

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. PURPOSE OF THE EIR

In compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) describes the environmental consequences that could be associated with adoption and implementation of the *Lower Arsenal Mixed Use Specific Plan* (Draft Specific Plan). The EIR also examines alternatives to the Draft Specific Plan and recommends a set of mitigation measures to reduce or avoid potentially significant impacts. This EIR is designed to fully inform City of Benicia decision-makers, other responsible agencies, and the general public of the proposed Draft Specific Plan and the potential environmental consequences of its approval. The City of Benicia is the Lead Agency for environmental review of the proposed Draft Specific Plan.

A “tiered” approach will be used to meet the requirements of CEQA for adoption and implementation of the Draft Specific Plan. This EIR is a Program EIR. Section 15168 of the *CEQA Guidelines* states the following:

*A program EIR is an EIR which may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either: (1) geographically; (2) as logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions; (3) in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or (4) as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways.*

*Use of a program EIR can provide the following advantages: (1) provide an occasion for a more exhaustive consideration of effects and alternatives than would be practical in an EIR on an individual action; (2) ensure consideration of cumulative impacts that might be slighted in a case-by-case analysis; (3) avoid duplicative reconsideration of basic policy considerations; (4) allow the Lead Agency to consider broad policy alternatives and programwide mitigation measures at an early time when the agency has greater flexibility to deal with basic problems or cumulative impacts; and (5) allow reduction in paperwork.*

*Subsequent activities in the program must be examined in the light of the program EIR to determine whether an additional environmental document must be prepared.*

This Program EIR identifies general effects of the Draft Specific Plan. It is assumed that individual development projects proposed within the Draft Specific Plan area (Plan Area) would receive project-specific environmental evaluation, as necessary, during the development review process.

### B. PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project, the Draft Specific Plan, is intended to revitalize the Plan Area, which is currently underutilized, with several deteriorating historic buildings, poor internal connectivity, poor

visibility, and aging infrastructure. The description below summarizes the key aspects of the Draft Specific Plan. The proposed project is described in greater detail in Chapter III, Project Description.

The Draft Specific Plan would redevelop the existing 526,815 square feet of mixed uses currently occupying the Plan Area with approximately 741,865 square feet of new and redeveloped mixed uses, 22 new residential units, and 6.39 acres of open space. To acknowledge that existing uses may be used more efficiently during and after buildout of the Draft Specific Plan, the analysis in this Draft EIR is based on the assumption that the 526,815 square feet of redeveloped mixed uses could intensify by approximately 20 percent, resulting in an *effective* net increase of 105,363 square feet of mixed uses. The 105,363 square feet of redeveloped uses would not represent actual physical development on the site; instead, this number would represent an intensification of existing uses. Therefore, *for purposes of the environmental review in this Draft EIR, net change in development on the site would include 215,050 square feet of new mixed uses, 105,363 square feet of redeveloped uses, 22 residential units, and 6.39 acres of open space.* The 215,050 square feet of mixed uses would include a mixture of work/live units, retail and office space, and light industrial uses.

The Draft Specific Plan proposes to implement a form-based development code for the Plan Area. The form-based code provides standards for physical development of land uses appropriate and specific to the Plan Area and would be the primary regulations considered by the City in the review and approval of new development.

In order to respond to the diverse needs of the Plan Area and further define “mixed use,” the Draft Specific Plan includes design proposals for four distinct districts, or “zones,” that recognize the unique characteristics of each. These zones include: the Jefferson Ridge/Officers’ Row Zone; the Adams Street Zone; the Grant Street Zone; and South of Grant Street Zone. The Draft Specific Plan details proposed development within each zone.

## C. EIR SCOPE

The City of Benicia circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) notifying responsible agencies and interested parties that an EIR would be prepared for the Draft Specific Plan and indicating the environmental topics anticipated to be addressed in this EIR. The NOP was published on June 5, 2007. The NOP was mailed to public agencies, organizations, and individuals likely to be interested in the potential impacts of the project. Comments on the NOP were received by the City and considered during preparation of the EIR. A scoping session for the Draft EIR was held as a public meeting before the Planning Commission on April 12, 2007. A total of six comment letters regarding the NOP were received in addition to the verbal comments received at the public hearing. A copy of the NOP and the comment letters received are included in Appendix A of this EIR.

The following environmental topics are addressed as separate sections in this EIR:

- Land Use and Planning Policy
- Population, Employment and Housing
- Geology, Soils and Seismicity
- Hydrology and Water Quality

- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Biological Resources
- Transportation and Circulation
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Visual Resources
- Cultural and Paleontological Resources
- Public Services
- Utilities and Infrastructure
- Sustainability and Energy

#### **D. REPORT ORGANIZATION**

This EIR is organized into the following chapters:

- *Chapter I – Introduction:* Discusses the overall EIR purpose, provides a summary of the proposed project and the EIR scope, and summarizes the organization of the EIR.
- *Chapter II – Summary:* Provides a summary of the significant impacts that would result from implementation of the proposed Draft Specific Plan and describes mitigation measures recommended to reduce or avoid significant impacts. Discussions of potential areas of controversy and alternatives to the proposed project are also provided.
- *Chapter III – Project Description:* Provides a description of the Draft Specific Plan in terms that are relevant to this environmental review, including a description of the Plan Area, the regulatory context, and Draft Specific Plan development assumptions, and proposed implementation and financing.
- *Chapter IV – Setting, Impacts and Mitigation Measures:* Includes a description of existing setting and the environmental analysis (impacts and mitigation measures) for each environmental technical topic. The description of existing conditions (setting) includes a list of applicable regulatory policies (federal, State, and local). The environmental analysis section for each environmental topic describes the elements of the proposed project (i.e., the proposed Draft Specific Plan policies) that are applicable to the subject environmental topic; provides an analysis of potential environmental impacts and their level of significance; and recommends mitigation measures to mitigate significant impacts.

Potential adverse impacts are identified by levels of significance, as follows: less-than-significant impact (LTS), significant impact (S), and significant unavoidable impact (SU). The significance of each impact is categorized before and after implementation of any recommended mitigation measure(s).

- *Chapter V – Alternatives:* Provides an evaluation of four alternative development scenarios to the proposed Draft Specific Plan, including a No Project alternative.

- *Chapter VI – CEQA-Required Assessment Conclusions:* Provides the required analysis of the overall impacts of the proposed Draft Specific Plan, including: effects found not to be significant; growth-inducing impacts; significant irreversible and unavoidable impacts; and cumulative impacts for the environmental issues found to have significant effects.
- *Chapter VII – Report Preparation:* Identifies preparers of the EIR, references used and persons and organizations contacted.