

CHAPTER TWELVE

COMMUNITY DESIGN

OVERVIEW OF THE GRASS VALLEY SETTING AND FUNCTION

Grass Valley is an historic gold mining community that was established in the 1850's. Its downtown core abounds with historic residential and commercial structures dating to its inception. This rich architectural character is a valuable asset to Grass Valley's charm as well as its tourism industry.

Over the past 150 years Grass Valley has experienced sustained growth, as indicated in the Land Use Chapter of this Background Report. The numerous mines in the area were the primary employment centers until the 1930's, complemented by commercial and service functions, most of which were concentrated in downtown Grass Valley. Annexations beginning in the World War II and post-war era facilitated residential development outside the 19th Century town boundaries. Small scale neighborhood commercial developments sprouted, especially along major transportation routes, as 1) residential areas developed further from downtown and 2) the automobile became the common mode for shopping ventures, largely supplanting foot travel. In order to accommodate the automobile in this dispersion of residential and commercial development newer areas took on a much different appearance than the historic downtown core; streets became wider and parking lots flourished. Because of the ease of movement of people and goods, stand-alone uses could survive and the continuity of the retail environment and the adjacency of residential and commercial uses became less prevalent.

Today Grass Valley is the center for commerce in Nevada County with over a third of all retail sales and a half of all jobs. This vibrant economic base results in an influx of workers during the weekday and tourists during the weekend placing a burden on the City's circulation and parking systems. Most of these workers reside outside of the Incorporated City and even outside of the planning area. In unincorporated Nevada County in the Grass Valley vicinity, this has resulted in relatively uncontrolled sprawl, a blurring of community definition, lack of public infrastructure, reduced pedestrian and highway safety, and automobile congestion.

CHARACTER OF THE SUBAREAS IN THE GRASS VALLEY PLANNING AREA

The following discussions of subareas describe areas in the community that have distinctive characteristics. They are not intended to be inclusive but rather generalizations of development patterns.

HISTORIC CORE

The historic downtown core is a combination of commercial, civic and residential uses. The commercial district is abundant with quaint turn of the century buildings. The southeast quadrant

of downtown (bounded by South Auburn, Main and Highway 49) is a mixture of the old and the new, newer buildings and styles including City Hall, Police Station, Post Office, the old department store building, and the new gas station/mini-mart. Brockington Manor (the Safeway Shopping Center) is also an example of more contemporary architecture (quasi-southwestern) not compatible with the downtown. One newer building that is very sympathetic to the historic character of downtown is the Well Fargo Bank building.

The entrances to downtown via South Auburn and Colfax are not at all compatible with the historic nature of the remainder of downtown. This area could be the subject of a major beautification effort to lure the visitor into downtown.

To the north and west of the commercial core are the historic residential neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are best characterized by small Victorian era homes on small lots along narrow streets.

EAST MAIN AND OTHER COMMERCIAL STRIP DEVELOPMENT

East Main Street from Idaho – Maryland Road northeastward is a strip commercial area developed since 1950. Other commercial areas were developed earlier along major transportation corridors. The areas have a combination of older highway commercial developments and more contemporary neighborhood shopping centers. Most developments have parking lots between the building and the public right-of-way. The buildings do not reflect the historic character of the core area. The roadway right-of-ways are only partially improved and not particularly “pedestrian friendly”.

NEWER RESIDENTIAL

There are essentially two eras of newer residential neighborhoods, those built between 1900 and 1950 and those built after 1950. The older of these neighborhoods were built closer to the core and those built after 1950 were dispersed, some adjacent to the established areas and others with varying degrees of connection to the historic core. The closer-in homes were built along streets that followed a terrain driven street grid pattern, were smaller in size, had porches and less dominant garages (if any). A few were developed with alleys servicing the rear of the property. The homes built further from the core are more traditional suburban type housing on winding streets with two car garages.

INDUSTRIAL/BUSINESS PARK

With the exception of mining, industrial areas and business parks are relatively new to Grass Valley. They are located in three general locations: South Auburn Street, Idaho – Maryland Road (including Whispering Pines) and Sierra College Drive. All three areas are relatively distant and unconnected to the historic core.

Many of the business park and industrial areas have been developed as planned “park” subdivisions with development guidelines. Others are independent individual projects.

The “park” subdivisions have large setbacks and off-street parking requirements. Because of setback standards and sloping terrain many buildings and parking areas are not evident from surrounding streets. The buildings are generally typical of late 20th Century suburban commercial buildings, characterized by unpainted wood siding and metal roofing.

PROPOSED ANNEXATION AREAS

The City is currently considering three annexations: North Star Mine, Loma Rica Ranch, and Kenny Ranch. Planning for these annexations presents an opportunity to approach new growth in Grass Valley in a manner that comprehensively addresses issues that sometimes results from new development on the fringes of older, established towns: excessive infrastructure, such as extra wide streets; unnecessarily high development costs; substantial amounts of wasted land; and unattractive building design. If the pending annexations are planned properly, there can be a substantial reduction in development costs, long-term maintenance costs, and environmental impacts as well as a substantial enhancement in the quality of life within the annexed areas and within Grass Valley as a whole.

In general, these communities should be planned with the following considerations:

Maximization of the quantity of open space: All three annexations could be developed with the same quantity of proposed uses but in a substantially more compact form and thus a substantially higher percentage of open space.

Reduced infrastructure development costs: Utilizing the more compact form suggested above could result in a reduction in the amount of development infrastructure cost by 30-60%.

Village Centers: With a more compact development form and greater open space buffers, fringe areas can be developed as villages capable of supporting a more pleasant community ambience, enhanced quality of life, a dramatic reduction in automobile trips, and environmental quality. A village form can greatly reduce the number of internal trips within the developing areas (such as the annexation areas) and increase the potential for transit links to other parts of the community.

Building and infrastructure guidelines: Guidelines could be developed for the annexation areas to promote higher quality building design and enhanced accessibility for pedestrians within the village.

CURRENT DESIGN DOCUMENTS

“DESIGN MANUAL - DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT” – 1981

The Design Manual is a multipurpose document which is 1) an inventory of historic, visual and cultural resources in the historic core of Grass Valley and 2) a very general guide by which to design and review projects (rehabilitation and new construction) in the downtown area. Elements of the Design Criteria include Height, Proportion, Spacing, Scale, Color and Tone, Textures, Materials, Projections, Roof and Parapet Shapes, Lighting, Signage, Canopies, Landscaping, Parking and Service and Architectural Details. These elements would be more helpful to the designer if they were more specific and provided required standards in addition to more general guidance. In addition, two important elements that are not included are Windows and the sidewalk level Storefront. The Manual is applicable in the review of projects in the “Historic District” as well as the remainder of the downtown area.

“DOWNTOWN FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM” GUIDELINES

The Façade Improvement Program Guidelines are used to supplement the “Design Manual – Downtown District” for projects utilizing the City’s Façade Improvement Program. These guidelines are much more specific than the Design Manual and provide the designer with much clearer expectations and direction. They also cover, for the most part, the elements missing from the Design Manual. These Guidelines and the Design Manual should be merged into consolidated Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines that are applicable to all project improvement in the downtown area.

“GRASS VALLEY DESIGN REVIEW MANUAL - DESIGN GUIDELINES” - 1997

The Design Review Manual was originally adopted in 1994 and amended in 1997. The “manual is intended to be used as a parameter for the design of new (underline added) development projects and signs providing applicants with clear direction on basic design standards and assisting applicants in design projects...”. As it is written, it is unclear if they are also designed to assist with rehabilitation projects.

The manual is generally very complete and thorough. However, on brief review, several deficiencies were noted; they include the following:

- The guidelines encourage parking in front of buildings located outside of the downtown.
- They lack any discussion of defensible space concepts.
- They do not include minimum sizes for usable private open space in multifamily projects.
- They need more guidance on articulation in non-metal buildings.
- They need criteria related to pedestrian movements between properties.
- They need criteria related to mixed-use projects.
- They need criteria for energy conservation.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE DESIGN DOCUMENTS

For ease of use by the general public, the three design guideline documents could be consolidated into one document that also incorporates the development standards included in other codes and ordinances.

The downtown historic district could be expanded to include the entire downtown area.

The City could evaluate and establish design review districts in the residential areas that have a historic character that surround downtown and provide design standards and review of additions, renovations and new construction of single family homes in those areas.

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

The design review process in Grass Valley is extensive. Every building permit, demolition permit, grading permit or sign permit with site plan or architectural elements, except for construction or remodeling of an individual single-family dwelling or building accessory, is subject to design review prior to issuance of any permit by the Building Official.

There are various levels of design review, depending on the magnitude of the project. They include:

Concept Review: a review at the option of the applicant for the purpose of providing an opportunity to discuss alternative general design concepts for a proposed project prior to preparation and submittal of detailed design plans. Such concept design review discussion is not intended to result in any decision on a project design.

Incidental Design Review: review by the City Planner of projects incidental to an existing project. Projects eligible for incidental design review include signs in compliance with city sign regulations, minor changes to the exterior of existing buildings, minor additions that are consistent with existing buildings and parking areas, and other improvements which will result in physical changes which are not visible to the public.

Preliminary Design Review: review by the Design Review Board for the purpose of providing the applicant with approval, conditional approval or denial of a proposed project.

All projects (even those that would require Incidental Design Review elsewhere in the City) in the Downtown Historic District require Preliminary Design Review by the Design Review Board. Although this practice assures adherence to design standards within the Historic District, it should be administered in such a way as to not discourage revitalization and private investment.

Final Design Review: review by the City Planner for the purpose of determining whether the plans submitted for building permit or grading permit are substantially in compliance with the

Preliminary Design Review approval or conditions of approval by the Design Review Board, or the decision making body on appeal.

COMMUNITY INPUT

During the course of this planning process two workshops were held to obtain input from the community on community design issues. The following is a summary of the input garnered from these workshops.

Workshop One

There appeared to be near consensus on the following issues:

Annexations including Loma Rica and North Star were appropriate future steps in the growth of the City of Grass Valley, but that filling in the existing holes needed to be the first priority.

The transportation systems should incorporate non-automobile modes and traffic calming on existing roads.

Increased density and mixed use development was appropriate if it is done correctly and located properly, including, but not limited to, the areas surrounding downtown.

Open space was a high priority for the community, especially in the new annexation areas.

Linkages to downtown and between existing districts in the community are a high priority.

There was an open discussion about managing the potential conflicts between:

The goal of maintaining a small town, rural sense to Grass Valley through traffic calming and emphasis on non-automobile transportation modes and infill, mixed use and high density development.

The fact that Grass Valley is servicing a population of 70,000 people that are coming from remote areas for which alternate modes of transportation are not feasible. Several comments suggested that the concern was less with the outlying retail districts and more with access to the downtown.

Some of the suggested approaches to managing the interface of these issues included:

An emphasis upon infill development, especially housing, and specifically housing for seniors in close proximity to downtown.

A pro-active approach by elected officials and senior city staff to encourage businesses and developers to undertake infill projects.

Develop pedestrian connections that currently do not exist between the downtown and surrounding areas (such as to the North Downtown Residential District and across the freeway at Colfax and South Auburn).

Shuttle routes tying the downtown to existing business parks and residential districts.

Aggressively work with the county to direct growth to within the city limits as much as possible.

Workshop Two

The responses in bold type were each group's choice for the best response to the question.

1. For your District, what two buildings best emulate an appropriate Grass Valley character?

DOWNTOWN

- Old Post Office
- Holbrooke Hotel
- Grass Valley Library
- Del Oro Theater
- Tofanelli's with Plaza
- Nevada Co. Bank
- Yuba Blue's
- Union Building
- Elk's Building
- Network Building

BUSINESS PARKS

- Board of Realtors Building
- Providence Mine
- Continental Professional Building
- Medical Center
- Brunswick East
- Innovative Metals
- Home Center
- Sierra Care
- Golden Gate Terrace

OLDER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

- Tremeroux House
- Race Street

STRIP COMMERCIAL

- Wells Fargo
- Holbrooke Hotel
- Brunswick East
- Sugar Pine Inn
- Mill Street Complex
- Pine Creek Center

NEWER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

- Morgan Ranch
- French Avenue/Brighton (Mixture of Ages)
- Packard Dr. - Affordable
- Berryhill Apartments (Fills Needs)
- Carriage House
- Scotia Pines (Good Site Plans, Tree Conservation)
- Hill Street (Nice Variation of Houses)
- Victorian Style
- “Cabin in Woods” Style
- Squirrel Creek (Miners/Rustic)
- Pine Street/Kate Hayes (Mixture/Mature/Hillside Design)

2. For your District, what two buildings are the least appropriate for Grass Valley?

DOWNTOWN

- Salvation Thrift
- Circle K- Gas
- Safeway
- Apple Fiar Building
- Old Teen/ Patio Buildings
- Canton Restaurant

BUSINESS PARKS

- Navo Building
- Foster’s Trucking
- Existing Litton Building
- Loma Rica Industrial Park mobile home-type buildings
- Familan Building
- New innovative mobile homes
- New Gray Electric
- Super Plumbing
- GRA Nevada
- Gold Cities Beverage

OLDER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

- Flat Roof (Boxes)
- Apartment Buildings

STRIP COMMERCIAL

- Riebe's Auto Parts
- K-Mart Center
- One-Stop Shopping
- Chevron on East Main
- Lucky Center
- Glenbrook Center

NEWER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

- Berryhill Apartments (Cheap Looking/No Landscaping)
- 1st & 2nd Street Between Eureka & Washington (Little Ranch Style Boxes - Poor Design)
- Carriage House (Feels Separated from Town)
- Scotia Pines (Unfinished Development, Repetition in Design, No Merging w/ Neighborhood, Sticks Out Like Sore Thumb)
- Condo Spring Hill - Affect Ridgeline (Nice Structure, Sticks Out)
- Apartments In Jenkins (Too Economically Built; Tries To Be Pretentious, But Ends Up Looking Cheap)
- Cypress Hill (Matching Garage Doors, 4/12 Pitch, Small Lots, No Sidewalks with Lots of Kids, Lack of Off -Street Play)
- Packard Drive (Same as Above)

3. What two design characteristics would most improve the buildings in your District?

DOWNTOWN

- Integrated Design using Historical Materials & Elements (Brick, Subtle Colors, More Reductive, Visual Harmony, More Historical Architecture, Round Windows & Openings, Open Facade/Transparency, Old Style Canopy/Less Canvas, More Detail)
- Improve Public Spaces (*Same as Above*)

BUSINESS PARKS

- Arched Accents, Bays, etc.
- Better Massing
- Less Stucco
- Less or Fewer Boxed Surfaces
- Taller
- More Open Space
- More Color
- More Landscaping

- Better Relation to Streets
- More Diversity

OLDER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

- Color Selection
- Pitched Roofs

STRIP COMMERCIAL

- Historic Design Consistency
- Historical Materials
- Native Vegetation
- Human Scale
- Courtyard

NEWER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

- More Variety in Architecture
- Front Porches
- More Striking Architecture
- Keep Structures Low Compared to Surroundings
- Control Elevation From Privacy & Aesthetics perspective; More Blending of Colors
- More Consideration to Surroundings
- Steeper Roof Pitches
- More Skylights
- More Earth Tone Colors, Less Pastels
- Less Stucco, More Wood Siding
- Sidewalks/Trails/Vegetation
- Roof Overhangs
- Larger Lots
- Garage Less Predominant in Architecture
- Varied Architectural Detail from Neighbor: Height, Stories, Roof Pitches

4. What two site planning characteristics would most improve the development in your district?

DOWNTOWN

- Parking Behind or Below
- More Trees and Landscaping
- Courtyard
- Allow More Outdoor Use (?)
- Streetscape Important to Public Space
- Directional Signage
- Mixed Use of Building
- Breakup Facades In & Out Movement

BUSINESS PARKS

- More Pedestrian Spaces & Pathways
- Covered Exterior Areas - Shade or Rain
- More Landscaping
- Save More Trees
- More Interesting Ground Spaces
- Parking Garages
- Underground Parking

OLDER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

- Trees
- Porches (Entry to Homes)
- Parking

STRIP COMMERCIAL

- Pedestrian Friendly
- Trees in Parking Lots
- Shielded Parking
- Individual Storefronts
- Courtyard Design
- Increased Streetscape (Setback)

NEWER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

- More Trees
- Work Sidewalks with Landscaping
- Alternate Transportation Allowance
- Park-like Areas
- Sidewalks
- Wider Streets
- More Pedestrian Access
- Deeper Setback
- Covered Entries
- Safe Walking Trails
- Alleyways – Parking
- More Color in Condos
- Narrower Streets
- Street Trees
- Density

5. How could design review of new projects and renovations be improved?

DOWNTOWN

- Encourage Design Creativity
- More Citizen's Input
- Suggested List Of Materials
- Other Countries Have Done
- Retain Existing Character
- More People Friendly
- More Street Accessibility
- Include More Historical Suggestions/Colors

BUSINESS PARKS

- Allow New Ideas That Don't Fit Guidelines
- Encourage Variety & Diversity
- Stimulate, Don't Legislate
- Openness (Open Mind)

OLDER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

- Complimentary to Neighborhoods
- Broad Guidelines

STRIP COMMERCIAL

- Strong Design Standards & Enforcement
- Coordination of Design & Style
- Positive Incentives for Design Authenticity

NEWER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

- Broad Guidelines
- Less Grading, Fit Topography
- Keep Expectations within Owners' Needs
- Set Up Design Criteria for Proper Site Planning
- Prohibit Siding
- Better Traffic Control
- Improve Design Guidelines Over Tracks