

**DESIGN MANUAL**  
Downtown Historic Area • Grass Valley, California

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WPM Planning Team  
Sausalito, California

in association with  
Parsons Associates  
Berkeley, California

18 December 1981

City Council  
City of Grass Valley  
City Hall  
Grass Valley, CA 95945

Dear Council Members:

Presented herein is a set of design guidelines which should help both the private and public sectors to make informed decisions on the design character of the Downtown Historic Area.

At the date of this letter, it is clear that the Grass Valley community, including the Downtown Historic Area, will be subjected to pressures of growth and change. It will be an ongoing challenge to the community to save or recreate the best of the old, while making way for the new.

Sincerely,



Rudolph R. Platzek,  
President  
WPM Planning Team, Inc.

# Acknowledgments

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MILL STREET, GRASS VALLEY 1981

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MILL STREET, GRASS VALLEY 1900

# GRASS VALLEY • Yesterday and Today

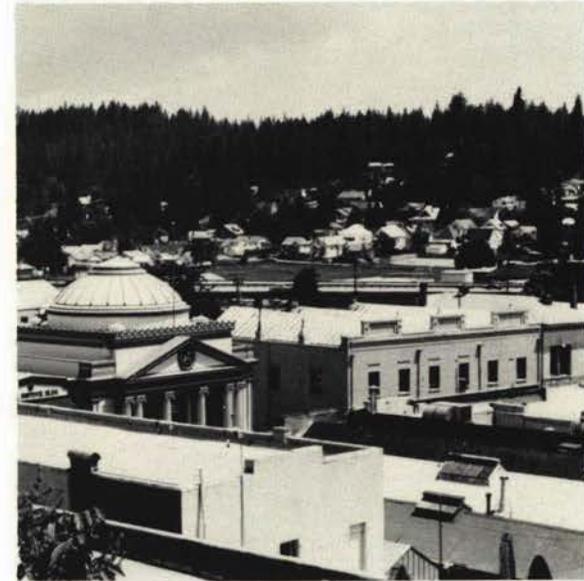
"Wagon trains that struggled over Donner Pass in the late 1840s and made their way down the rough western slope of the Sierra found Greenhorn Creek a likely spot to camp and rest before they continued the journey to the Sacramento Valley. When cattle wandered from this campsite in search of better feed, the emigrants often found them several miles away grazing peacefully in a meadow that came to be known simply as Grass Valley.

In autumn of 1849, two small groups of emigrants decided to linger there. They built crude cabins to protect themselves against the oncoming winter. A store was opened, the spot acquired the name Boston Ravine, and settlement began. Briefly, it bore the name Centerville, and then became "Grass Valley."

The local Gold Rush began in earnest with the discovery of the precious metal on "Gold Hill" in 1850. The 'City' of Grass Valley soon became a thriving, and dynamic commercial, cultural, and residential center for miners, their families, and of course a wide array of new businesses, all drawn by the prospect of sharing in the newly found wealth. The population grew dramatically; many new buildings were built, and the downtown began to take on a discernible shape and character. The Holbrooke Hotel was completed in 1862 with much fanfare; by the middle 1870s Main and Mill Streets were firmly established as the core of the new city.

Over time there were minor fluctuations in the availability of gold as the old discoveries petered out and new techniques had to be developed to extract the metal from deep underground lodes; yet, at the turn of the century Grass Valley was still producing most of the gold in Nevada County. By 1900 the City was in full bloom – complete with a rather colorful, albeit dusty, Fourth of July celebration.

Although the gold mines finally closed down at the end of World War II, ending almost 100 years of continuous production, Grass Valley today (1981) is an attractive and viable community of approximately 7000 residents.



GRASS VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

Dependence upon a gold economy has given way to a much broader, and more stable range of commercial enterprises, services, and attractions. Furthermore, with the preservation of many of the original buildings, the early years legacy of Grass Valley remains to delight and inspire residents and visitors alike.

There is a growing interest, both within the community and beyond, to protect or even restore a sense of continuity with earlier America. The Grass Valley Downtown Historic Area, because it is unspoiled by large-scale and recent changes, is today a testing ground for this possibility. Only tomorrow will tell whether the subtle forces of change have remained sensitive to this expressed need.

# Chapter One

# Overview of Design Manual

## Introduction

This Grass Valley Design Manual for historic conservation and enhancement is the result of a community planning and design effort sponsored by the City of Grass Valley.

The Design Manual focuses on a question which is of critical importance to every businessperson, resident, and City official of Grass Valley . . . namely, **what shall we do about conserving and enhancing the older structures of our downtown historic district?** Shall we control inevitable change or shall change be blind to this heritage? The focus of the Manual is the central historic area in the vicinity of Mill and Main Streets.

The audience for this Design Manual includes architects, contractors, planners, investors, bankers, developers, real estate brokers, tax consultants, City officials and interested citizens as well as business persons. The Design Manual will help in making decisions on the conservation and enhancement of existing buildings in older styles, and the character, style and scale of new buildings to be added in the Downtown Historic Area.

## Purpose

As a guide, the Manual provides design criteria to be used – item by item – in determining the shape, content, and character of structures and related developments in the Grass Valley Downtown Historic Area. Such criteria do not provide all the aesthetic answers: that is not the intention. Rather, they will help pose the questions to be asked in an orderly and systematic way.

The Design Manual is the outcome of a public workshop held in Grass Valley on March 14, 1981. As such, it also functions as a summary report of the findings of that enthusiastic and productive meeting. Please refer to Chapter 3, Public Workshop for a specific discussion of the meeting results.

## Summary

This Design Manual is organized to serve two important purposes:

- As an inventory in written and graphic form of the existing historic, visual, and cultural resources – primarily architectural, which predominate and lend their distinctive character to central Grass Valley.
- As a guide for decisions during the project development, review and approval process on proposed changes which may affect these valued resources.

There are three chapters which are key to the full understanding of the intent of this presentation, and the practical use of the Design Manual. They are:

- Chapter 2 – Historic Area Inventory
- Chapter 3 – Public Workshop on Design Theme Preferences
- Chapter 4 – Design Criteria

Chapter 2, the Historic Area Inventory results from a reconnaissance of the central area of Grass Valley conducted by the consultant team. The resultant material was presented and discussed during the public workshop on design theme preferences. The types of historic buildings in the downtown area are identified and listed. Results of a quality evaluation of these buildings, concerning their historic value and potential for conservation and enhancement, are also noted and explained.

In Chapter 3, the results of the public workshop held on March 14, 1981 in Grass Valley clearly identify the issues and opportunities as the workshop participants view them. In addition they describe the consensus goals which were then formulated specifically for the future of the Downtown Historic Area of the City. Every effort is made in this chapter to present an accurate reporting of the overall feelings, concerns, and desires of local residents, businesspersons,

and City officials. The workshop was held to elicit a clear sense of direction based upon local opinion. The design criteria which follows this chapter reflect in every way possible the community consensus.

Chapter 4, the Design Criteria represent essentially the definitive end product of the workshop process. They are based upon principles which are universally applicable to the design of all cities – yet are specifically tailored to fit the precise needs and desires of the unique Grass Valley situation. Please keep in mind that they are not intended to be absolute requirements, but rather are informative and illustrative guidelines to assist in the local decision making process.

## Use

The Design Criteria herein are to be used in formulating or assessing proposals which will impact the design theme as it presently exists. Specific recommendations are made in some cases to avoid a particular material or design arrangement. The Criteria leave specific or detailed interpretations up to the user. This is done to provide as many options as possible to the developer, builder, and City. The inherent flexibility of this approach will hopefully encourage imaginative and efficient design yet, at the same time, help conserve and enhance an identifiable design theme for the Downtown Historic Area of Grass Valley.

# Chapter Two Historic Resources

## Historic Area Inventory

The City of Grass Valley, and in particular the downtown area along Mill and Main Streets, retains some of the most important and visually distinctive historical buildings in all of California. Many of these older structures are of the mid-1800's Gold Rush period. Their overall building form and precise architectural detailing are reflective of several styles which are characteristic of this period. Other old buildings were added later which complement the overall historic design themes. In short, the historic buildings – both individually and in groups – constitute a unique and valuable cultural and visual resource not only for the use and enjoyment of local citizens, but for visitors and tourists as well.

What are the specifics which clearly contribute to a historic design theme? To answer this question a thorough inventory of existing central area buildings was undertaken by the consultant team. The following sections describe the results of this inventory and are divided into two parts, in accordance with the process used in the actual survey. They are:

- The "building types" section which identifies what kinds of buildings are included in the historic area, and,
- The "building quality " section which identifies what level of historic quality each of these buildings represents.



## Types of older structures

The historic buildings of Downtown Grass Valley, and also to a lesser extent in the City at large, can be classified according to specific categories for identification and discussion purposes. As there is no existing system by which to classify the design characteristics of Gold Rush period architecture, the following system was formulated.

### Residential Structure Types

- Grass Valley:** Small to medium sized Gold Rush period dwelling; peaked roof; wood frame and exterior; porch.
- Queen Anne:** Victorian period – late Gold Rush; usually quite large; multi-gabled; peaked roof; wood frame; wood exterior; elegant detailing.
- Box:** Simple box dwelling; low angle or hipped roof; porch; simple neo-classic detailing; wood frame; wood exterior.



QUEEN ANNE COTTAGE

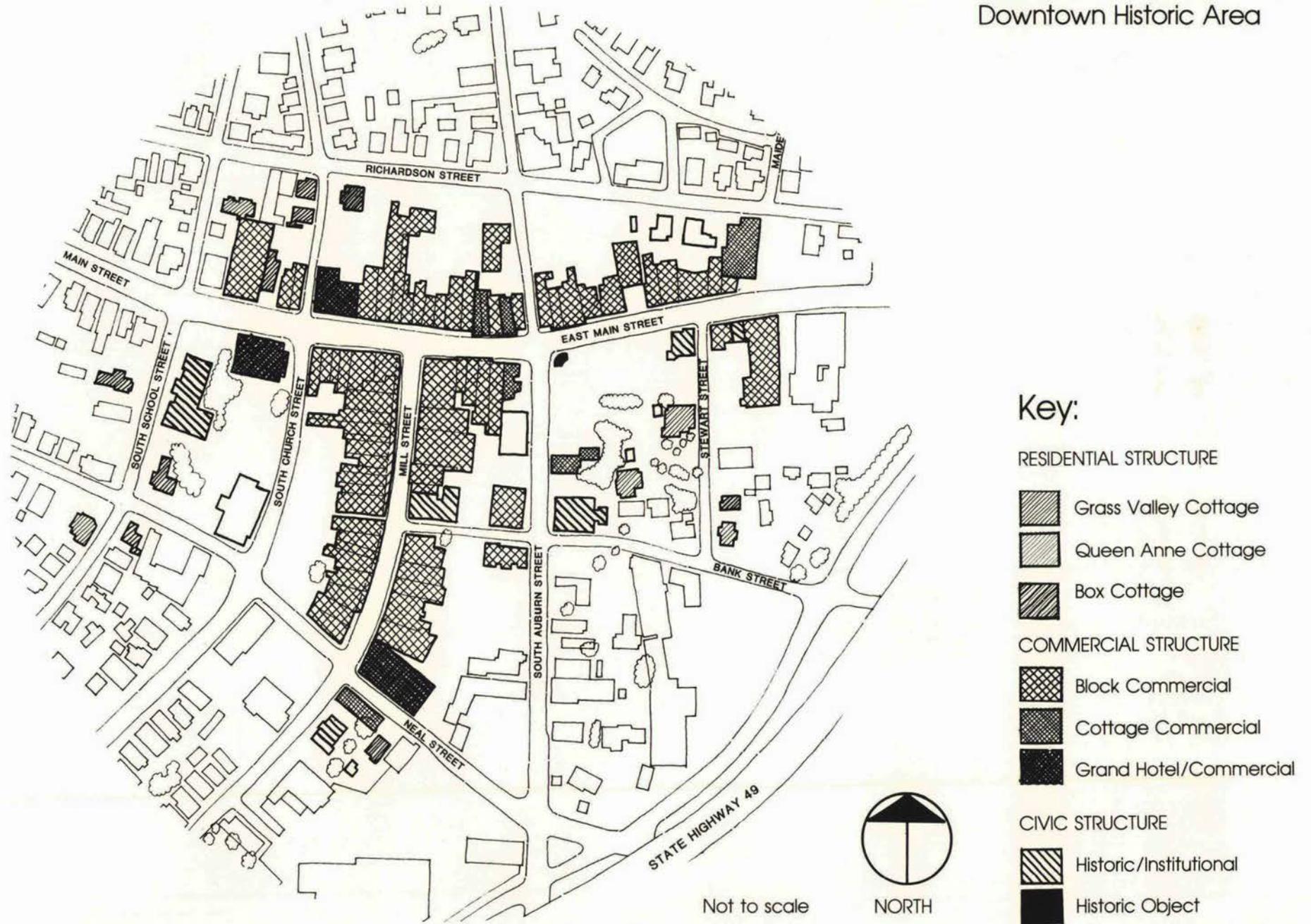


GRASS VALLEY COTTAGE



BOX COTTAGE

Figure 1: Building Types Survey  
Downtown Historic Area





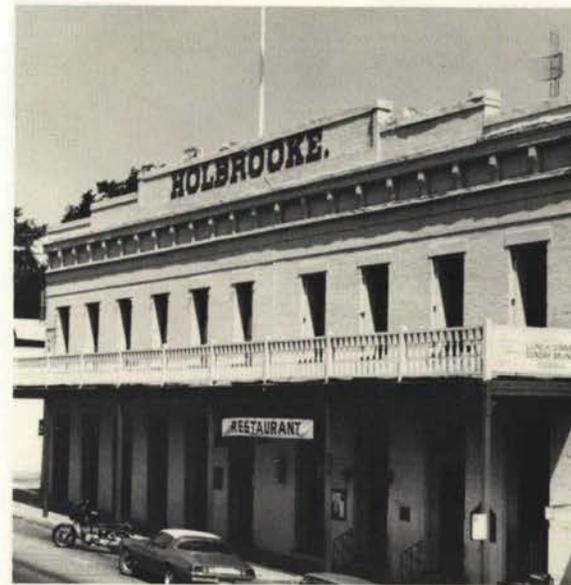
BLOCK COMMERCIAL

## Commercial Structure Types

- **Block:** Simple box or rectangular shaped facade; flat roof; simple detail in period style; first floor commercial frontage; with or without overhead canopy; wood frame or wood frame with masonry.
- **Cottage:** Same as above except with peaked roof and residential style details; most often wood frame with wood exterior; could have been a residence during earlier period.
- **Grand Hotel:** Large, usually masonry over wood frame; simple yet elegant details; neo-classic style; 2-3 stories in height or higher; history of hotel / saloon / boarding house / theater uses; central architectural focus in the community.



COTTAGE COMMERCIAL



GRAND HOTEL / COMMERCIAL

## Civic Structure Types

- **Historic/Institutional:** Large wood frame or masonry structures; old civic uses such as central library, banks, lodge halls; distinctive period style – not necessarily Gold Rush period.

To summarize, Downtown Grass Valley is dominated by historic “block commercial” structures with large keynote – “grand hotel / commercial” – structures such as the Holbrooke Hotel anchoring the edges.

These historic structure types are shown on Figure 1.



HISTORIC/INSTITUTIONAL

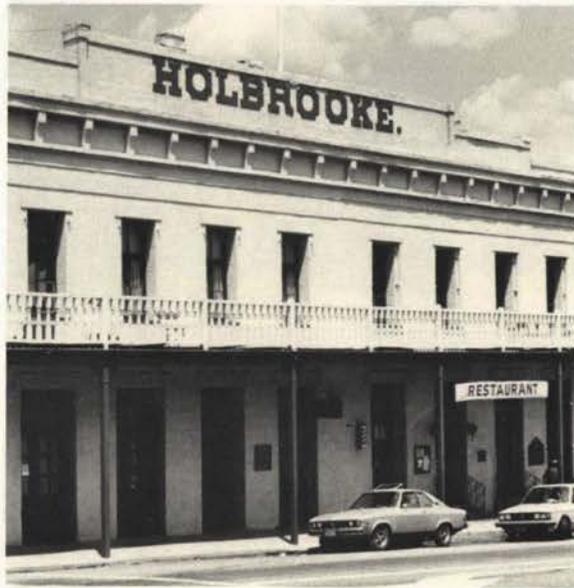
## Building Quality Survey

Any discussion of possible enhancement of a historic design theme for the Downtown Historic Area must directly address the inherent contribution – in terms of existing or potential historic value – of the buildings involved.

As in the previous classification of the types of structures there has been little actual documentation of the historical importance of buildings in Downtown Grass Valley. Therefore, the consultants have formulated a simple 1–4 rating scale to rate historic value for purposes of discussion and public information. Numbers one through three are quality numbers – one being the highest or prime contributors, three being the lowest or least likely to be of significant historical value without major alterations. Number four is a “not-applicable” category. By reason of building character (either new and not in a historical style, or new and conforming to local historic styles) a structure in this category would clearly not be appropriate to consider as a present candidate for an historical enhancement program.

Not surprisingly, the quality survey effort has located over three dozen buildings – which in the view of the consultants are either of prime historic quality (#1) or have great potential for improvements (#2) – which undoubtedly are candidates for historic conservation or enhancement.

Figure 2 is a building quality survey map which precisely locates and identifies all of the central area buildings according to the quality scale.



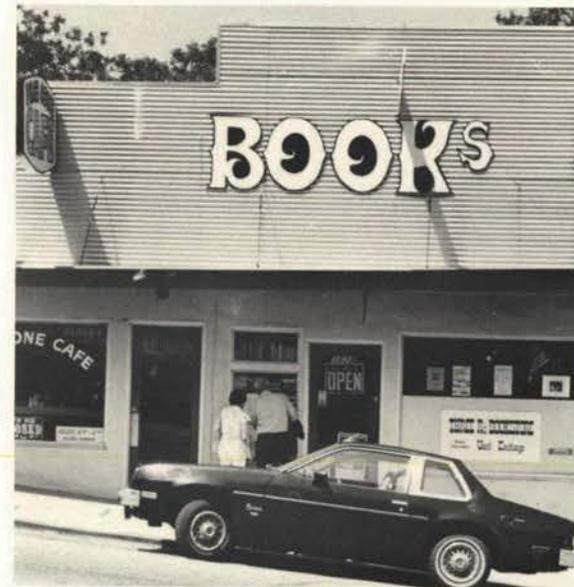
EXAMPLE OF PRIME QUALITY



EXAMPLE OF SECONDARY QUALITY

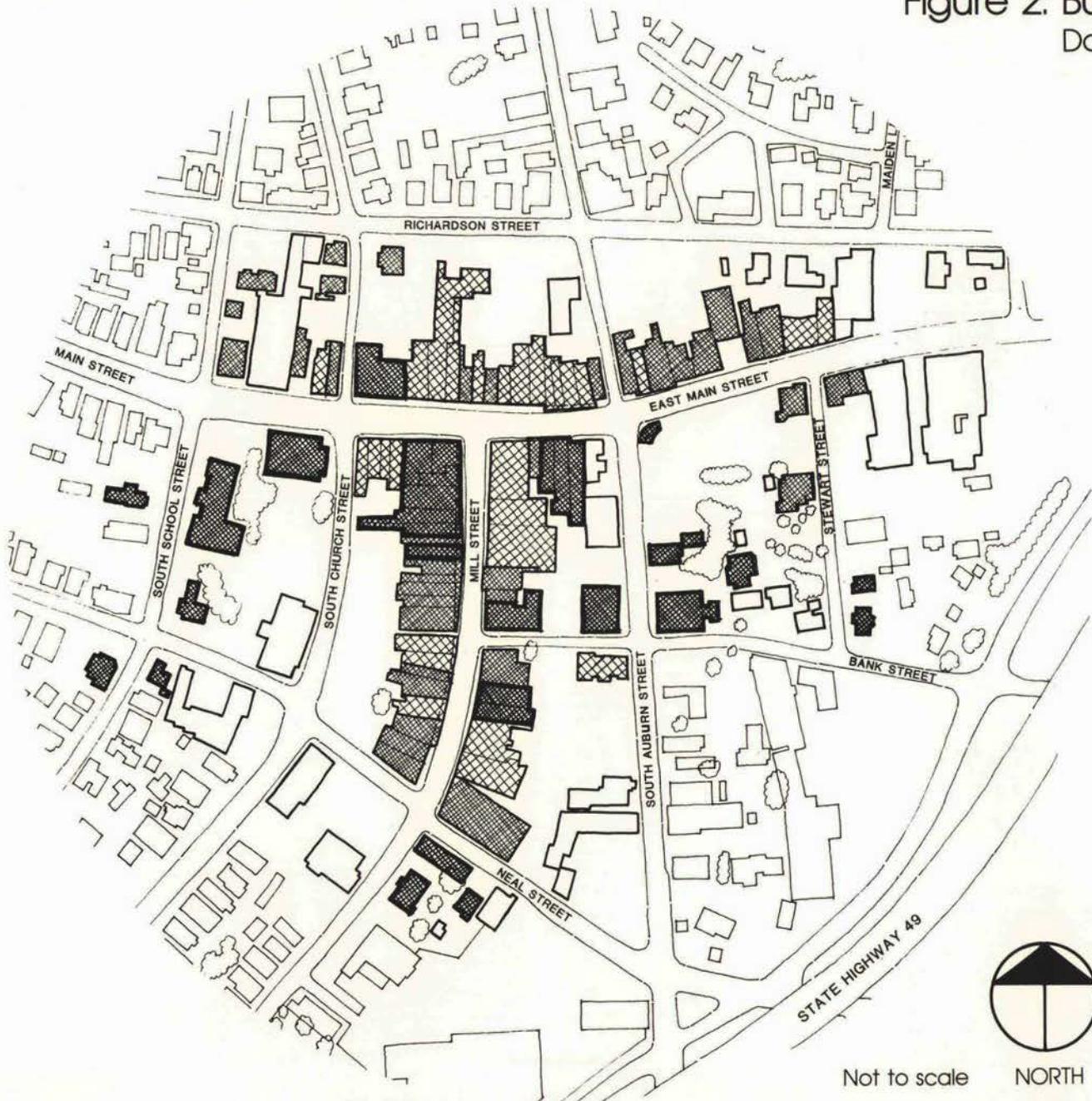
## Building Quality Classification

- Prime Quality:** Valuable historic structure
- Secondary Quality:** Great potential for enhanced historic character
- Marginal Quality:** Major changes required to achieve historic character



EXAMPLE OF MARGINAL QUALITY

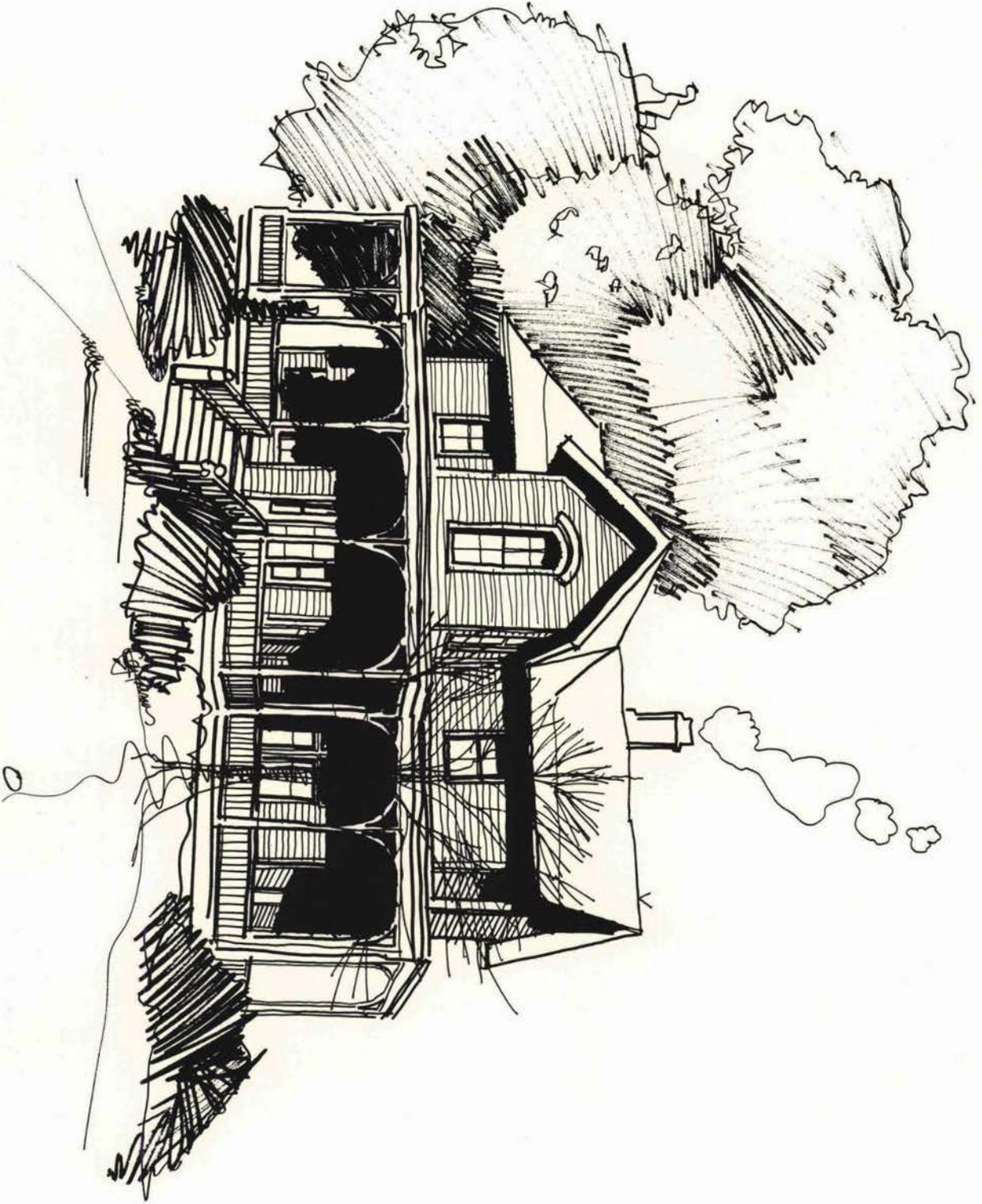
Figure 2: Building Quality Survey  
Downtown Historic Area



Key:

-  Prime Quality
-  Secondary Quality
-  Marginal Quality
-  Not Applicable

Not to scale  NORTH



# Chapter Three Design Theme Preference

## Results of Public Workshop

### Issues and Opportunities

This chapter summarizes the Public Workshop which was conducted on Saturday, March 14, 1981. The Workshop was held in Grass Valley to explore community preferences for the future design theme of the Downtown Historic Area of Grass Valley.

About fifty participants representing various groups and interests took part in full group gatherings and roundtable discussions which resulted in strong support for the adoption and use of design guides and criteria for historical conservation and enhancement. A list of participants is included at the beginning of this report.

Following the introduction by the Mayor, the workshop participants, who included council and planning commission members, citizens and staff, were divided into four roundtable groups to review questions contained in a Study Guide prepared for the Workshop. Consultants who helped guide discussion at the roundtable groups included Rudolph Platzek and Brenda Gillarde of the WPM Planning Team, of Sausalito and Clay Parsons of Parsons Associates of Berkeley. Conclusions at the workshop are summarized in the following sections of this chapter.

Workshop participants discussed three distinctly different alternatives for the future design theme for the Downtown Historic Area as follows:

### Alternatives for Downtown Historic Area

- Strict preservation** of all buildings with existing or potential historical character.
- Responsible conservation of historical resources and select development** within the Downtown Historic Area.
- Major development and redevelopment** regardless of historical resources.

Briefly, the design theme implications of these options are as follows:

### Implications of Alternatives

- Strict preservation:** Only very limited modifications to old buildings and additions of new buildings would be possible under this approach. The Gold Rush character of the Downtown Historic Area would be preserved much as it is in 1981 even as the surrounding Grass Valley community grows and changes.

- **Responsible conservation and select development:** This approach would be more flexible than a strict preservation approach in the use, re-use, and modification of existing buildings, and also in the possible development of new structures. There would be a possibility that the distinct image of Grass Valley's history would be partially lost as the Downtown Historic Area evolves over the course of time. A strong and skillful design review process would be required on the part of the City plus continuing cooperation and participation of local residents and businesses. The possibility would still remain to move to the strict preservation approach if the community so decides at some time in the future.
- **Major development and redevelopment:** Major change would be encouraged and provided for over the next 10 to 20 years – especially as local and regional economies change – regardless of the implications for existing historic resources. New buildings, possibly new streets and/or street widenings with considerable impacts on adjacent buildings, new and enlarged parking lots, possible major demolition of marginal historic structures would likely occur and eventually the Downtown Historic Area would be unrecognizable from that of today.

Following the discussion on future roles for the Downtown Historic Area and the resulting architectural design character, the participants turned to discussion of how to achieve such design character. The results of these discussions are summarized in the following section.

## Summary of Public Workshop

There was general consensus at each of the roundtables that a sensitive but flexible **Conservation and Select Development Strategy** will be required to extend present community efforts for design enhancement of the Downtown Historic Area. This strategy would emphasize the following goals:

### Goals for Overall Design Character and Scale

- Maintain an "Old Town" character and scale throughout the Downtown Historic Area in future years.
- Other historic buildings (not just Gold Rush Period) should be conserved as well.
- The Mill Street area historical character should be more strictly preserved.
- General compatibility among building facades in terms of height, scale, design details and color is encouraged.
- A "people-oriented," not "car-oriented" Downtown is desired.

### Goals Related To Economic Development:

- Commercial diversity should be emphasized in the Downtown.
- Encourage balance between office and commercial uses in the Downtown.
- Commercial development in the Downtown should serve to expand the trade area for tourists as well as local shoppers
- The commercial viability of the Downtown should be maintained in the future although it should not be allowed to become too "touristy."

## Goals for Design Enhancement:

- The Downtown should be beautified with appropriate landscaping, street furniture, etc.
- Other conveniences for shoppers and visitors such as toilet facilities should be provided.
- Plaques should be provided to designate historic buildings and areas.

Following endorsement of this overall strategy and set of goals to support the strategy, the following policies were endorsed to achieve these goals:

## Policies for Design Review:

- A manual with clear design guidelines is needed for the entire city. It will assist in the management of the design and in the maintenance of the historical character of new commercial development and building design.
- A design review mechanism, separate from the Planning Commission or City Council, should be established by the City. It should be made up of local people whose function is to review commercial and public building proposals for their architectural design and historical enhancement implications.
- The design review mechanism should focus initially on the Downtown Historic Area and eventually should be expanded to the entire City.
- All new commercial construction throughout Grass Valley eventually should come under review to ensure that it blends with local styles.
- All property owners should be treated equally.



- Flexibility is needed to allow individual initiative.
- Design review of proposals should focus only on the outside of buildings
- Residential buildings should be allowed to convert to commercial uses.

## Policies for Historic District(s)

- The "historic-interest" area should be extended beyond the central area to include fringe areas.
- Grass Valley should be districted into three separate districts for historic preservation, conservation and enhancement as follows:
  - District A: Preservation
  - District B: Conservation and Select Development
  - District C: Optional but subject to Design Review

The following chapter presents the design guidelines and criteria intended to be used by private development interests and the City to help achieve the consensus goals and policies presented in this chapter.

# Chapter Four

# Design Criteria

## Use of Design Criteria

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Design Criteria contained in this chapter are to assist those who propose or review changes and additions within the Downtown Historic Area to decide whether such changes or additions will conserve or enhance the historical design theme.

This chapter contains 15 separate compatibility factors, called design criteria. These criteria can be used to systematically evaluate the positive or negative effects of change on the historic design theme. Individual design criterion are presented, identified, defined and explained in detail. Each is graphically supported by labeled photographs and sketch examples of local buildings and related developments.

The use of these 15 design criteria as self-ratings of individual projects by persons proposing changes in existing buildings or addition of new buildings is encouraged at an early stage in proposal formulation to help answer the question – **will this proposal make the maximum contribution to the historical design theme and therefore become a viable proposal?**

Ratings by the City's design review mechanism and other official bodies will provide guidance to proposal-makers on whether modifications are deemed in order for purposes of historical conservation or enhancement.

# DESIGN CRITERIA 1 • Building Height

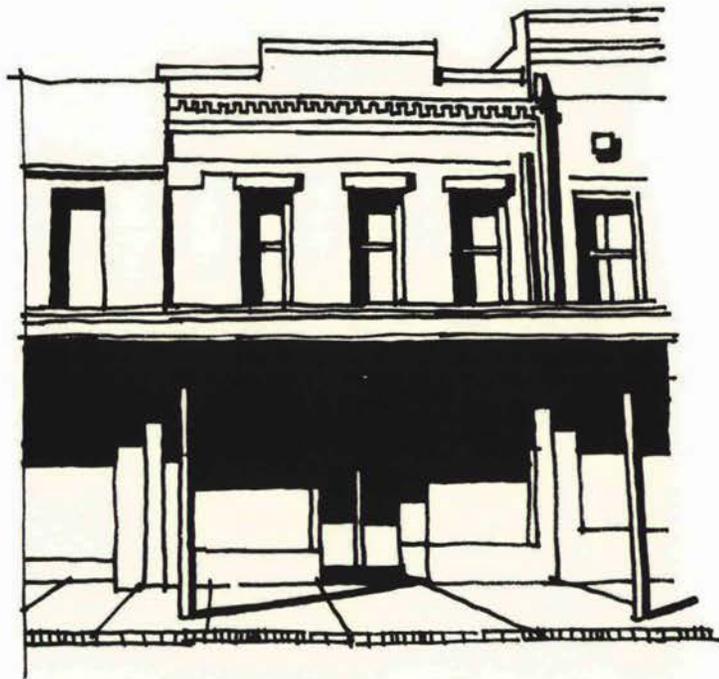
**Compatibility Factor: The relationship of the height of a new or improved structure with the height of surrounding development.**

This element is one of the most important considerations in the design of new structures or additions to existing buildings. While varied heights can mix with each other in visually interesting ways, a building which is significantly taller than adjacent development will seriously disrupt the existing scale of the downtown area. With the possible exception of very important civic or cultural facilities which could act as visual landmarks in the City, new development within the historic area should complement the existing pattern of building heights.

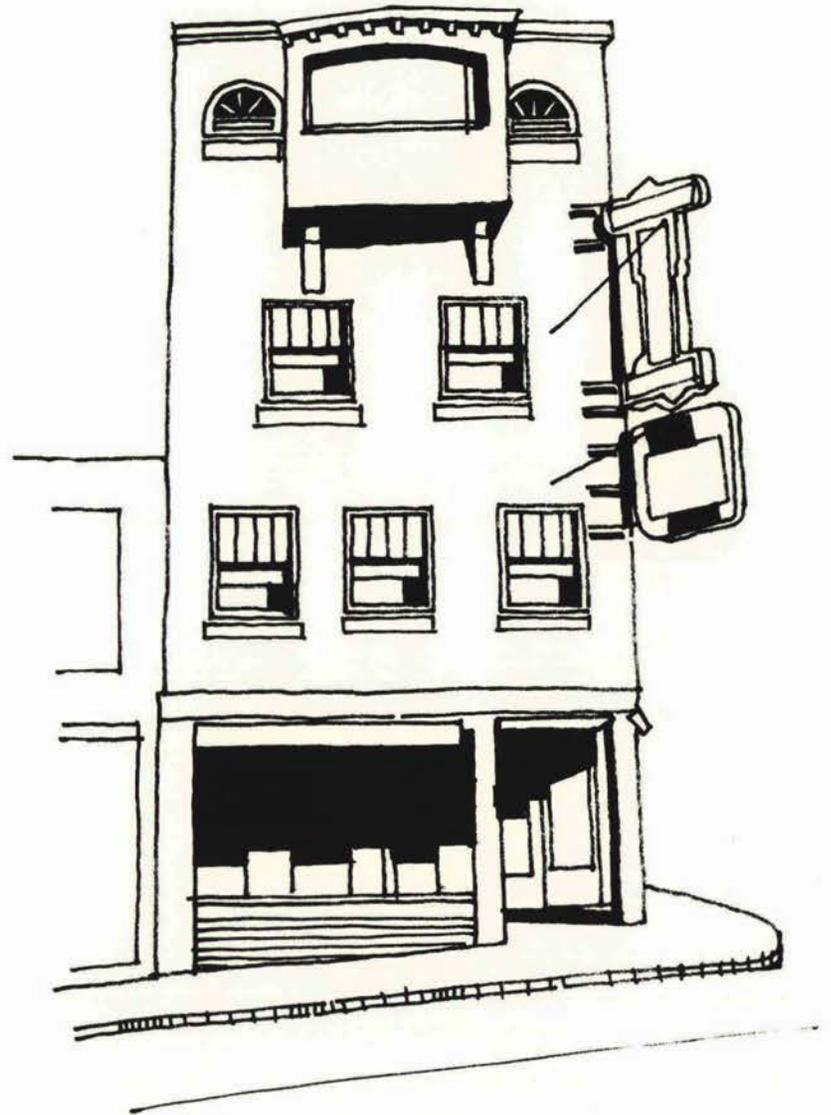
Illustrative examples of this principle are the existing structures on Mill Street between Neal and Main Streets. Variation in building heights adds considerable interest. However, the relative similarity of their heights, plus the repetition of strong architectural features such as canopies, second story windows, and brick cornices clearly establishes overall harmony.



COMPLEMENTARY BUILDING HEIGHT



MAINTAIN EXISTING HEIGHT RELATIONSHIPS



AVOID TALL BUILDINGS

# DESIGN CRITERIA 2 • Building Proportion

**Compatibility Factor:** The relationship of the width and height of a new or improved structure with the same proportions of existing adjacent buildings.

The relationship of the width and height of a building facade as well as its overall proportions should be designed so as not to overwhelm or strongly contrast with that of adjacent development. This principle is especially true in the historic area of Grass Valley where these relationships are already clearly established. The existing pattern of narrow lots and relatively high and narrow individual and group building facades can be easily disrupted by new buildings with wide, disproportionate dimensions. Also, the existing pattern of narrow and relatively high facade openings such as windows and doorways can be drastically impacted by wide, undifferentiated windows (such as large plate glass store-front windows) and similar sized building entrances. Such negative impacts may be avoided by breaking up new or altered building masses into smaller units of scale to better relate to existing conditions, and by designing facade details to conform to approximately the same proportional requirements.

Examples of this principle include existing structures along the north and south sides of Main Street. The modernization of individual commercial buildings here has not substantially altered the predominant pattern of proportional relationships. Another successful example of this principle in practice is the Wells Fargo Bank building at Mill and Neal Streets. Because of its complementary form in relationship to adjacent downtown buildings, the structure achieves a remarkable fit with existing City character.



EXISTING FACADE CHARACTER



RETAIN EXISTING  
FACADE RELATIONSHIPS



AVOID LARGE BUILDINGS

# DESIGN CRITERIA 3 • Spacing of Buildings

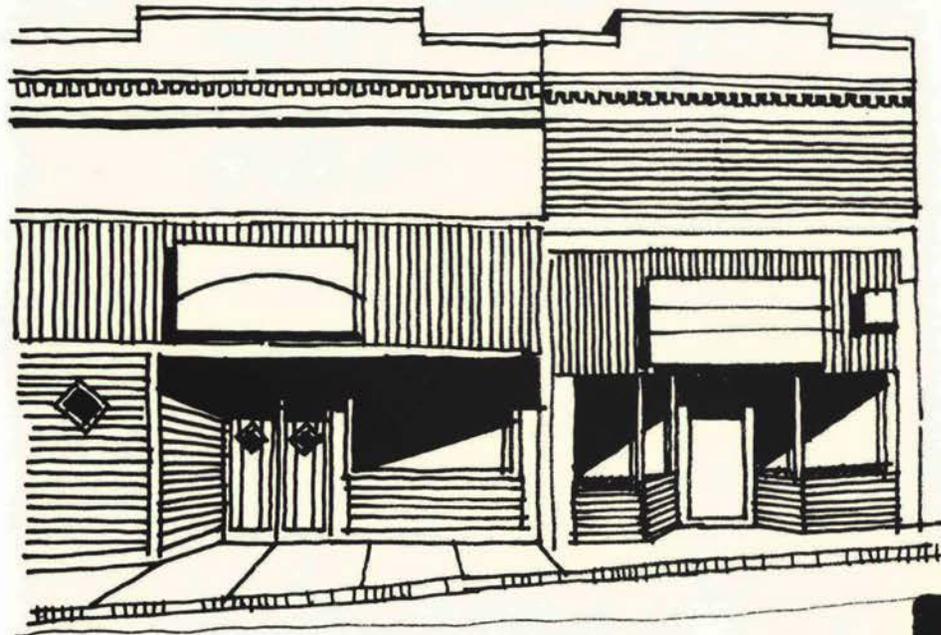
**Compatibility Factor: The relationship of sequences of buildings and building masses, and the spaces between them, to one another and to the overall development pattern.**

In walking or driving past a series of buildings, the perceived rhythm of recurrent building masses and the spaces between them establish a strong visual pattern. This pattern is found in central Grass Valley in sequences of individual buildings which are part of larger building masses, or blocks of structures, and the streets that divide them. Outside of the downtown area an open pattern exists with a regular, smaller scale pattern of buildings and adjacent open spaces.

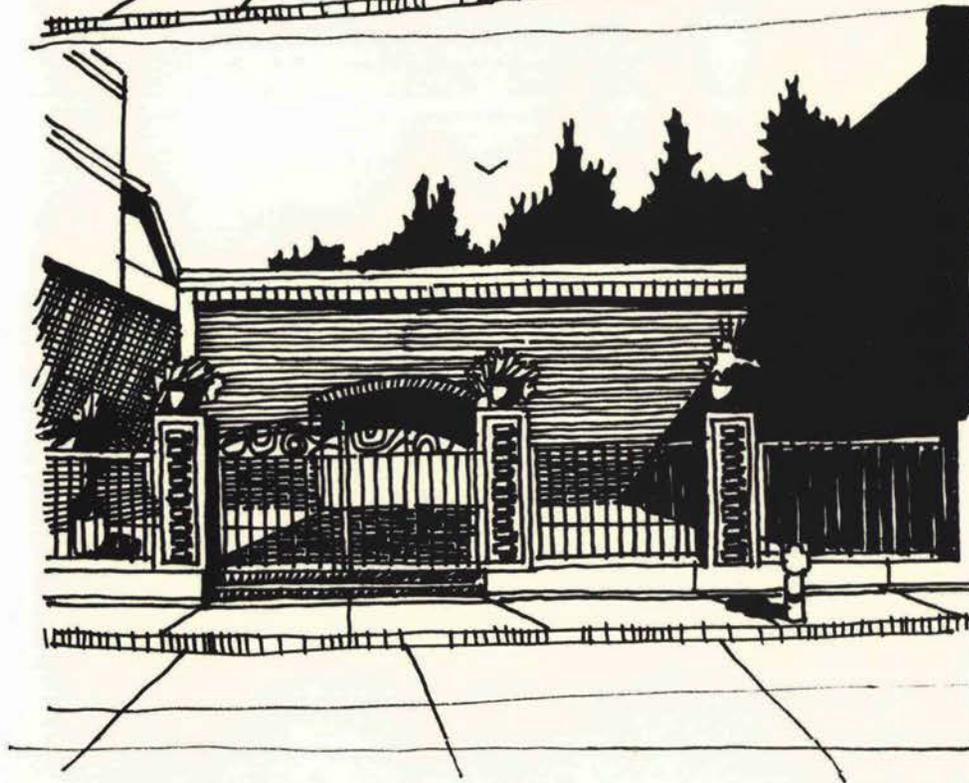
Avoid the creation of disproportional gaps between buildings that would visually disrupt the predominant existing rhythm and may also create an unsafe dark spot on the street.



RHYTHM OF RECURRENT BUILDINGS



RETAIN EXISTING  
BLOCK PATTERN



AVOID  
UNDERUTILIZED GAPS  
BETWEEN BUILDINGS

# DESIGN CRITERIA 4 • Building Scale

**Compatibility Factor: The relationship of building details, proportion, and size of structures and related development, with the familiar and easily perceivable dimensions of the urban environment.**

Scale is created by the size and proportion of all physical elements that comprise our environment in relationship to human physical dimensions, perception, and our ability to comprehend and visualize. Scale is also created by structural height, mass, and proportion as it relates to the shape and substance of a City, to the particulars of vehicular and pedestrian circulations, and to open space.

Historic architectural elements common in Grass Valley which relate structures and structural mass to a comfortable human dimension include balustraded porches on residential buildings; the prevalent use of brick and three dimensional brick detailing such as dentals and cornices on building facades, and the use of canopies and balconies. Building siting and the treatment of the downtown streetscape including elements such as landscaping, street furniture and lighting standards, also communicate a familiar sense of scale to the pedestrian or motorist in movement.

Scale may be perceived on a continuum of monumental on one end and intimate on the other. Central Grass Valley represents a model of small scale Gold Rush Period architecture – much closer to an intimate level of size relationships than to the monumental.

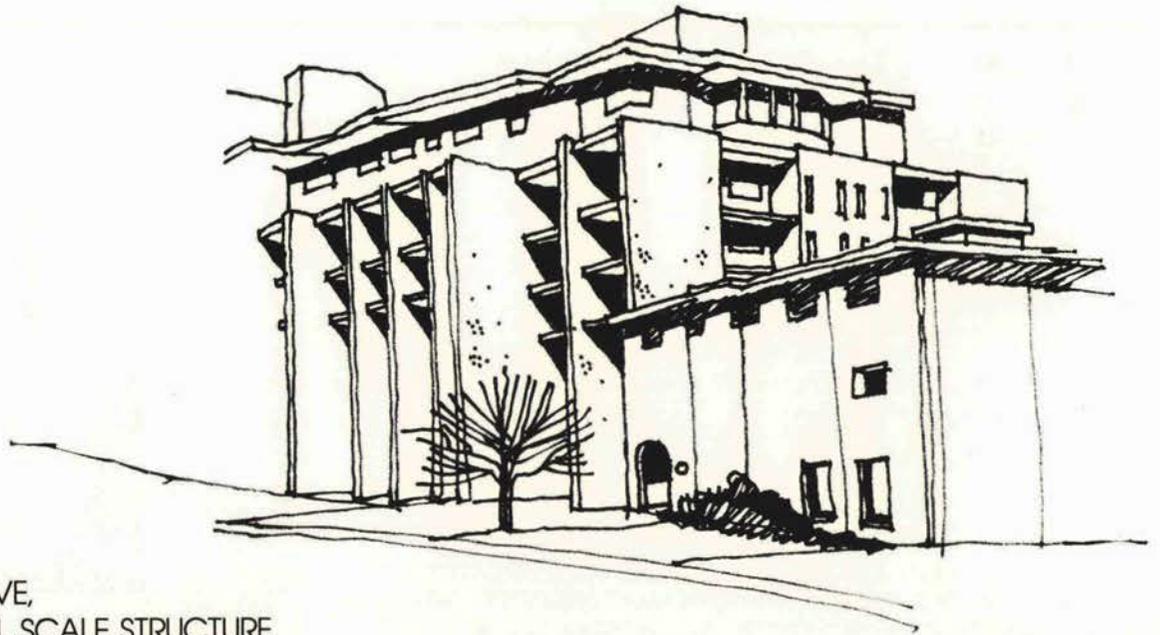
New structures or renovations of existing buildings should communicate a scale which respects and fits with the identity, use, and characteristics of the immediate area where it is being placed, and also with the Downtown Historic Area as a whole.



EXISTING BUILDING SCALE



PROMOTE  
EXISTING SIZE RELATIONSHIPS



AVOID MASSIVE,  
MONUMENTAL SCALE STRUCTURE

# DESIGN CRITERIA 5 • Color and Tone

**Compatibility Factor: The relationship of the colors and tones used on new or improved structures with the color and tone patterns already established by adjacent buildings.**

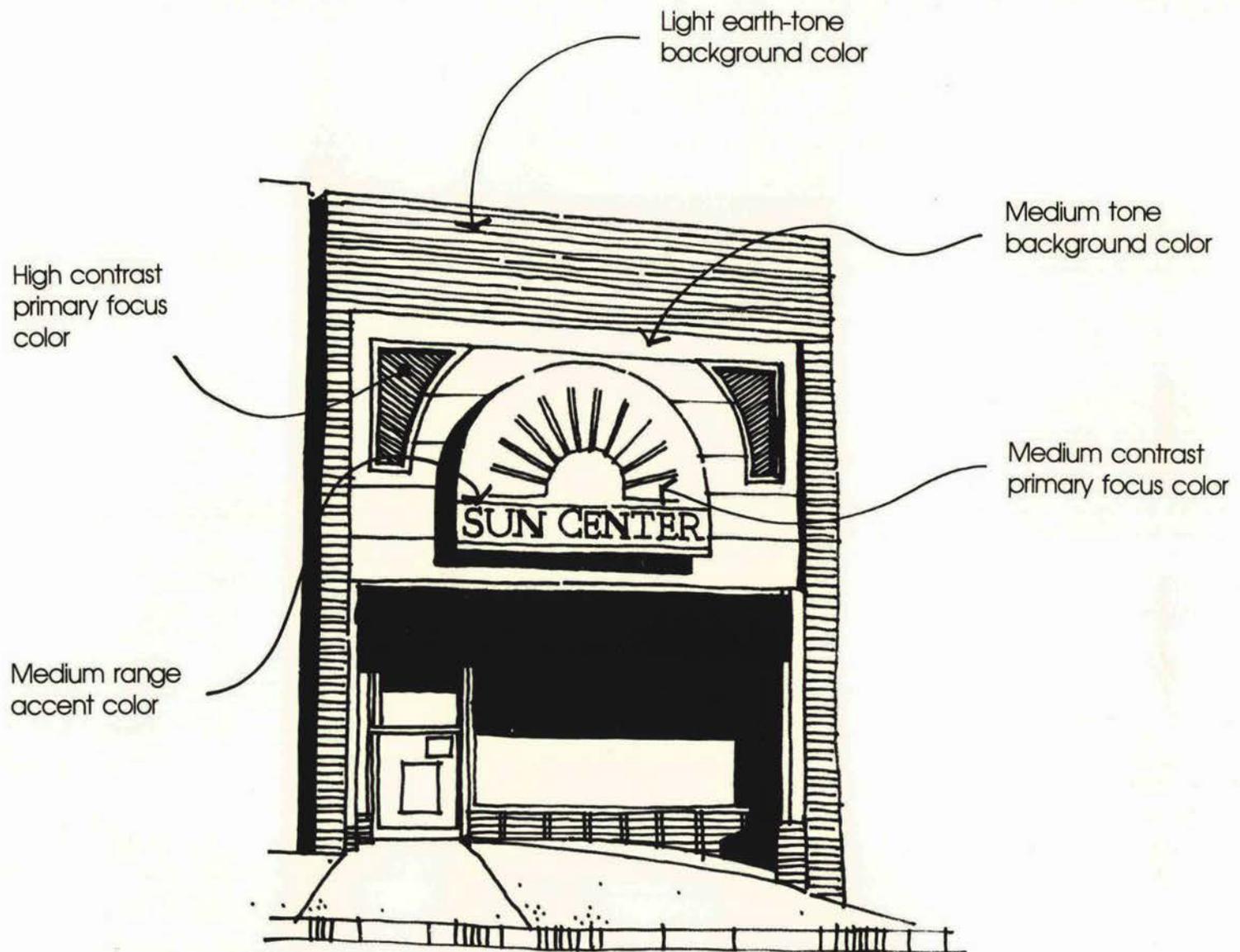
The predominant colors and tone variations of a building or group of buildings within an area may be natural to the materials used in exterior construction. These may be wood, brick or stone, or a combination of intrinsic and applied materials such as stained wood. Various tones may also be created by the weathering of natural materials and/or artificial surface colorings.

Bright solid colors focus attention and emphasize detail. On the other hand, more subdued pastels and earth colors blend well with a variety of architectural treatments. The tasteful use of color and accent can introduce variety and charm, whereas the indiscriminate use of colors and color combinations can overload the senses and produce visual conflict and chaos.

Exercise caution in the use of colors and tone combinations and their patterns. The goal is to achieve an area-wide complementary blend of background colors combined with selected and limited use of primary and focal colors. Avoid colors which visually overpower or strongly contrast with adjacent building colors and established downtown color schemes as a whole.



EXISTING PATTERN OF TONES AND VALUES



PROMOTE GOOD COLOR SCHEMES

# DESIGN CRITERIA 6 • Textures

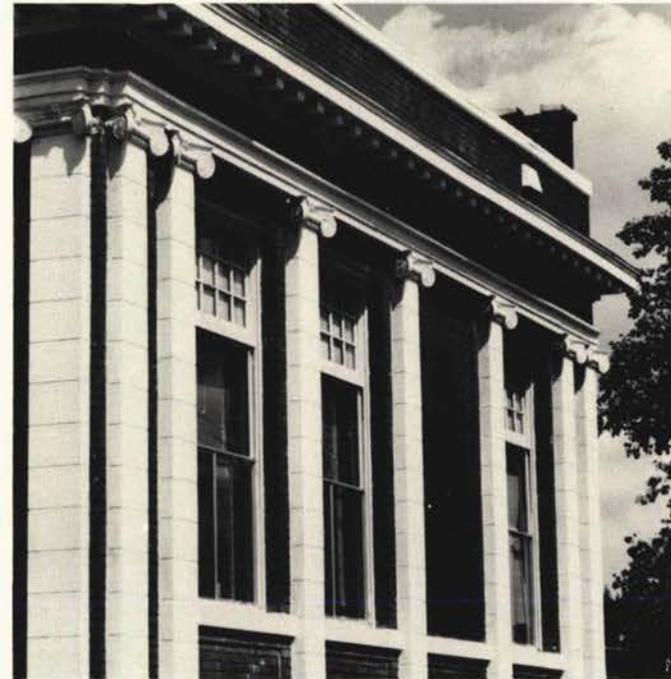
**Compatibility Factor: The relationship of various exterior building surface treatments or textures with one another and with similar or dissimilar treatments on adjacent buildings.**

The predominant texture of the exterior surface of a single structure may vary from smooth, such as plaster or finely finished wood siding, to rough, such as field stone or brick, with much variation in between.

Rough textures tend to project a "rustic" or frontier image while smooth textures tend to communicate detail, refinement and high technology. Smooth textures can also act as uncluttered visual backgrounds for more detailed eye catching features. The repetition or predominance of a certain texture can produce a strong, yet subtle, unifying link among various structures in an area. Textures can also be used to visually link a structure to its site and surroundings by repeating or extending the building facade treatments or textures out into the adjacent environment.

The predominant textures of central Grass Valley are a reflection of materials used in exterior surface construction. For the most part they are rough or medium level textures such as brick, stone, or painted plaster. Finer surface textures such as wood (depending upon how it is used), steel, aluminum, glass, and cast iron, occur in a visually supportive or complementary role.

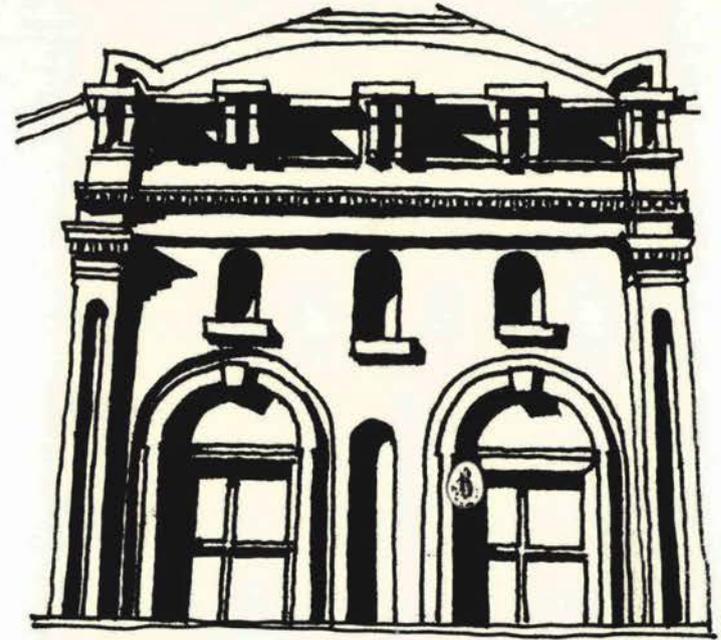
Use of fine textured materials, which because of area coverage or visual character will dominate the design of new or remodeled brick facades, should be avoided. Use rough or medium textures such as brick whenever possible as the background texture, and use finer textures to complement, set-off or enframe the dominant textural theme.



CLASSICAL BUILDING TEXTURE



ROUGH BRICK TEXTURE



THREE DIMENSIONAL TEXTURE



WOOD TEXTURES

# DESIGN CRITERIA 7 • Construction Materials

**Compatibility Factor: The relationship of construction materials used on the exterior or building facade of a new or improved structure, with the materials used on adjacent existing buildings and the structures of the Downtown Historic Area as a whole.**

There are a myriad of different types of building materials which are available on the market today; many of them are certainly appropriate for use in Grass Valley. Some are not. The primary materials used in **exterior** construction, based on the previously described inventory of existing buildings, include brick, plaster, cast iron detailing, wood siding, concrete and concrete cinder blocks, and local mine rock and field stone.

A building may offer a subtle or strong contrast to adjacent structures as a result of the type of various materials used in its construction. In the Downtown Historic Area of Grass Valley, where the use of brick, wood siding and various materials with plaster or paint covering predominates, compatibility with similar exterior construction materials in the immediate area is recommended in order to maintain the distinct character and harmony of the area. Shiny metallic or obviously non-historical material should be avoided wherever possible. For example, in window and door construction, wood sash should be used in the remodeling of older buildings wherever wood was the original material. This maintains the buildings consistency of character. On brick or plaster facades the original brick with wood and/or cast iron window detailing should be respected in new construction.

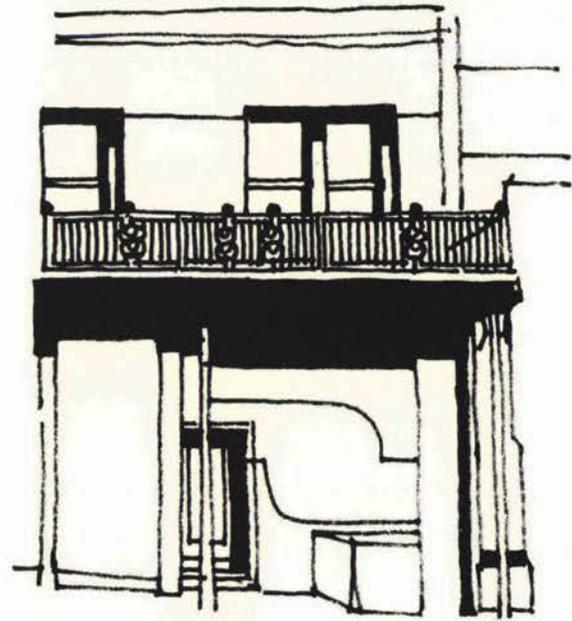
New buildings which are proposed for the downtown area should respect the use of materials and material combinations which presently exist.



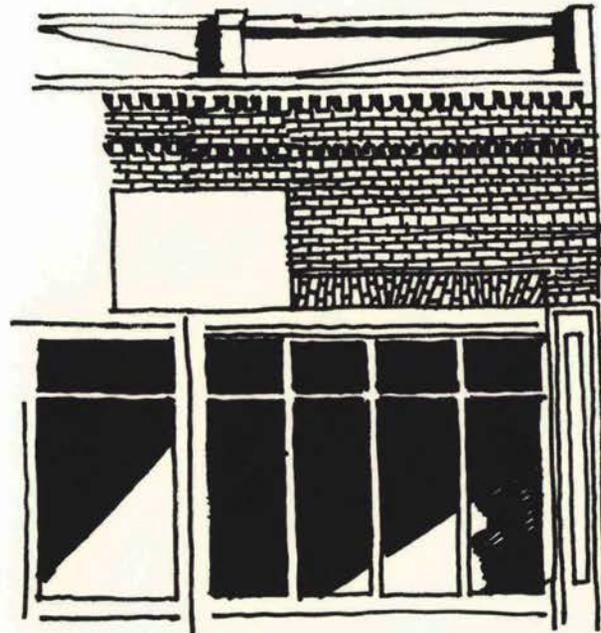
TRADITIONAL BUILDING MATERIALS



WOOD CONSTRUCTION



CAST IRON DETAILS



BRICK  
CONSTRUCTION

# DESIGN CRITERIA 8 • Building Projections

**Compatibility Factor:** The relationship of three dimensional architectural features which project out from the facades of new or improved buildings with similar projections already common to existing buildings.

Moving past a sequence of structures as a pedestrian or motorist, one experiences a rhythm of building entrance, window, canopy, and occasionally balcony or porch projections at an intimate scale. These details reflect historic architectural patterns which are unique examples of Grass Valley Gold Rush architecture. In addition, their incorporation into the design of existing buildings adds considerable visual interest to what otherwise would be flat and monotonous building facades.

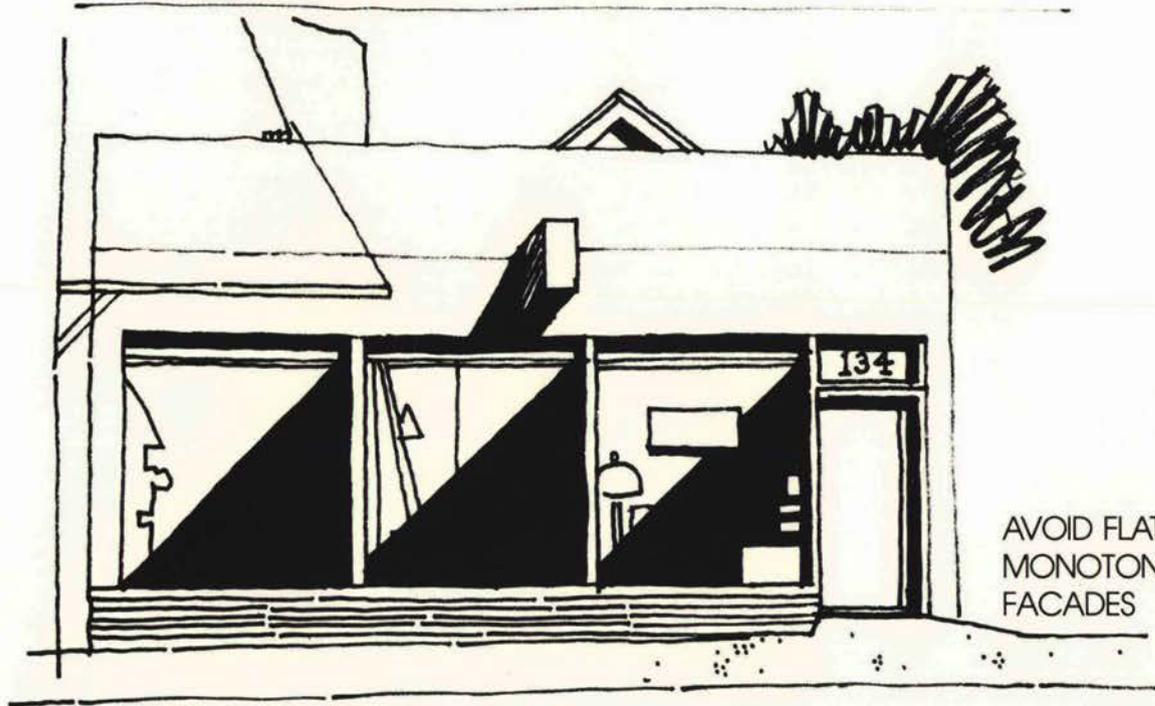
New and improved structures should feature similar architectural projections where appropriate, and their detail design should respect existing patterns.



BUILDING FACADE PROJECTIONS



CLASSICAL BUILDING  
PROJECTIONS



AVOID FLAT AND  
MONOTONOUS  
FACADES

# DESIGN CRITERIA 9 • Roofs and Parapets

**Compatibility Factor: The relationship of roof and parapet forms or shapes proposed for new or improved structures with those of existing buildings.**

A majority of buildings in an area may have gabled, hip, flat, or other types of roofs. The contrast of roof shapes may present a visually interesting sequence of forms or, on the other hand, present a chaotic, disorganized sequence of forms totally unrelated to existing patterns and to each other. A common failure in designing new buildings or additions to older buildings is often due to a poor visual relationship resulting from a radical change in roof pitch or shape standards.

The predominant roof shape which exists in central Grass Valley is flat with the presence of an occasional gabled roof – usually found on rehabilitated, old commercial or residential buildings.

Avoid introducing changes in roof shapes which dramatically contrast with those of existing area structures.

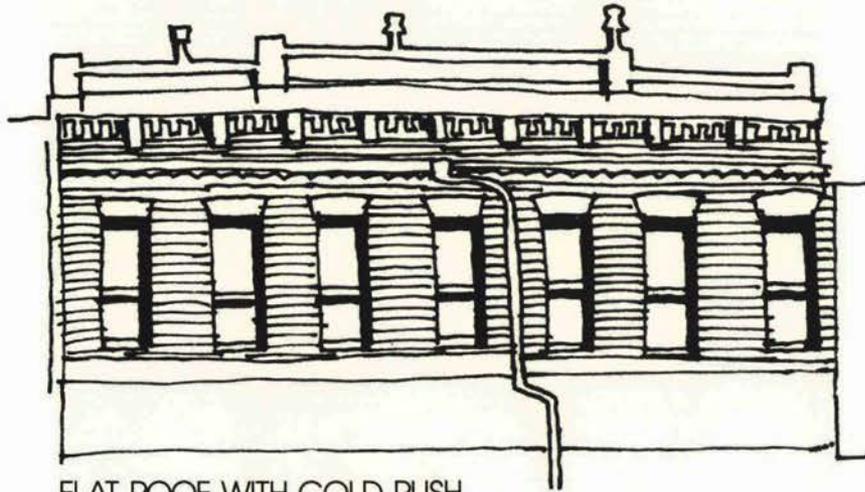
The predominant parapet or “top of facade” forms in Grass Valley are either flat, stepped, or in a limited number of cases, peaked. All three patterns are usually found fronting upper story “false fronts” which present a visually higher facade than actual building size. Architectural details such as brick dentils, ornate cornices, and in the case of the peak form, neo-classic pediment design, embellish and add interest to the variety of existing shapes.

The contrast of parapet designs may, as in the case of roof shapes, present a visually interesting yet harmonious sequence, or with the wrong combinations achieve exactly the opposite effect.

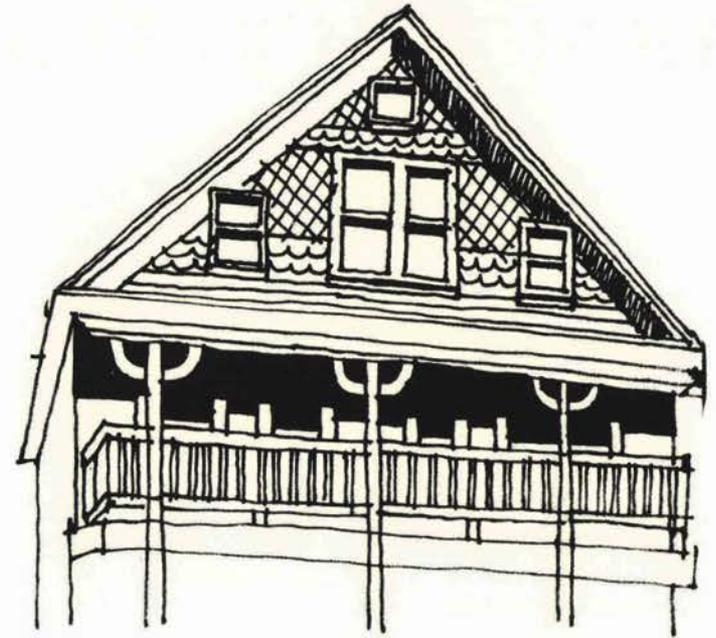
Avoid introducing dramatically new and different parapet designs.



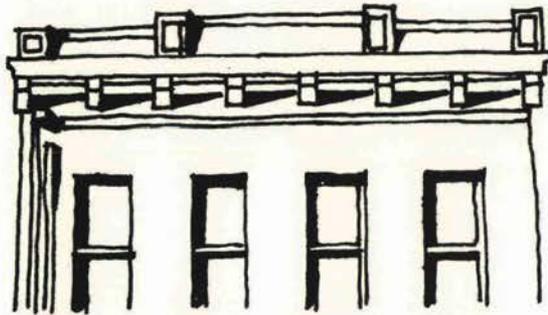
MILL STREET ROOF AND PARAPET SHAPES



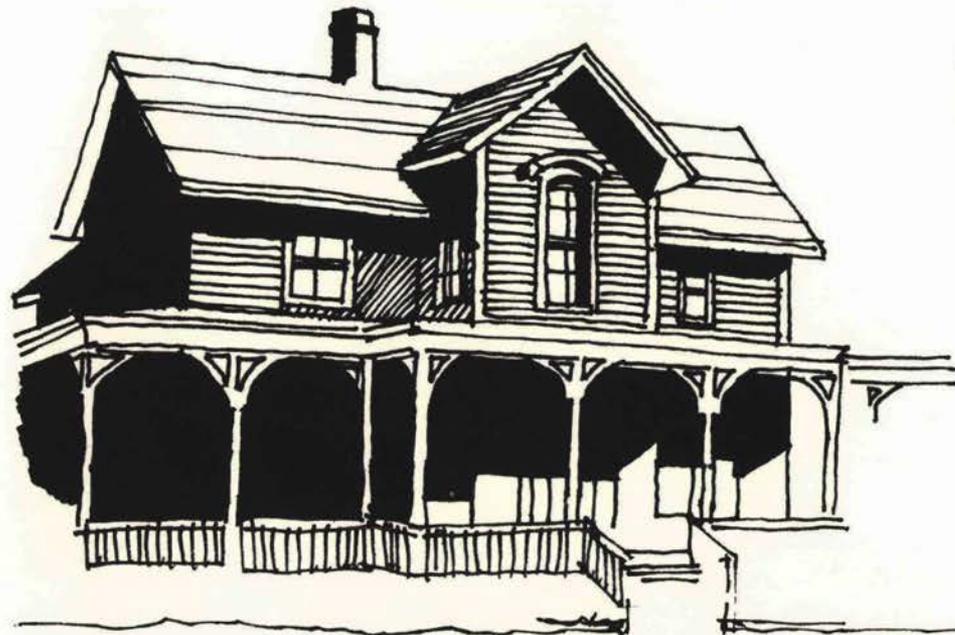
FLAT ROOF WITH GOLD RUSH  
PERIOD PARAPET AND CORNICE



PEAKED ROOF



FLAT ROOF WITH CLASSIC PARAPET  
AND CORNICE DETAILS



PEAKED ROOF  
WITH GABLE  
PROJECTION

# DESIGN CRITERIA 10 • Lighting

**Compatibility Factor: Exterior building lighting which functions to illuminate entrances, pedestrian walkways, or advertising on new, improved, or existing structures.**

Lighting arrangements and the use of various standards of exterior lighting on building facades, entrances, and advertising can either enhance and add gaiety and charm to existing or new buildings and the adjacent streets, or produce visual chaos, waste energy, and visually disrupt local character and scale.

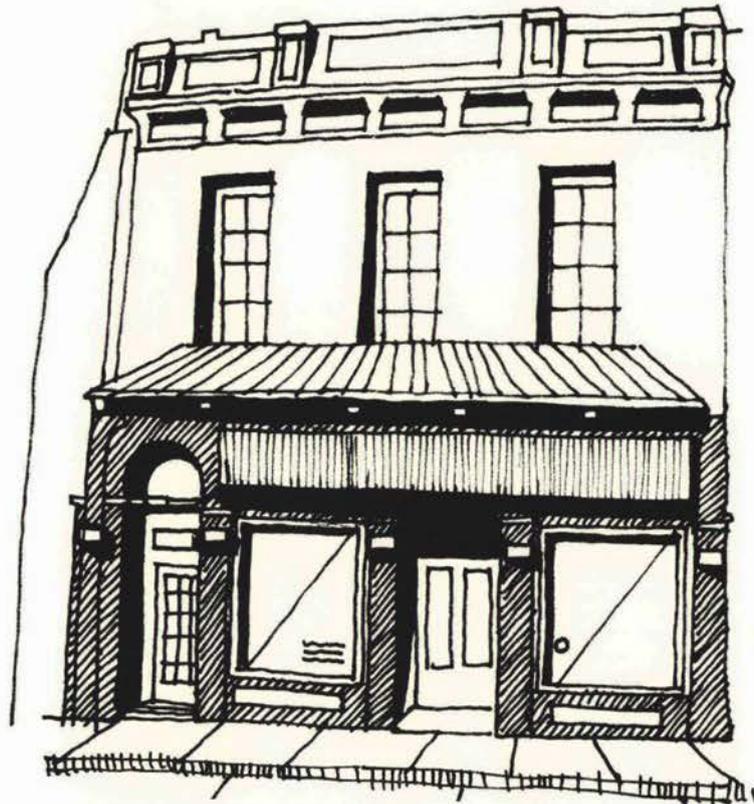
**Street, walkway and parking area lighting** should be visually dominant within the downtown area of Grass Valley. Pedestrian walkway (sidewalk) lighting on main shopping streets should be designed to a comfortable human scale. Traffic street lighting on major through and interior streets should be at more powerful and larger standards than walkway lighting except in areas of prime pedestrian activity. Parking area lighting should be middle ground in size and power between the previous two.

**Building lighting** should be much smaller and lower in power wattage than all three of the above standards. Individual building lighting schemes should not attract too much attention away from the primary lighting systems which provide street and walkway illumination. In addition, building lighting should be indirect whenever possible with the light source(s) hidden from direct pedestrian and motorist view. Incorporate, if possible, the use of traditional historic materials to support or contain exterior building lighting. Examples include cast iron, or steel with baked enamel finish painted to look like cast iron.

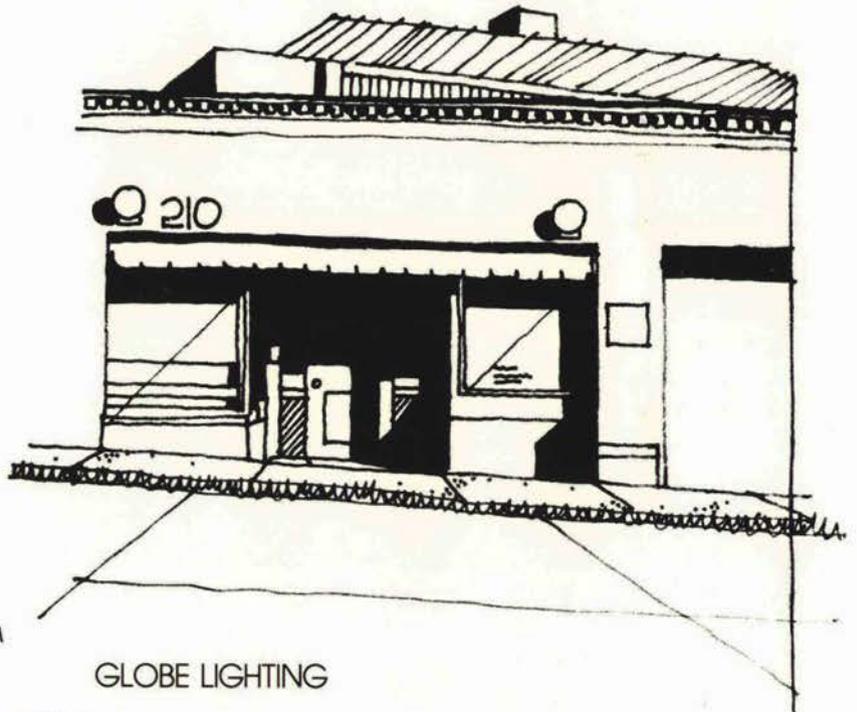
Avoid **colored** lighting schemes whenever possible in order to retain relative harmony of building lighting within the downtown area.



HISTORICAL STREET LIGHTING



INDIRECT FACADE LIGHTING



GLOBE LIGHTING

Note: Illustrates lighting concept only

# DESIGN CRITERIA 11 • Building Signage

**Compatibility Factor: The design and location of building facade signs on existing buildings, and on new or improved structures.**

Building facade signs have a legitimate function in any commercial center. Their main role is to provide necessary information, specifically to identify the offering and location of shops, stores, and related facilities such as parking. Other functions include the presentation of directions to important places or areas within the City, and the announcement of important commercial or civic/cultural events such as festivals or parades.

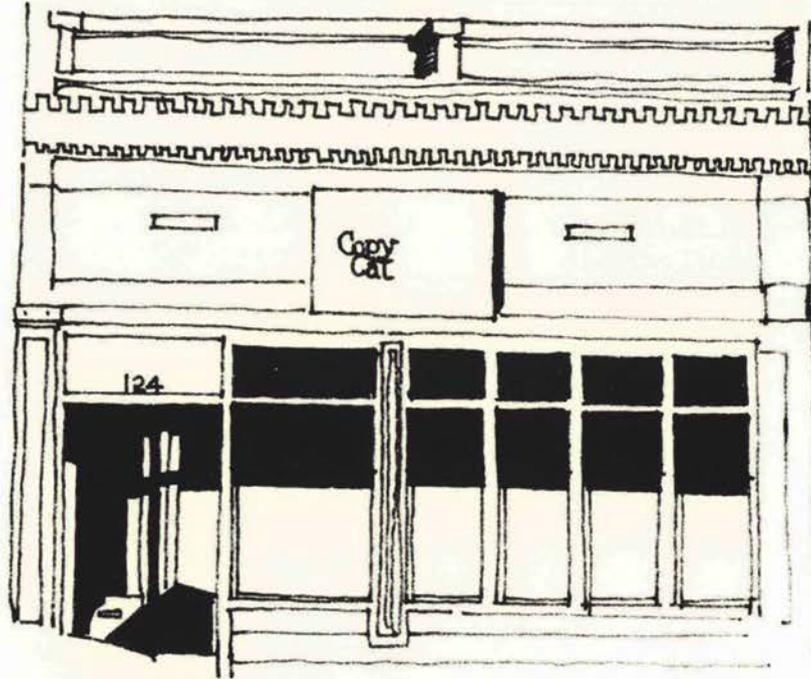
Small, well-designed signs attract the eye, and are supportive of existing local architectural character. Large, garish, obtrusive signs may cause sensory overload. Well-designed signs complement each other and attract attention to the buildings and services or products they advertise. Badly designed signs intensely compete with each other and visually confuse.

Signs in the Central Historic Area of Grass Valley should be pedestrian-oriented in size and shape. Sign graphics should be simple and bold. Signs should be flush with the building wall since flat signs usually complement architectural elements more effectively than projecting signs. Symbolic and historic three dimensional signs such as barber shop poles are encouraged. Paper signs attached to the interiors and exteriors of store windows should be discouraged except where a temporary public notice is required.

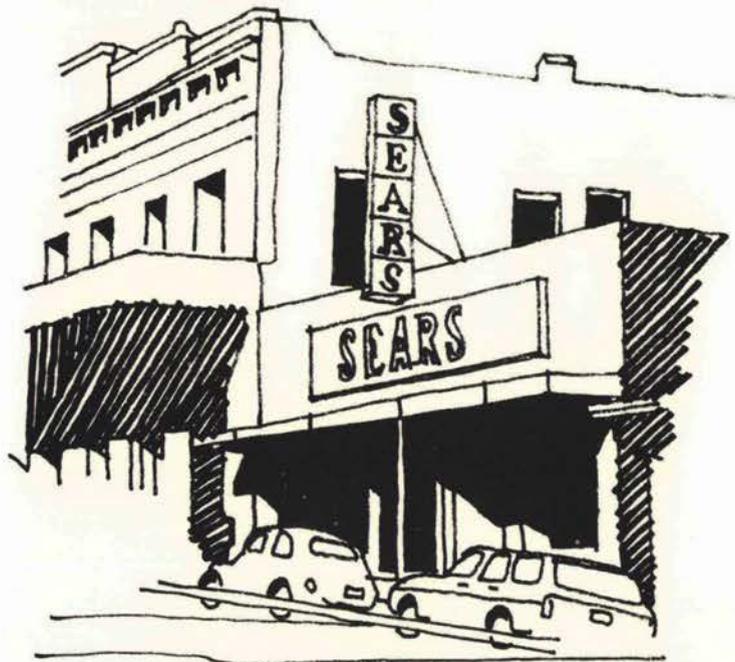
The height of new signs should not extend above the window sills of a building's second floor. Wherever facade canopies or marquees are used, place building signage, if possible, below the overhang. Signs on one story buildings should not project above the cornice or building parapet line. All roof mounted signs should be excluded from consideration.



EXISTING PROJECTING CORNER SIGNAGE



PROMOTE SIMPLE SIGNAGE



AVOID PROJECTING AND  
DISPROPORTIONATE SIGNS

# DESIGN CRITERIA 12 • Building Canopies

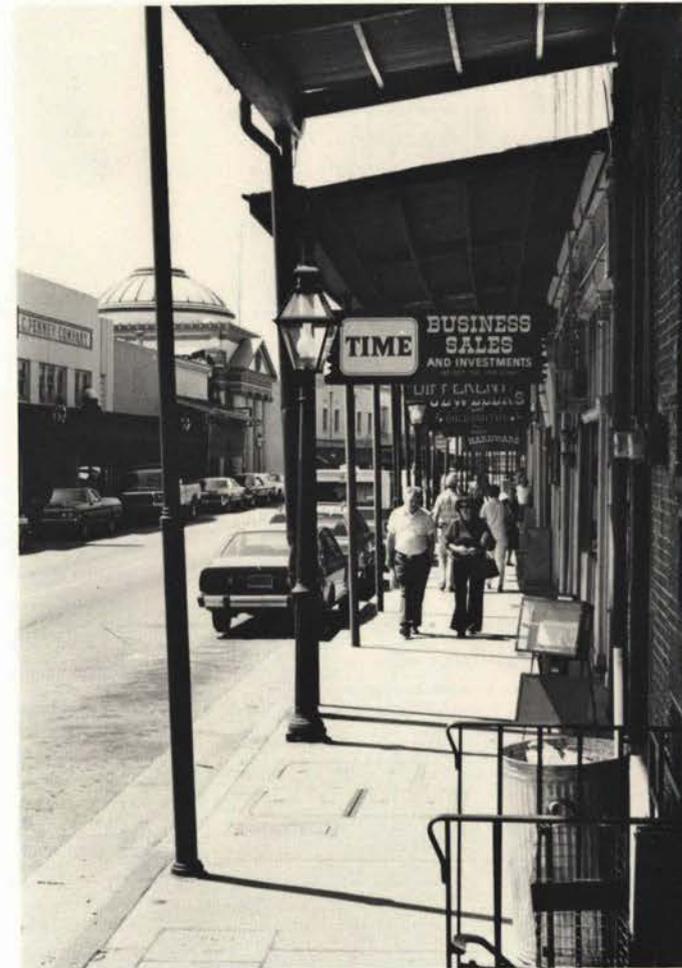
**Compatibility Factor: Exterior, linear, and roof-like building facade projections located or projecting out from between the first and second floors of a building, and supported by wood, cast iron, or steel columns or posts. A typical building facade canopy provides shelter for pedestrians along street and parking lot frontages and rear entryways.**

The building facade canopies or marquees primarily located along Mill and Main streets in central Grass Valley serve a variety of practical purposes. They provide shade from the sun for pedestrians and shoppers; they protect storefront windows from excessive heat gains; they protect people from rain and snow and other consequences of nature; and they create a comfortably scaled, attractive main entrance for many Grass Valley business establishments.

Building facade canopies also constitute a strong visual and cultural link with the historic past of the City. Even as they are practical today, they made great sense to the early settlers of Grass Valley – in the days when Main and Mill Streets occasionally became mud covered, water soaked, and difficult for pedestrians. A building extension into the Street, in the form of a raised pedestrian sidewalk and a canopy to keep out the elements was not only logical but necessary to maintain business and social activity.

Wherever feasible on the facades of new or improved structures, introduce a single story level projected building canopy, especially along major street frontages. Where adjacent building facades already provide canopies, maintain a relative uniformity of top and bottom of canopy height in order not to disrupt the function of the entire system. Also maintain enough clear distance from curb side to the edge of the canopy posts or columns (in the sidewalk) so that car doors can open freely, car bumpers will not damage canopy supports, and trucks can unload.

Use materials in the construction of canopies which are practical, and which clearly reflect the historic visual and cultural character of Grass Valley. Examples include wood timbers and posts, or cast iron or steel posts with wood or sheet steel roofing. Avoid the use of shiny metals whenever possible.



MILL STREET BUILDING CANOPY



PROMOTE  
CONTINUOUS CANOPIES



AVOID EXPOSED FACADES

# DESIGN CRITERIA 13 • Landscaping

**Compatibility Factor: The use of a variety of plant material to enhance the setting and adjacent pedestrian and vehicular environments of buildings and related facilities.**

There are many roles which plants and related landscape amenities can assume either as central features or as adjuncts to urban development. They include a variety of clearly functional uses such as the creation of shade, the buffering of active pedestrian areas from streets and parking lots, and the screening of unsightly development. Also included are equally important visual uses such as helping to establish a comfortable environment adjacent to large buildings, providing a sense of structure and organization to urban open spaces, and adding a wide variety of color and texture to the overall setting.

The following landscape criteria are important considerations in the imaginative and effective use of urban landscaping:

- Highlight important architectural features and structures by the use of distinctive landscaping.
- Visually and physically buffer parking lots from adjacent buildings and pedestrian walkways with groupings of plant materials.
- Frame and edge existing and proposed buildings where feasible with appropriate types of plant material to achieve human scale.

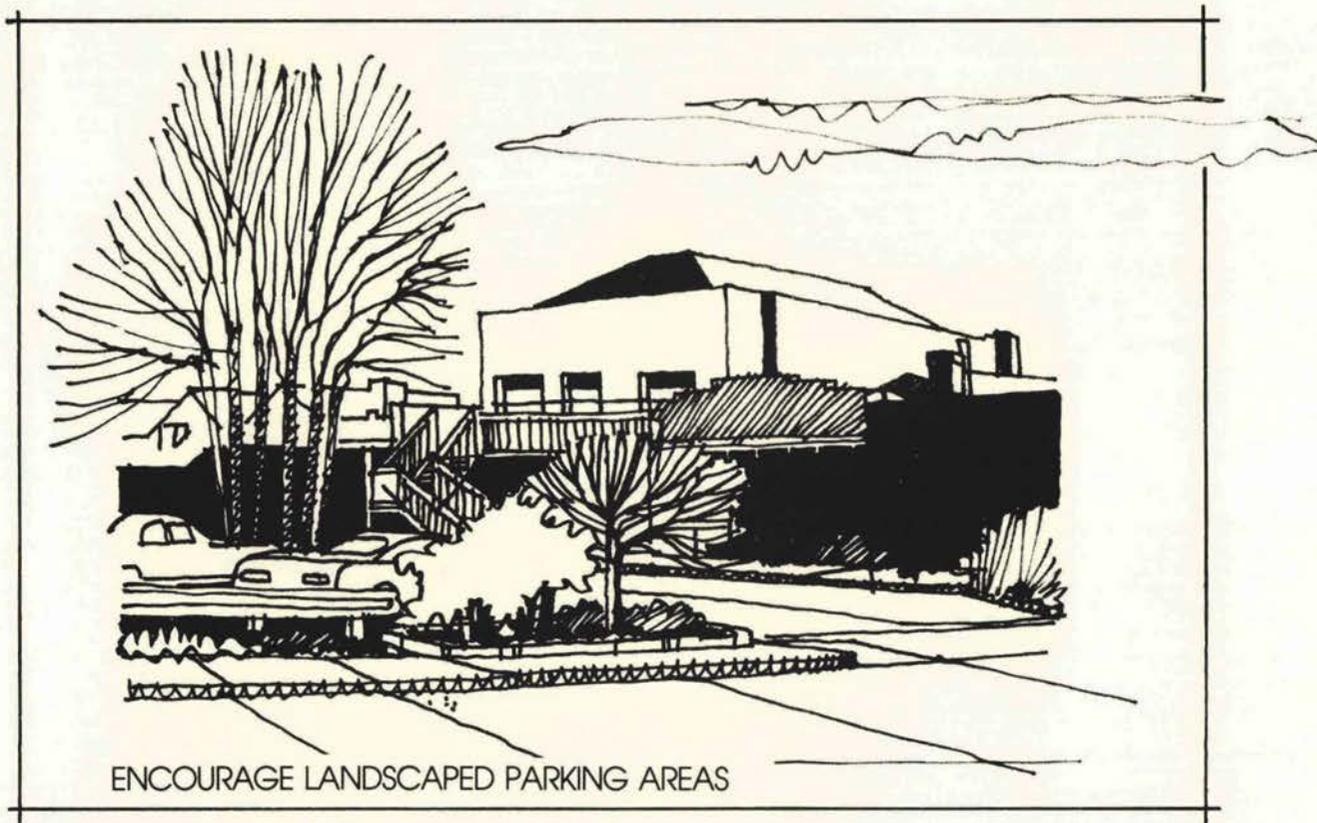


EXAMPLE OF URBAN LANDSCAPE

- Carefully locate street trees and shrub plantings within the downtown area to buffer and separate walkways from traffic, create shade where needed for pedestrians, and establish more clearly defined pedestrian use areas.
- Establish where practical, canopy trees to provide shade for parked cars. Tree planting in parking lot islands will reduce heat gain and should be encouraged.
- Establish by the use of distinctive plant material a clearly recognizable planting character for the Downtown Historic Area of Grass Valley. Develop a master planting list which would not only recommend the names of plant types and species but also their uses.



- Use local or indigenous plants. Allow variations to include a limited number of exotic or introduced varieties to encourage imaginative design solutions.
- Avoid planting trees in the central area of the City which at maturity will be too large or out of scale with existing buildings and pedestrian walkways.
- Avoid high maintenance plant material except in areas where high cost maintenance might be justified in order to achieve a special effect.



# DESIGN CRITERIA 14 • Parking and Service

**Compatibility Factor: The relationship of parking areas, service parking, and unloading facilities to each other, to adjacent developments, and to the downtown area as a whole.**

Important, if not critical, design considerations are: how existing and proposed structures and groups of structures are served by off-street parking and service areas, and how the various systems work and relate to development and land use patterns. The existing character of central Grass Valley can be either supported or enhanced by carefully planned off-street parking and service areas, or dramatically impacted by disorganized, poorly located, or overly ambitious facilities.

The following considerations provide a flexible framework within which improvements can be carried out. The resultant product truly reflects the strong need for easy access and efficiency in the Downtown Historic Area.

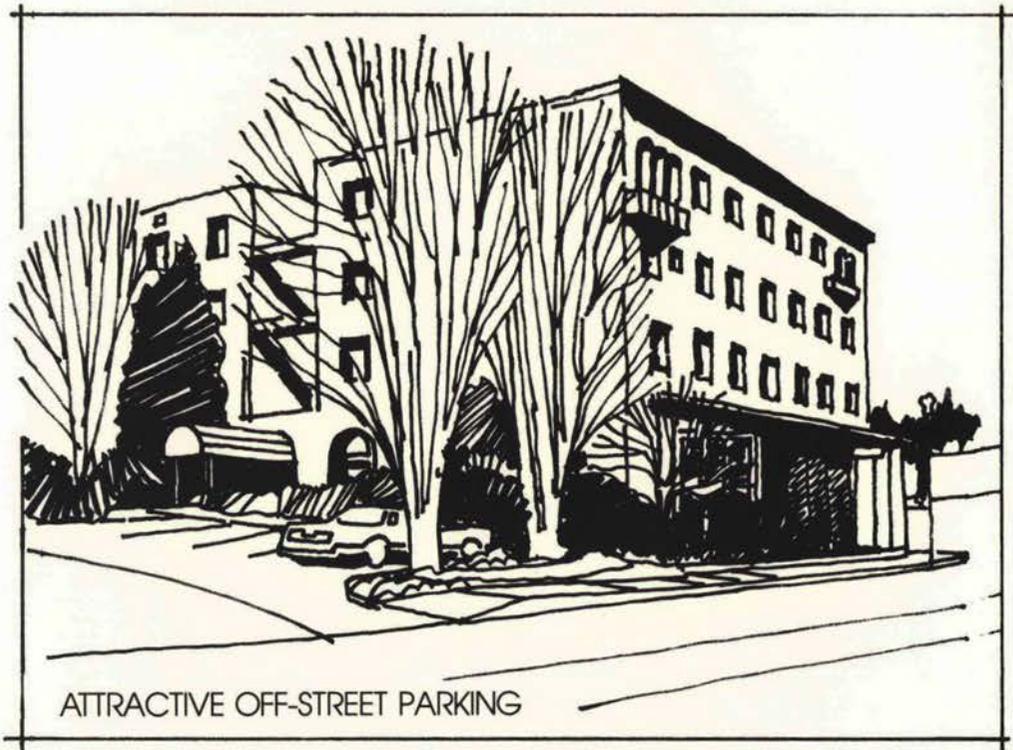
## Parking

- Locate major off-street parking facilities, where possible, to the rear of downtown commercial structures. Clearly separate parking areas from shopping street frontage and from areas of intense pedestrian activity.
- Minimize the size of individual off-street parking lots. Accommodate a large number of cars by the use of a series of separated lots and/or structures, rather than one or two large facilities. Maximize traffic island landscaping in and adjacent to all off-street parking areas.



OFF-STREET PARKING LOT

- Use parking garage structures to meet the need for increased parking in the downtown area. Keep the size of parking structures in approximate conformance with adjacent building size and proportion.
- Allow for safe and unencumbered pedestrian and wheelchair movement through parking lots and access roads with the use of raised (or delineated) landscaped walkways. Also utilize pedestrian walkways to permit the establishment of attractive and accessible rear store entries and entry plazas plus open or enclosed walkways to shopping streets and commercial frontage areas.
- Use both pedestrian walkway and vehicular lighting standards to adequately illuminate off-street parking areas, walkways and alleys at night.



## Service Facilities:

Service Facilities: parking and drop-off/unloading facilities for trucks and autos which serve commercial development, e.g., truck/garbage pick-up.

- Locate service facilities as far away as possible from pedestrian walkways and rear store entryways and plazas.
- Screen service facilities from pedestrians and passersby with the use of architectural treatments such as fencing or free standing walls, or with the use of landscaping.
- Encourage easy and unencumbered access for trucks and other service vehicles through adjacent parking lots. Also, design parking lots to eliminate or reduce the potential for auto and service vehicle conflicts.
- Incorporate and de-emphasize service facility accommodations in the overall form of a new or improved structure to ensure building integrity and minimize negative visual impact on adjacent structures.

# DESIGN CRITERIA 15 • Architectural Details

**Compatibility Factor: The relationship of specific architectural detailing proposed for use on the exteriors of new or improved buildings with details representing traditional Grass Valley Gold Rush Period architectural standards.**

Historic Gold Rush architectural form and construction detailing reflects a long standing, important visual and cultural tradition in the City of Grass Valley. Many existing buildings, some of them constructed during or shortly after the Gold Rush period, today clearly still exhibit a truly unique local character based on the life styles, construction techniques and materials common to the mid-1880's.

Fortunately, recent changes have not yet drastically altered the overall historic character of the downtown area of Grass Valley. Many of the new buildings constructed in the last decade boldly reflect the areas' Gold Rush heritage. New structures planned for future development, and also modifications to existing buildings, should continue this commitment to local history and respect in whatever way feasible these dominant existing architectural patterns and themes.

The historic elements which could most easily be incorporated into new or improved building design include the following:

- The use of traditional building materials for building exteriors such as brick, wood siding, or plaster over wood, concrete, or stone.
- The use of traditional wood sash window or door detailing with small pane glass windows set in lead or wood mullions. The use of cast iron or wood window shutters on brass or cast iron hinges.



CLASSICAL BALCONY DETAIL

- The use of traditional wood doorway detailing with timber or stone lintels.
- The incorporation of pedestrian canopies and marquees into building facade design.
- The use of balconies and/or porches whenever possible using appropriate traditional materials in construction.
- The use of selected common facade and roof details, where appropriate, to enhance the overall character of the structure and maintain relative harmony with adjacent historic buildings.



WROUGHT IRON BALUSTER



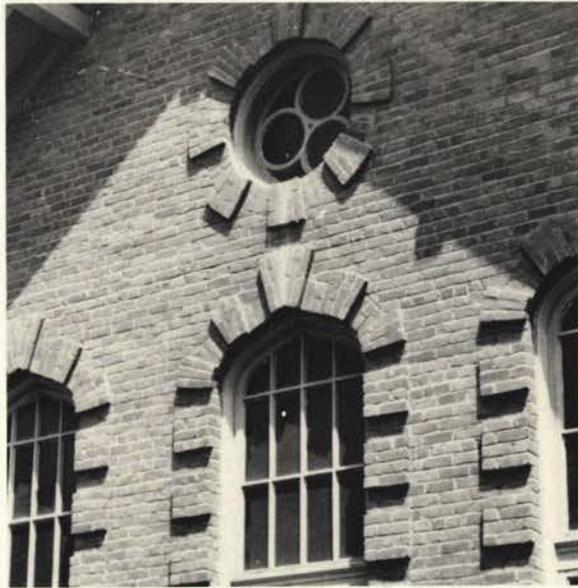
CLASSICAL  
COLUMNS AND PEDIMENT DETAILS



CORNICE PARAPET  
AND GOLD RUSH WINDOW DETAILS



WOOD PORCH AND BALUSTRADE DETAIL



EARLY 1900 BRICK DETAIL



CAST IRON WINDOW DETAIL

# Chapter Five

# Implementation

## Conclusions and Recommendations

As mentioned in earlier chapters, there are clearly three different directions which could be stressed in making private and public decisions on development within the Downtown Historic Area. They are strict preservation, conservation and select development, or unlimited change. Each of these directions have their advantages and disadvantages; each is potentially viable and, of course, dependent upon the circumstances and particulars of the times. Each potentially would result in very different design images of central Grass Valley.

Chapter 3 summarizes the consensus of a public workshop for a conservation and enhancement approach which would keep the best of the old with sensitively designed new developments. Therefore, this is the central goal by which all proposals for change can be evaluated.

With this statement of community preference in mind, the following Action Program should be considered in order to coordinate and accelerate activities:

- Designate a Downtown Historic District within which these criteria will be applied.
- Establish a Design Review mechanism to work with other City officials and the private sector to accelerate and coordinate the historic conservation and enhancement program.
- Establish and maintain a continuing program of community-wide participation in all significant decisions affecting downtown revitalization, enhancement, and conservation of historic architecture and the surrounding environment.
- Investigate the appropriateness of creating an incentive program to encourage individual building/property owners to make "significant" contributions to historic district amenities. The program would be managed by the City of Grass Valley and/or commerce group and use the Design Manual as a guiding document.
- Develop a comprehensive **Downtown Revitalization Plan** for the designated historic area. Include the study of the future role of the downtown within the greater Grass Valley community, existing and projected land uses, circulation (both vehicular and pedestrian), open space, streetscape landscaping, parking (both on and off-street), lighting, building facade improvements, and building and street signage. Adopt special zoning requirements as applicable to follow recommendations of the plan.
- Develop a detailed **Streetscape Plan** for the Downtown Historic District based on the findings of the Revitalization Plan. Include specific proposals for landscaping, lighting, pavement enhancement, rear and front entryway treatments, on-street parking, and street furniture – such as sitting areas, kiosks, etc.
- Develop detailed front "facade" elevation drawings for all block fronts on Main and Mill Streets in the Central Historic Area. Include specific recommendations to be used as guidelines for facade improvements including signage, lighting, canopies, window modifications, doorway modifications, and detailed architectural enhancements such as the cleaning and refurbishing of brick and brick detailing.

# Glossary

- Balcony/Gallery** – A balcony or upper story projection supported from the building facade and with columns or posts to ground level.
- Baluster** – A post or upright support for a handrail.
- Balustrade** – A handrailing of upright posts or Balusters.
- Bay** – An outward projection of a wall with windows, or a division in a wall seen as space between piers or columns.
- Canopy** – Roof-like building facade projections located or projecting out from between the first and second floors of a structure, and supported by wood, cast iron, or steel columns or posts.
- Capital** – The crowning element of a column, post, or pier.
- Cornice** – A decorative projection running horizontally at the top of a wall where it meets the roof.
- Dentils** – Small brick blocks or toothed wood decorative members found in classical or period architecture in cornices, or other horizontal bands on building facades.
- False Fronts** – A vertical extension of a building facade above roof line, to add visual height.
- Gable** – The triangular part of an exterior wall, created by the angle of a pitched roof with two sides.
- Hipped Roof** – A roof with pitched or sloped ends and sides which rise from all four sides of a building.
- Lintel** – the horizontal member above a door or window which supports the wall above the facade opening.
- Marquee** – Same as a canopy except that marquees are usually constructed of canvas with steel or aluminum supports, and cover less area than a full canopy.
- Mullions** – The frames or divisions within multi-paned windows.
- Parapet** – A railing or retaining wall along the edge of a roof, porch, balcony or terrace.
- Peaked Roof** – A roof with a single, unbroken pitch from two sides to a central linear peak or ridge running the entire length of the roof.
- Pediment** – The triangular face of a gable end crowning a building front or portico, especially in a classical – or strongly symmetrical form.
- Pier** – An upright support, either free standing or part of a wall.
- Porch** – A building projection located at first floor entry or exit level. An extended exterior first floor designed to facilitate easy entry and exit, and accommodate occasional recreational use. Usually covered with a canopy.
- Portico** – An entrance porch.
- Ridge** – The highest line of a roof where two sloping surfaces come together.
- Sash** – The frame which holds window panes, and forms the movable part of the window.
- Shutter** – A rectangular wood or cast iron piece, set on hinges and used to cover a window or door. Historically used for security or to protect window or door openings from natural elements.
- String Course** – A continuous projecting horizontal band on a building facade usually made of moulding (wood or plaster) or masonry.
- Wood Frame** – A building constructed with structural wood timber supports, and bracing, with or without a wood board facade covering.

### Credits:

- Rudolph R. Platzek, AICP - Project Supervisor  
WPM Planning Team
- Clayton Reed Parsons, ASLA - Project Designer  
Parsons Associates
- Varda Wilensky - Report Designer
- Leon White - Draftsman
- Jerry Beach - Text Typesetting  
Avant Garde & Baskerville - Letter Type
- Photo on Page VII - California Historical Society,  
San Francisco, California