

1000 FRIENDS PROTECTING HISTORIC BENICIA

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1,000 Friends Protecting Historic Benicia, a local non-profit, fights to save Officers' Row, in the nationally recognized Benicia Arsenal Historic District, from city approved development that will destroy the district's historic significance. The development threatens Civil-War era buildings and grounds surviving from President Lincoln's commissioning of the Benicia Arsenal Army base.

WHAT: 1000 Friends Protecting Historic Benicia is suing the City of Benicia to stop it from issuing permits and is seeking a peremptory writ of mandate ordering the City and its agencies and commissions to set aside and void the City's recent approvals of two development projects in the Benicia Arsenal Historic District.

"Projects that destroy or impair the significance of a site on the National Register, as these projects do, clearly have the most significant adverse impact on historic resources," said Gary Widman, former Chief Counsel for the California State Department of Parks and Recreation and the Office of Historic Preservation.

BACKGROUND: In August 2022, the City of Benicia approved two development projects for Officers' Row in the heart of the Benicia Arsenal Historic District which the U.S. government listed on the National Register of Historic Places, deeming it worthy of preservation due to its historical significance to the country.

[The Jefferson Ridge Project](#) would build 121 housing units and 2,000 square feet of commercial/retail space on Jefferson Street, including the former flag pole assembly area between the Commanding Officer's Quarters and the Lieutenant's Quarters. A total of 16 three-story structures would flank Jefferson Street, dominating the three historic houses adjacent to this project and blocking character-defining views of the Carquinez Strait.

[The 1451 Park Road Project](#), would build 17 apartments in 2 two-story buildings incompatible with the scale and style of the historic non-commissioned officers' quarters immediately west on Jefferson Street.

Designated a **State Historical Landmark** in 1935, the Benicia Arsenal was placed on the **National Register of Historic Places** in 1976 and was a key contributor to establishment of the **National Park Service's Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area** in 2019.

The Arsenal's Officers' Row offers one of the nation's most impressive ensembles of mid-19th-century military architecture and open spaces, largely intact as built over 150 years ago. Meticulously planned by the Army, the layout is a prime example of military site design, with careful thought given to building scale, placement, and sight lines.

The two projects needed the City of Benicia to determine that they qualified for fast-track approval under a new state law, [California Senate Bill 35 \(SB 35\)](#), that restricts review of projects to their consistency with “objective standards.”

Members of the community highlighted several conflicts with the Arsenal Historic Conservation Plan (AHCP) and objective planning and zoning standards for both projects. This included several standards for which the City claimed the projects demonstrated consistency.

The City subsequently removed many of the standards it had identified as conflicting with the projects as proposed.

The City also failed to incorporate many standards from the AHCP. In particular, a commenter stated that in reviewing the 1451 Park Road Project, the City only applied 37 of the 64 design standards and guidelines from the AHCP that apply to the design of residential buildings in Officers’ Row.

The City failed to consider public safety standards because City staff stated that Senate Bill 35 applications were not subject to any such standards, since they contain subjective as well as objective elements and therefore had to be considered subjective.

Despite the various inconsistencies, on August 26, 2022, the City issued ministerial approvals for both projects. The City subsequently denied members of the public the right to appeal the two projects.

ACTION: The lawsuit challenges both approvals based on errors in assessing environmental hazards and violations of City of Benicia ordinances concerning the current general plan and zoning.

1000 Friends Protecting Historic Benicia is a non-profit Benicia organization represented by attorney Doug Carstens, Chatten-Brown, Carstens & Minter, a public interest-oriented law firm specializing in environmental and land use law. Individuals of the non-profit and other members of the public are on record with the City with many protest letters and public hearing appearances over the past two years. The ultimate goal of this campaign is to establish a park that will honor and protect the nationally recognized Arsenal Historic District forever,

DONATIONS: “Receiving support from historic preservation groups across California and nationwide is an important source of funds for our campaign,” said Toni Haughey.

Please make checks to the 1000 Friends Protecting Historic Benicia, P.O. Box 193, Benicia, CA 94510. This is a 501(c)(3) non profit benefit organization.

WEBSITE: 1000FriendsPHB.org