

**PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT**  
**November 14, 2023**

**WHAT:** *Imagine* - 1000 Friends Protecting Historic Benicia is sponsoring a **design competition** to do just that - imagine. The vision and ideas of students and community members submitted to the competition will be on view - two classes from Benicia High School are submitting nine concepts. One other entry has been submitted at press time which is before the deadline of November 15<sup>th</sup>.

**WHERE:** Benicia Public Library Dona Benicia Room

**WHO:** Anyone can come to the Library and vote for the design that you think meets the criteria derived from the adopted Conservation Plan and the Secretary of Interior Standards.

**WHEN:** November 16<sup>th</sup> 6:00-9:00 PM, 18<sup>th</sup> Noon-5:00 PM, and 19<sup>th</sup> Noon-5:00 PM

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Imagine you are stationed at the only West Coast Arsenal - Benicia. It's 1863 - Imagine you are living in the Commanding Officers Quarters. Imagine no more. You can visit the Historic Jefferson Ridge to see the Arsenal as it was at its closure in 1964. There are a few changes, but the general **military spacing and massing and views** to other military buildings as well as views

to the only water access to inland California remain. There is a reason that the Clocktower is located on a promontory overlooking the Carquinez Strait.

Many in Benicia cherish this one-of-a-kind military installation. It's story begins in 1849. There were different active branches of the Army - ordnance, infantry, artillery, and medical corps. Each established a garrison, barracks and the first hospital west of the Mississippi. In 1852 the Ordinance Branch took over. The Clocktower, as we know it, was an arsenal fortress to store gun powder, cannon balls, and other military equipment. And to defend against vigilantes and foreign invaders.

President Lincoln thought it was important enough in 1862 to order the lands "... be segregated from the public lands for purposes of the Secretary of the Interior ..." – because there was some doubt as to the legal transfer from General Vallejo to Robert Semple and Thomas Larkin. Holding California free from slavery and preventing confederate traitors from gold thefts was critical.

Ms. Wold, a recent graduate from the University of California at Berkeley, imagined in 1974 what the closed Historic Arsenal could mean for all of California and dedicated herself to submitting nearly one hundred applications to the National Park Service (NPS) for designating buildings for historic and architectural values. She recommended a historic district should be created. With a few modifications the federal Department of Interior's National Park Service agreed with her selections, descriptions, and importance. The state designated it as State Historical Landmark No. 176.

We have **four historic districts** on the National Register of Historic Places. Four. Why not one district? Because from 1964 to 1975 there were changes including tearing down a few structures (the Gate House at entrance for example) and new construction. The consequence was enough to break up the integrity of a whole 232-acre historic district encompassing the Camel Barns, the hospital, Jefferson Ridge, and lower Arsenal. The four districts as listed on the National Register of Historic Places is recognized in the Delta National Heritage Area inventory of resources.

Benicia residents advocated for official city recognition of the Historic Arsenal and by November 1993 adopted the **Arsenal Historic Conservation Plan**. The conservation plan is intended to achieve the purposes of including, but not only, encourage development tailored to the character and significance of ... historic district.

- The goals, objectives, design guidelines and criteria to be used in guiding future development . . . . to safeguard the architectural and historic integrity [of the district] pg. 2
- . . appropriate . . . new construction . . . *not damage by insensitive or incompatible construction which would **deduct from the historic image and waterfront setting of the Arsenal district.***

- The City intends to implement this Conservation Plan in a manner consistent with these existing port/industrial uses.
- The period of significance for the **Arsenal Historic District is 1849 . . . to 1964**, when the Benicia Arsenal was deactivated. Pg. 8
- . . . the Arsenal has some of the state’s most architecturally distinguished buildings notably the Storehouse and Ammunition Shop (Camel Barns), Clocktower, Powder Magazine, Shops and the **Officers’ Residences**. Pg. 12
- Preserve, maintain, and promote appropriate adaptive reuse . . . **preserve important natural features**, including hillsides, slopes and vegetation which have been identified as integral to the district’s character . . . pg 19
- **Maintain key views of historic structures and the water**, pg. 19

Now imagine what could be developed in a manner consistent with these.

**1000 Friends Protecting Historic Benicia** is sponsoring a **design competition** to do just that. The vision and ideas of students and community members submitted to the competition will be on view November 16, 18 and 19<sup>th</sup> at the Benicia Library. Two classes from Benicia High School are submitting nine concepts. One other entry has been submitted at press time which is before the deadline of November 15<sup>th</sup>.

Anyone can come to the Library and vote for the design that you think meets the criteria derived from the adopted Conservation Plan and the Secretary of Interior Standards.

By the way, the city approved two-story 138 apartments – yep, doesn’t even come close to the goals, objectives, design guidelines and criteria. The consequence will threaten the future historic status of Jefferson Ridge. We know almost anyone could do better. Come, view, and vote.

**Help.** We filed a lawsuit to stop this destructive development. Your **donations** help us fight a bad plan for history, for public health (it is adjacent to heavy industry) and the climate (no transit and no walkability). **Send checks to 1000 Friends PHB, P.O. Box 193, Benicia, CA, 94510 or charge at website 1000friendsphb.org**

*Can you locate tennis courts, fountains and gardens at Jefferson Ridge at various times from the 1860s to 1964?*

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