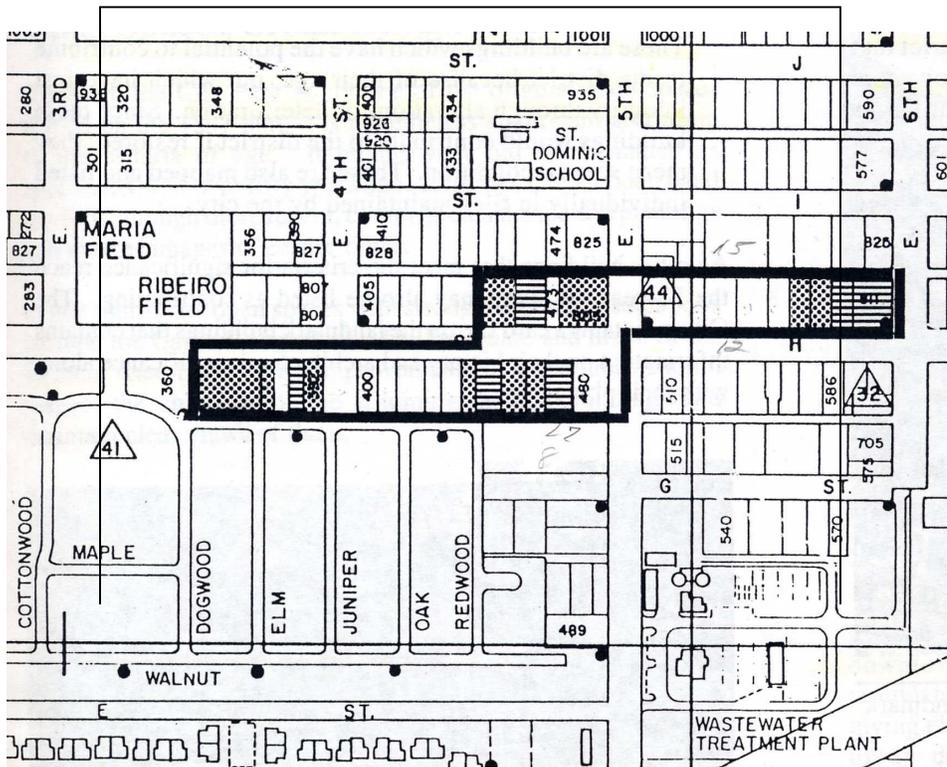
Subsequently, the *Downtown Historic Conservation Plan* prepared by architectural historian, Sally Woodbridge, provided a context statement for the surveyed area and defined boundaries for a Benicia Downtown Historic District. The context relies heavily on architectural analysis as the principal means of identifying historic properties. It discusses the main styles and periods represented within the Downtown area. The *Plan* identified four categories of significance: Landmarks, Potential Landmarks, District Contributors and Potential District Contributors. Landmarks are defined as buildings which are recognized through listing on a national or state register or which were identified as Landmarks in the Benicia Historic Survey. Potential Landmarks were defined as buildings which needed more research. Contributing buildings were defined as buildings of an age and/or [that are] representative of common styles and building types in the District, but which are not outstanding enough to merit individual recognition. Potential Contributors were defined as buildings which may have a problem of historic integrity.

A list of Landmarks and Potential Landmarks was published in the *Plan*. However, the *Plan* does not provide a comprehensive list of contributing and non-contributing buildings within the district. It does provide a Downtown District Map with a legend that delineates the status of the represented parcels. Unfortunately, the map suffers from three shortcomings in that it does not provide addresses or assessor parcel numbers, it varies in several specifics from the Downtown assessment maps, and it has not been updated for fifteen years. However, it remains the principal tool used to identify historic properties in the City of Benicia.

The 1986 survey forms provide information on individual properties. However, the DPR 523 forms are very inconsistent. Some forms consist of little more than field notations, while others provide more information. Most forms lack a clear building description that defines the significant features and important characteristics of the building. Forms do not include evaluations based on National Register Standards.



Existing District Boundary and identification map, *Downtown Historic Conservation Plan*, 1991.



Existing District Boundary and identification map, East H Street Extension, *Downtown Historic Conservation Plan*, 1991.

Although Benicia has made more progress than many communities in identifying and protecting its historical resources, the tools designed for carrying out these purposes suffer from incompleteness and, as time has passed, an increasing number of inaccuracies regarding building appearance, integrity, and use. In addition, since the *Plan* and the survey were prepared in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the regulatory environment within which the City's historic preservation program operates has altered substantially.

## REGULATORY CONTEXT

In 1992, California passed legislation establishing the California Register of Historical Resources. The California Register is intended to be a comprehensive list of the state's historic properties, and includes all buildings and historic districts listed or determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or directly nominated to the California Register of Historical Resources. It also includes a portion of the State's Historic Landmarks and Points of Historic Interest. The legislation also provided that buildings designated under local preservation ordinances, or included on local surveys may be included in the California Register. The California Register statute is contained in the

California Public Resources Code section 5024.1. The State Office of Historic Preservation has promulgated regulations for the implementation of the California Register which are included in the California Code of Regulations Title 14, Chapter 11, sections 4850 et seq.

The California Register directly links historical resources to environmental review. Properties included in the California Register or potentially eligible for listing in the California Register are defined as a part of the physical environment and are subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Public Resources Code 21084 makes explicit that a project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource is a project that may have a significant impact on the environment. Sections 15064.5 and 15126.4 of the CEQA Guidelines provide regulatory guidance regarding the application of environmental review to historical resources.

The creation of the California Register has made it necessary for local jurisdictions to identify and evaluate their historical resources under generally recognized standards, and in a manner that will inform and support project and land use decisions made by local commissions and governing bodies.

## **SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF CURRENT SURVEY**

The City of Benicia has formulated preservation goals intended to bring their program into closer conformity with state and federal standards. Under the *General Plan for Benicia* it is a City goal to maintain an inventory that will meet the standards of the National Park Service and the State Office of Historic Preservation and enable the City to become a Certified Local Government. The City obtained Certified Local Government Status in August 2007.

In 2004 the City hired Roland-Nawi Associates: Preservation Consultants, to update the survey of the Downtown Historic District to meet current standards. In addition to updating the Historic District Survey and preparing new DPR 523 forms for all eligible buildings, the City requested that a reconnaissance survey be conducted outside the District boundaries to identify any adjacent areas that contained a sufficiently coherent concentration of resources to be added to the existing district. If such an area or areas were identified, the City requested that DPR 523 forms be prepared to document it and appropriate boundaries be defined. All survey activities were to be conducted to the standards of the Certified Local Government Program and the California Register of Historical Resources.

General and property-specific research was conducted in October and November, 2004. Previous context statements and survey evaluations were reviewed. Secondary literature on the history and architecture of Benicia was reviewed. Information in the Community Development Department files regarding the district was made available for examination. The City provided two lists of historical buildings, one a database prepared by the City and the other the historic property map from the *Plan* (1991). These two “lists” were not

always internally consistent and in a number of cases provided conflicting evaluation codes for the same property. In addition, since the map has not been updated in fifteen years, it failed to reflect changes in use, demolitions and new construction. In some cases, lot delineation on the map is not consistent with the assessor parcel maps. Other documents employed to identify and interpret properties included Assessor Parcel Maps and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. The resources of the Benicia Archives and the California State Library were consulted. The Sanborn Maps proved to be particularly useful in understanding evolving land use patterns and in verifying the existence of the same or similar buildings on specific lots in particular periods of time in Benicia. The 1986 survey provided baseline data on many properties, including possible dates of construction and some previous ownership information. Photographs of historic buildings in Benicia in 1977 by the Historic American Building Survey and photographs from the 1986 Survey were very useful in identifying changes and alterations in recent years.

Phase I of the survey was limited to the Downtown Historic District. The Benicia Arsenal was outside the scope of the survey. Phase I involved a block by block field review of all buildings and structures within the existing District boundaries. Based on this field review all individually eligible and contributing District buildings were recorded on a DPR 523 A and B form. All forms include a detailed description of the property identifying its architectural style and the character defining features. Buildings were evaluated using the criteria of the California Register of Historical Resources and the National Register of Historic Places. Evaluations include recommendation as to whether a property is individually eligible for listing under the criteria and/or contributes to an eligible historic district. The context developed in 1991 was deemed by the City to be adequate for evaluation purposes and no revision of the context was undertaken as a part of this study.

DPR Forms were prepared for all buildings recommended for inclusion within the District. DPR forms were prepared on a discretionary basis for buildings which were tentatively identified as eligible for listing in the 1986 survey. The California Register and the State Office of Historic Preservation do not recognize categories such as “Potential Landmark” or “Potential Contributor” as a basis for land use and environmental regulation. A property must meet state and federal eligibility criteria and retain sufficient integrity to convey its significance in order to qualify as a historical resource under California law and regulation. Properties previously placed in the “potential” categories were field inspected, previous documentation was reviewed, and additional research was undertaken to determine if the building should be added to the list of District contributors and if a DPR 523 form should be prepared. In cases where the property did not appear to have any potential to meet the criteria, no form was prepared. Intensive survey was conducted between October, 2004 and March, 2005, with subsequent field checks employed as needed.

The Phase II scope of work was to identify areas outside the Downtown District boundaries that had potential to be added to the existing district, or to become a separate historic district within the general Downtown area. In September 2005, a preliminary survey was conducted in the areas outside, but adjacent to, the Downtown District. Based on this field review, and in consultation with the City Community Development Department, a group of

historic buildings on East K Street was identified as having a sufficient concentration to constitute a historic district eligible for listing in the California Register. This proposed district includes several residences and two historic school buildings. This area was intensively surveyed and a DPR 523 form was completed for each contributing building and boundaries for a potential district were defined.

All historically significant properties were photographed with Kodak Gold 200 film; photographic prints were converted to electronic files.

Construction dates on the DPR 523 forms are based on information from the previous survey and/or are based on the period in which the architectural style of the building was popular and widely used. Most dates refer to the decade in which the building was constructed rather than to a specific documented date of construction, although where a specific date was known, it is used. Property specific research in historic assessor records was not possible within the scope of the survey.

### **SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS**

The 1986 survey concentrated on the City's 19<sup>th</sup> century resources. As the oldest and, in some ways, the most distinguished of the City's architectural resources, they were deserving of concerted attention. Buildings from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were less consistently recorded and evaluated. As a result, the current District contributor list does not recognize many worthy examples of 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings. While some examples of Craftsman architecture were included as contributors, other, equally meritorious examples were excluded. This is also true of Period Revival Style buildings from the 1920s and 1930s. A number of buildings recommended for addition to the City's list of contributors are drawn from these later periods. The addition of these buildings as contributors to the District will provide a better rounded picture of the City's historic and architectural heritage and will enhance the ratio of contributing to non-contributing buildings within the District boundaries.

The current Landmark list concentrates heavily on civic and public buildings with the addition of a few particularly large and noteworthy residences. However, Benicia has several excellent examples of middle and working class houses that exemplify fine design and workmanship. A number of these are recommended for individual recognition and elevation to Landmark status.

Finally, Benicia has a rare collection of pre-1870 buildings. Often simple and vernacular in design, these types of buildings often do not receive the recognition that they deserve. I-house, Salt-box, Pyramidal Roof, and Front Gable houses are rare in California. With the rapid expansion of many urban areas, these early and simple structures were rapidly replaced by larger and more fashionable building types. While an evaluation was outside the scope of this study, it is quite possible that Benicia may have a non-contiguous National Register eligible district of early buildings, important for their vernacular style,

but also as examples of early California settlement. This may be a fruitful area for future research and documentation.

Of the properties that were field inspected and researched, 302 property forms (DPR 523) were prepared by Roland-Nawi and the local review committee.

46 properties are recommended as Landmarks. This includes confirmation of 26 existing Landmark properties and a recommendation that 19 additional properties within the Downtown Historic District and 1 property outside the District be elevated to Landmark status.

192 properties are recommended for the listing as contributors to the District. The 46 properties recommended for Landmark status also contribute, resulting in a total of 238 contributing properties in the Downtown Historic Overlay District. The 45 properties recommended for addition are included in this total.

**\*\* Note** - 45 properties of the 192 are recommended for addition to the City's historic property list. These include buildings that were previously listed as potentially eligible (PC), as well as a number of buildings that had not been previously identified as historic.

- Of these 45 properties, 5 are included in the Landmark category noted above; 8 are part of the proposed East K Street exclave
- The Historic Survey Ad Hoc Committee is recommending designation of 3 additional properties (822 West 2nd, 327 Gull Point Court and 470 West J- with coordinating boundary changes)
- The Historic Survey Ad Hoc Committee is recommending removal of 2 of these properties (916 West 3<sup>rd</sup> and 151-153 West H)

64 properties that were identified as either Contributors or Potential Contributors in the 1986 survey and in the *Plan* map (1991), or requested by the Historic Survey Ad Hoc Committee for evaluation, are recommended for removal or from the City's list of historic properties, or not recommended for designation. In the *Plan* potentially contributing properties (PC) were defined as properties that lacked integrity, but might become contributors if rehabilitated or restored in the future. Re-evaluation of these properties confirmed that they continue to have substantial problems that preclude their meeting accepted standards of historic integrity. The California Register of Historic Resources, CEQA, and the State Office of Historic Preservation only recognize historic properties that retain integrity in their present condition and appearance. Other properties in the removal category include reconstructions, new construction, demolitions, and substantially altered buildings or properties previously evaluated by professional consultants or deemed by the City Council to merit delisting.

- The Historic Survey Ad Hoc Committee recommended 16 of these properties retain their historic status and be listed as "contributors"
- The Historic Survey Ad Hoc Committee recommended that 10 of these properties be recognized as having Portuguese influence in their architecture. These properties should be re-evaluated upon completion of

a formal historic context. Staff recommends 6L classification from the California Historical Resources State Codes – *“Determined ineligible for local listing or designation through local government review process; may warrant special consideration in local planning.”* Effectively, this allows the City to monitor development activity on these properties.

In 2008 at the request of the City’s Historic Survey Ad-Hoc Committee all properties recommended for removal were resurveyed and re-evaluated. Forms were prepared for a number of properties that had not previously been recorded. This effort is reflected in the conclusions above.

### **FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

1) As discussed earlier in the report, the existing historic context for the Downtown Historic District concentrates primarily on architectural values. While these continue to be an important aspect of Benicia’s heritage, a broader understanding of the city’s historic and heritage resources could be achieved through the preparation of a new and enlarged context statement. Such a context statement might consider such areas as settlement history, business and industrial development, transportation, and the contribution of diverse social, cultural and ethnic groups within the community.

2) The large scope of this survey did not permit time for archival research in property records to establish precise construction dates and ownership. This is an area in which future research might be pursued.

2) Benicia has an unusual number of modest vernacular residential buildings dating from the 1860s and 1870s. In many areas of California such buildings have succumbed to development pressures and been demolished. The large number early buildings in Benicia constitute a rare historic heritage dating to the founding and earliest development of the state. The City has clearly recognized this in designating several of these buildings as local Landmarks. These resources should be given special consideration in decisions regarding demolition, alterations and additions. It is recommended that additional research be conducted to verify construction dates and to provide a detailed documented history of each of these early buildings. It is possible that these buildings may constitute a National Register eligible district.

3) Little is known about the architects and builder associated with Benicia’s historic built environment. Additional research in City Directories, property records, local newspapers and other biographical resources to identify some of these individuals would add substantially to the understanding and appreciation of many of the City’s buildings and residences.

## **PROPOSED NEW DISTRICT**

A new historic district is recommended between East Third and East Fourth Streets on East K. There is a concentration of historic residences and two school buildings which qualify as a historic district. These buildings date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and are good examples of the Vernacular, Queen Anne, Craftsman and Period Revival styles consistent with the Downtown District. These buildings are not in close proximity to the Downtown District boundaries and form a small coherent district of their own. This district would include the only two examples of historic school buildings in Benicia. The buildings recommended as contributors to the district include the following:

305 East K Street

350 East K Street (two school buildings on the same parcel)

315 East K Street

325 East K Street

333 East K Street

351 East K Street

281 East K Street

# PROPOSED EAST K STREET DISTRICT

