VI. CEQA-REQUIRED ASSESSMENT CONCLUSIONS

As required by CEQA, this chapter discusses the following types of impacts that could result from implementation of the proposed project: growth-inducing impacts; significant irreversible changes; cumulative impacts; effects found not to be significant; and unavoidable significant effects.

A. GROWTH INDUCEMENT

A project is considered growth-inducing if it would directly or indirectly foster substantial economic or population growth or the construction of additional housing.[1] Examples of projects likely to have significant growth-inducing impacts include extensions or expansions of infrastructure systems beyond what is needed to serve project-specific demand, and development of new residential subdivisions or industrial parks in areas that are currently only sparsely developed or are undeveloped. Typically, redevelopment projects on infill sites that are surrounded by existing urban uses are not considered growth-inducing because redevelopment by itself usually does not facilitate development intensification on adjacent sites.

The proposed project, which involves the development of a business park on the edge of Benicia, has the potential to induce growth in three key ways: 1) the extension of infrastructure into a currently undeveloped area; 2) the development of industrial and commercial uses at the edge of Benicia; and 3) job growth, which could indirectly attract new residents to the area (and an increased demand for housing). The project, which includes no housing development, would not directly induce population growth. As described below, the project is not expected to be substantially growth inducing, although it would result in the development of one of Benicia's largest sites planned for urban uses.

Infrastructure Extension. The proposed project would result in the extension of utilities into a site that has been recently been used for grazing. New infrastructure would include 12- to 15-inch water lines, sewer lines of various sizes, storm drains, and electric/energy and telecommunications lines. As part of the project, Reservoir Road would be abandoned, and Industrial Way would be extended through the site to Lake Herman Road. The new utility infrastructure on the site would be substantial, but is planned to serve uses proposed as part of the project, and not existing or proposed development around the project site (including residential development on open space lands to the north of Lake Herman Road, which has been considered in the past). The extension of new infrastructure to the project site has been planned by the City as part of its General Plan process, which resulted in the designation of the project site for industrial and commercial uses. Because the infrastructure on the site would be built to satisfy anticipated project demand, and not anticipated demand for future development around the project site, it would not induce growth.

Development at Benicia's Edge. New population and employment growth in Benicia is likely to take place in Downtown, where select parcels are being redeveloped, and on the edge of the City, where

[1] *CEQA Guidelines*, 2006. § 15126.2(d).

relatively large tracts of land are available – or are likely to be available in the future – for development. The Benicia Business Park would be developed near the urban limits of the City, in the vicinity of potential future growth areas. The project site is located immediately northeast of large residential subdivisions that have been built over the last 10 years. However, the growth-inducing potential of the project in its proposed location would be constrained by several factors, including: existing General Plan and Zoning designations in the vicinity of the site (much of the land in the City used as open space is currently designated for such uses); limited supply of currently-available land within City limits; a regulatory process that discourages development on open lands; an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) that does not allow for intense development north of lake Herman Road and west of the church; and the City's propensity for moderate to slow long-term growth. Therefore, development of a business park at the edge of Benicia would not be expected to substantially induce growth through the development of surrounding areas.

Job Growth. Implementation of the proposed project is expected to result in the direct creation of 7,680 jobs. In addition, the project is anticipated to result in spin-off economic effects that could indirectly create additional jobs in Benicia.[2] The business park would increase the City's revenue, potentially allowing for enhanced City services, which could in and of itself attract new employers and job growth. The direct and indirect job growth that is expected to result from the project could also indirectly result in population growth in the area, as persons seek housing in Benicia that is in close proximity to job centers. Although the business park could result in a local population increase, the scale of this increase is anticipated to be reduced by a lack of large-scale opportunities for residential development in Benicia and the availability of housing in other parts of the County. The County itself currently maintains a jobs/housing imbalance, in which many residents commute outside of the area for jobs. With development of the business park, it is likely that some commuters who currently work outside the County would decide to seek employment in Benicia. These sorts of employment changes would not necessarily entail population growth, but rather a shifting of job locations. In addition, the County has a relatively affordable housing supply compared to the rest of the Bay Area, indicating slightly reduced demand for housing. Some of the existing vacant or underutilized housing in the County would likely accommodate some of the new employees at the business park. Therefore, job growth associated with the proposed project is not likely to substantially induce growth.

B. SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE CHANGES

An EIR must identify any significant irreversible environmental changes that could result from implementation of a proposed project. These may include current or future uses of non-renewable resources, and secondary or growth-inducing impacts that commit future generations to similar uses. CEQA dictates that irretrievable commitments of resources should be evaluated to assure that such current consumption is justified.[3] The *CEQA Guidelines* describe three distinct categories of significant irreversible changes: 1) changes in land use that would commit future generations; 2) irreversible changes from environmental actions; and 3) consumption of non-renewable resources.

[2] Applied Development Economics, 2006. *Economic Impact Analysis of the Proposed Benicia Business Park.* August.

[3] *CEQA Guidelines*, 2003. § 15126.2(c).

1. Changes in Land Use Which Would Commit Future Generations

Implementation of the proposed project would result in the development of approximately 347 acres of land recently used for livestock grazing into a business park. The remainder of the project site would be covered with landscaping or would contain preserved natural areas (including a significant drainage). The preservation of open space in perpetuity would be considered a beneficial impact of the project. However, development of business park uses would be considered a significant irreversible land use change. The project would remove several environmental resources on the site, including intermittent drainage channels, wetlands, riparian vegetation, groves of trees, hillsides, and scenic viewsheds. Although the proposed land uses are anticipated in the City's General Plan, the proposed type and intensity of development would permanently change the landscape of the City. Because the proposed project includes relatively intense urban uses and 9,000,000 cubic yards of grading, it is unlikely that the site would ever be restored to its pre-project landscape.

2. Irreversible Changes From Environmental Actions

No significant irreversible environmental damage, such as what could occur as a result of an accidental spill or explosion of hazardous materials, is anticipated due to implementation of the proposed project. Compliance with federal, State and local regulations, and the mitigation measures identified in Section IV.E, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, would reduce to a less-than-significant level the possibility that hazardous substances within the project site would cause significant environmental damage.

3. Consumption of Nonrenewable Resources

Consumption of nonrenewable resources includes conversion of agricultural lands, loss of access to mining reserves, and use of non-renewable energy sources. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the loss of agricultural uses associated with the conversion of grazing land to business park uses. After implementation of the proposed project, it would probably not be practical to continue grazing activities on the portions of the site reserved for open space (in addition to portions of the site developed with industrial and commercial uses). The project site does not contain Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide importance; therefore, valuable agricultural soils would not be lost through development of the project.

The project site does not contain significant mineral reserves. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not result in the loss of significant mineral resources. Development of the proposed project would require the use of energy to fuel grading vehicles, trucks, and other construction vehicles. It is anticipated that all or most of this energy would be derived from non-renewable resources. Energy consumption would also occur during the operational period of the project due to the use of automobiles, appliances, and heating, cooling, and ventilation systems.

Energy reduction through design and land use decisions would typically occur through the minimization of automobile use. Automobile use can be reduced on new development sites in a variety of ways, including through the improvement of bicycle and pedestrian access, the location of new development near transit nodes, and the creation of a street grid that encourages walking. The proposed project would include bike lanes along East 2nd Street and Industrial Way, which could encourage bicycling. However, the current conceptual design of the project, with its streets ending in cul-de-sacs, lack of connectivity to surrounding areas, lack of trails through the open space areas, and primary orientation to the freeway, would discourage the use of alternate forms of transportation.

There is no plan or proposed features to increase pedestrian or transit access to the project site. Users of the business park would be expected to rely heavily on single-occupancy automobiles. Therefore, the proposed project would be expected to result in the substantial consumption of nonrenewable resources.

C. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

CEQA defines cumulative impacts as "two or more individual effects, which, when considered together, are considerable, or which can compound or increase other environmental impacts." Section 15130 of the *CEQA Guidelines* requires that an EIR evaluate potential environmental impacts that are individually limited but cumulatively considerable. These impacts can result from the proposed project alone, or together with other projects. The *CEQA Guidelines* state: "The cumulative impact from several projects is the change in the environment which results from the incremental impact of the project when added to other closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable probable future projects. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time."[4]

1. Methodology

When evaluating cumulative impacts, CEQA envisions the use of either a list of past, present, and probable future projects, including projects outside the control of the lead agency, or a summary of projections in an adopted planning document, or some reasonable combination of the two approaches. This cumulative analysis uses the development assumptions in the City's General Plan.

2. Cumulative Effects of the Proposed Project

The following analysis examines the cumulative effects of the proposed project. The potential cumulative effects of the proposed project are summarized below for each of the topics that are analyzed in Chapter IV of the EIR.

a. Land Use and Planning Policy. Planned development in Benicia would generally occur on infill parcels in Downtown and on smaller to medium-size parcels of land near the City's outer edges. This development, like the proposed project, is anticipated to be compatible with surrounding land uses and would not create barriers that would divide established neighborhoods. As described in the Land Use and Planning Policy section, the proposed project would result in a substantial conflict with numerous General Plan policies that promote the protection of existing creek channels, viewsheds, and wetlands, and that encourage the development of neighborhoods that promote the use of alternate forms of transportation. Although select individual policy conflicts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level with implementation of the mitigation measures outlined in this EIR, the cumulative effect of the policy inconsistencies (even with mitigation) would represent a significant environmental impact. Therefore, the proposed project would result in a **significant and unavoidable** cumulative contribution to policy inconsistency in the City. This policy inconsistency would cause the City to deviate from the overarching goals and policies in the General Plan, many of which were adopted for the purpose of protecting the environment, and the results could be adverse physical impacts.

[4] *CEQA Guidelines*, 2006. Section 15355.

b. Population, Employment and Housing. Cumulative projects in the City would increase Benicia's employment and housing base. The employment growth that would result from implementation of the proposed project is generally consistent with growth planned in the General Plan. The project would not substantially induce population growth, result in the removal of existing housing, or result in the displacement of people. Therefore, the project would not make a significant cumulative contribution to adverse population, employment, and housing impacts.

c. Geology, Soils and Seismicity. Geology-related impacts of the proposed project are typical of development sites in the Bay Area with steep slopes. Implementation of the proposed project would result in impacts associated with earthshaking, expansive soils, soil deformation, and landslides. These impacts would be confined to the project site and would be reduced to a less-than-significant level with implementation of the mitigation measures recommended in the Geology, Soils and Seismicity section and adherence to the construction standards in the applicable Uniform Building Code. The geologic impacts of other planned projects in Benicia would also be reduced with similar mitigation measures. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a significant cumulative geologic impact.

d. Hydrology and Water Quality. The proposed project, like some of the other planned projects in Benicia, would increase impervious surfaces and increase downstream flood hazards. Construction activities (particularly 9,000,000 cubic yards of grading proposed as part of the project) and operation of the project also have the potential to degrade the quality of surface water and creeks in Benicia. The implementation of mitigation measures outlined in Section IV.D, Hydrology and Water Quality would reduce the project's hydrology and water quality impacts to a less-than-significant level. Other planned projects in the City would likely be required to implement similar measures. However, the proposed project would eliminate much of the natural drainage pattern on the site through the filling of existing drainages and swales. Mitigation measures to reduce this impact require the development of best management storm water features and engineered solutions. Although storm water features and new storm drain infrastructure would reduce the direct flooding and water quality impacts of the project, the hydrology of the project site would be permanently changed, and the long-term function of the mitigating features and structures (unlike the function of the existing drainages) is unknown. Changes to Benicia's hydrology and drainage that would result from the project would represent a **significant and unavoidable** cumulative hydrologic impact.

e. Hazards and Hazardous Materials. Implementation of the proposed project could result in the release of hazardous materials used during development activities, in addition to lead and asbestos associated with the demolition of buildings on the site. The project could also expose persons to wildfire hazards and hazardous materials at the project site, including explosives. Planned projects in Benicia could also release hazardous materials associated with construction activities. Foreseeable projects built on the outskirts of Benicia could also result in wildfire hazards. However, the hazards impacts of the proposed project and planned projects would be reduced to a less-than-significant level through adherence to federal, State, and local hazardous materials regulations, and through the implementation of standard mitigation measures and conditions of approval. Therefore, the cumulative hazards impacts of the project would not be considered significant.

f. Biological Resources. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the loss of existing wetlands, riparian zones, and creek channels, and could diminish the habitat and population

of a variety of protected plant and animal species ranging from pappose tarplant, to California red-legged frog, to American badger. Projects in Benicia planned for previously undeveloped sites would be expected to result in similar impacts. The project's impacts to these resources would be reduced to a less-than-significant level with implementation of the mitigation measures in Section IV.F, Biological Resources, which include the development of mitigation wetlands. However, the proposed project would diminish the quantity of naturally-occurring wetland and drainage channels in Benicia. These channels would be replaced with create wetlands, which typically have lower habitat value and species diversity than naturally-occurring wetlands. This cumulative impact would be considered **significant and unavoidable**.

g. Transportation and Circulation. Refer to Section IV.G, Transportation and Circulation for a detailed description of the cumulative transportation-related effects of the proposed project. The Benicia Business Park is projected to cause 11 out of the 20 study intersections to operate at unacceptable LOS E or worse under Cumulative Plus Project Conditions. In addition, the project would result in significant cumulative congestion on Interstate 780 (I-780). The project, which includes no transit or pedestrian facilities, would also discourage the use of alternate modes of transportation. The project's congestion-related impacts and lack of facilities to encourage alternative transportation would result in a significant transportation impact in the cumulative condition. However, all significant cumulative impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level with implementation of recommended mitigation measures.

h. Air Quality. The proposed project would result in significant emissions of regional air contaminants, particularly reactive organic gases, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter. These emissions would not be reduced to a less-than-significant level, resulting in a **significant and unavoidable** cumulative impact.

i. Noise. Implementation of the proposed project and cumulative projects would increase noise levels in Benicia and surrounding areas due to construction-period activity and increased traffic on City streets. Other foreseeable projects in Benicia would have similar impacts. However, noise increases associated with the project would occur along major roadways and in areas primarily used for industrial uses, and would not adversely affect sensitive receptors. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in significant noise impacts in conjunction with other planned projects in Benicia.

j. Visual Resources. The proposed project would substantially alter the visual character of the project site through the conversion of land recently used for grazing into a business park and the substantial redesign of the site topography through grading. Other foreseeable projects could result in similar landscape changes in Benicia, including the development of hillsides, drainages, and wet-lands. The proposed project, in conjunction with other cumulative development, would substantially change views from public viewpoints in Benicia and the overall visual character of the City. Therefore, the proposed project would have a **significant and unavoidable** impact on visual resources.

k. Cultural and Paleontological Resources. Construction activities associated with the proposed project could result in significant impacts to archaeological resources and human remains. However, the proposed project would be subject to measures that protect identified and previously unidentified archeological resources. Other foreseeable projects in the City would be subject to similar measures. Therefore, the proposed project, in conjunction with the cumulative projects, would not result in a significant impact to archaeological resources.

l. Public Services. The proposed project, along with other planned projects in Benicia, would increase demand for police and fire services. This increased demand could compromise the emergency response times of the police and fire departments. The proposed project, like other foreseeable projects, would be required to contribute its pro-rata share or other funding to the construction of new police and fire facilities in the City. These new facilities would allow emergency responders to maintain adequate emergency response times. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a significant cumulative public services impact.

m. Utilities. Implementation of the proposed project would require the extension of water supply and wastewater conveyance infrastructure into the project site. In addition, the project would increase demand for water, wastewater treatment, solid waste disposal, energy, and telecommunications. The City currently has adequate water supply and wastewater treatment capacity to accommodate planned development. Although on-site infrastructure improvements would be required to provide a range of utilities to the proposed project and cumulative projects, associated impacts would generally be site-specific. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a significant cumulative impact to utilities and infrastructure.

n. Urban Decay. The retail/commercial uses proposed as part of the project would be absorbed into Benicia's existing retail market without significant adverse impacts to existing businesses, including businesses in Downtown Benicia. The proposed project is anticipated to enhance the economy of the area and would not result in cumulative urban decay impacts.

D. EFFECTS FOUND NOT TO BE SIGNIFICANT

Based on visits to the project site and preliminary research, the proposed project is not expected to result in significant impacts related to mineral resources. The project site does not contain significant mineral resources.

E. SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

The proposed project would result in the following significant unavoidable impacts: 1) conflict with a substantial number of City General Plan policies adopted for the purpose of protecting the environment, resulting in adverse physical environmental effects; 2) emit significant levels of regional air pollutants, including reactive organic gases, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter; and 3) adversely change the visual quality of the project site by removing scenic landscape features, including hillsides and drainages.

The proposed project, in combination with other anticipated development in the City's General Plan, would result in significant unavoidable cumulative impacts related to the following environmental considerations: land use and planning policy; hydrology and water quality; biological resources; air quality; and visual resources.