

Appendix A • Sample Design Guidelines for Six Commercial Districts



Guidelines can build on the historic beauty of towns such as Angels Camp.

Chapter 3 provides an introduction to the role of guidelines in Sierra communities — as a framework to design places that build upon and complement the local assets and unique context. Guidelines reflect the community’s vision, political capacity, and willingness to create distinct commercial and mixed use districts. As indicated in Chapter 3, guidelines should vary to reflect the distinct historical patterns, local character, and desired future of the different communities.

The following are sample guidelines for each prototype commercial district. They are designed to help fuel community-level discussions for establishing appropriate place-based guidelines for your unique Sierra commercial districts. These recommendations are specifically designed to encourage compact, pedestrian-friendly, and mixed use commercial districts.

Downtown / Main Street — DMS

These sample guidelines encourage the DMS to be the civic and commercial heart of the community while maintaining its historic pattern and character.

Community Design Guidelines

- Design developments that encourage public interaction, special events, and celebrations in the DMS as the civic heart of the community.
- Incorporate residences in the DMS to enhance vitality, housing options, and street life. (The rise in DMS real estate prices in much of the Sierra often works to displace residences in favor of office / retail. Towns often need to provide incentives to ensure residential use is encouraged.)
- Maintain commerce-friendly, pedestrian-oriented DMS through traffic calming, bypasses, and design

features especially on the many Sierra main streets that have evolved into highways (e.g. Highways 49 and 395).

- Utilize vacant lots and undeveloped land to convert to plazas, new historically contributing mixed use buildings, or parking areas.
- Provide for parking studies, satellite parking, and shuttles before crisis points are reached for area merchants in DMS where parking is often poorly managed or inadequate at peak periods.
- Incorporate walkable trails and sidewalks to enhance pedestrian use of the DMS. Build on the grid of historic streets that are laid out around pre-existing natural topography and landscapes.
- Plan for and promote undergrounding of utilities.

Site Design Guidelines

- Encourage zero lot line in all new buildings and have renovations contribute to the “outdoor public room” created by the row of historic buildings placed on the streetfront.
- Maintain pedestrian streetscape and historic character by moving parking to the rear where possible and off-site with shuttles.
- Integrate plaza areas on vacant sites with good solar exposure to create attractive public gathering spaces. Plan ahead for population increases that will require greater public space to accommodate civic events.
- Encourage outdoor restaurant space, retail areas, and pedestrian amenities such as benches and historic streetlights to bring life to the street.
- Create shared parking plans to manage retail parking during day and more restaurant / theater availability in evening.

- Maintain street tree canopy and covered space along the building façades. Non-coniferous trees provide an arching canopy for the sense of a ceiling to the “outdoor public room” in the DMS.
- Provide service areas in the rear and / or consolidate among establishments so that services do not conflict with pedestrian use of the storefront.

Building Design Guidelines

- Design new buildings to contribute to the historic character of the DMS. They should complement, not replicate, the proportions, forms, patterns, and materials of the historic structures around them while making it clear they are not of the historic period of the original downtown.
- Replace or remodel buildings to complement the historic character of the DMS. Non-historic buildings may be out of context with the historic pattern of the downtown.
- Undertake renovations, rehabilitations, and additions consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation. (This approach can help the town secure incentives for renovating historic buildings.)
- Design massing and façades to fit today’s larger retail stores within a traditional main street environment. (Our downtowns were built at a time when retail stores were smaller and many downtown blocks are divided into lots as narrow as 20-25 feet.)
- Create covered walkways and pedestrian space with the use of balconies, awnings, or canopies that provide pedestrian comfort and are consistent with the historic design.
- Align cornices with adjacent buildings and use historic patterns on architectural features such as doors, windows, siding, and trim. Historic cornice and parapet details enhance the unique streetscape.

Neighborhood Convenience Center — NCC

These sample guidelines encourage a mix of commercial services that fill residents’ daily staple shopping needs while stimulating locally based social interaction.

Community Design Guidelines

- Rezone to promote a CMU area within growing established residential neighborhoods so that NCCs can be created.
- Build new NCCs early in new neighborhoods and plan for evolution into full-scale NCs given increased density and ongoing growth projections. Incorporate vacant lots around NCCs for future plazas and buildout into NC.
- Provide parking for shuttles between NCC and the downtown and shopping districts. In the General Plan and Transportation Element, NCCs serve as gathering points for regular transit service.
- Encourage residents and children to commute safely by connecting NCCs to street and trail networks with clear pedestrian access through sidewalks, bike trails, and safe road crossings.

Site Design Guidelines

- Design NCC with respect for the scale, proportion, forms, patterns, and materials of the neighborhood to communicate a neighborhood identity and sense of place.
- Incorporate civic spaces with growth, such as playgrounds and tot lots, to increase neighborhood use of the NCC.
- Cluster parking in side and rear lots.
- Provide amenities such as extra-wide sidewalks and street furnishings to encourage social interaction.

- Maintain a street tree canopy and covered pedestrian space along the building façades to reduce snow and ice hazards for pedestrians.
- Provide service areas in the rear and / or consolidate among establishments so that services do not conflict with pedestrian use of the storefront.

Building Design Guidelines

- Design new buildings to the proportions, forms, patterns, and materials of the neighborhood. Place the buildings for views of the Sierra or surrounding community to support the wider neighborhood design and sense of place.
- Orient ground-floor commercial / retail toward the street with appropriate canopies and awnings for weather and sense of pedestrian scale.
- Set scale of one to two stories to fit into the neighborhood residential scale.



A convenient NCC serving one of Truckee’s neighborhoods.

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Neighborhood Center — NC

Sample guidelines encourage NCs that meet the daily retail, community, social, entertainment, and athletic needs of residents close to where they live.

Community Design Guidelines

- Incorporate NCs into large new-growth proposals, ensuring they are present in neighborhoods of 5,000-15,000 people. In areas of extremely rapid population growth, plan for multiple NCs to service distinct neighborhoods.
- Build new NCs early in a large-scale development, as the neighborhood hub for civic and commercial activity in new master-planned communities.
- Promote NCs in infill areas.
- Design NCs as non-linear mixed use nodes to ensure they do not evolve into commercial corridors (CCs).
- Provide parking for shuttles to downtown and shopping districts from NC. In the General Plan and Transportation Element, NCs serve as gathering points for regular transit service.
- Incorporate appropriate uses to ensure that complementary functions evolve between the NCs and the DMS.
- Encourage residents and children to commute safely by connecting NCs to street and trail networks with clear pedestrian access through sidewalks, bike trails, and safe road crossings.

Site Design Guidelines

- Design NC with respect for the scale, proportion, forms, patterns, and materials of the neighborhood to provide a sense of place.

- Build in playgrounds, village greens, ice-skating rinks, etc. within NC borders to increase NC civic and commercial integration.
- Design NCs with pedestrian amenities such as extra-wide sidewalks and street furnishings to connect mixed use establishments throughout the NC and encourage social interaction.
- Cluster parking in side or rear yard, or in public garage, subordinate to pedestrian use.
- Create shared parking plans to manage retail parking during day and more restaurant / theater availability in evening to cover 16 spaces per 1000 sf as biggest demand.
- Maintain a street tree canopy and covered pedestrian space along the building façades to reduce snow and ice hazards for pedestrians.
- Provide service areas in the rear and / or consolidate among establishments so that services do not conflict with pedestrian use of the storefront.

Building Design Guidelines

- Design new buildings to the proportions, forms, patterns, and materials of the neighborhood and place for views of the Sierra or surrounding community.
- Orient ground-floor commercial / retail toward the street with appropriate canopies and awnings for weather and sense of pedestrian scale.
- Encourage second (and in some neighborhoods third) story use for offices and residences proportionally throughout NC with higher buildings in center and lower buildings at edges of development.

Shopping District — SD

SD guidelines encourage larger retail services that complement the family and quick-stop services of the NC and unique retail mix of the DMS.

Community Design Guidelines

- Develop SDs in existing commercial areas or brownfield sites on axes to downtowns at a major intersection. Factor the possible need for multiple SDs into planning decisions around additional growth proposals.
- Place SDs on the perimeter of the DMS, with outdoor plaza spaces that can link the DMS and SD, drawing people through music, art, farmers' markets, sidewalk sales, parade staging areas, etc. to bring vitality to these critical commercial districts.
- Expand SD by building in set-aside areas within internal street grid or using a node vs. corridor approach to expand into adjoining properties.
- Incorporate drive-through and ubiquitous franchise stores only when tied to nodal development, zero lot lines, and use of appropriate regional architecture. Disallow look-alike franchise architecture.
- Set square footage restrictions (e.g. 40,000 sf or less) or set architectural requirements to meet local character to discourage big boxes or provide clear guidelines for how they can fit into the community character.
- Link SD transit stops to DMS and NCs with regular timely shuttle service.

Community Design Guidelines (continued)

- Buffer adjacent neighborhoods with mixed use buildings, live-work units, and / or multi-family homes.
- Provide clear pedestrian access through sidewalks, bike trails, and safe road crossings and links to wider trail system.

Site Design Guidelines

- Include outdoor public “plaza” space for special events and community gatherings.
- Design SDs with pedestrian amenities such as extra-wide sidewalks and street furnishings to connect retail and mixed use establishments throughout the SD.
- Create shared parking plans to manage retail parking during day and more restaurant / theater availability in evening to cover 16 spaces per 1000 sf as biggest demand.
- Encourage articulated parking nodes oriented to SD façades and multi-tiered parking to avoid huge asphalt areas. Parking should be clustered on side, in rear, or in public garage, subordinate to pedestrian use.

A lumber mill theme design goes underappreciated when parking is placed in front.



- Encourage creative use of parking area with retail displays in low-volume periods.
- Maintain a street tree canopy or covered pedestrian space along the building façades and walkways to ease pedestrian access to parking areas.
- Provide service areas in the rear and / or consolidate among establishments so that services do not conflict with pedestrian use of the storefront.

Building Design Guidelines

- Adopt local design vernacular to respect community character. Large façades must be articulated with diverse retail functions communicated at storefront through architectural forms. Provide architectural detail utilizing materials and scale to complement existing community character.
- Provide two- to three-story buildings with retail on the first floor and offices or residences above. Retail such as restaurants with third story views also appropriate.
- Design buildings so they can be adapted for a variety of uses and tenants beyond the initial lease and be more profitable over the long term.

- Orient ground floor commercial / retail toward the street and / or internal street network with canopies and awnings for weather and sense of pedestrian scale.
- Transition building height through step-downs into residential neighborhoods, including use of two-story multi-family housing.

Commercial Corridor — CC

CCs degrade the character of our historic towns and Sierra landscape. The following sample guidelines are intended, not to promote CCs, but rather to provide ideas on how to convert them into nodal retail and mixed use centers.

Community Design Guidelines

- Disallow new CC zoning in community gateways (requires coordination with Caltrans and NDOT).
- Convert CCs to nodal developments, prioritizing those closest to downtown along axes to largest neighborhoods in concentric circles (with incentive program). By converting the linear building entrances to nodal development, pedestrian activity can be increased in a “park once” environment.
- Encourage nodal developments behind landscaped parkways to promote a “park once” environment and reduce visual impact of large parking areas.
- Disallow isolated office parks.
- Incorporate traffic lane narrowing, pedestrian sidewalks, and landscape parkways along wide highway rights-of-way. Within the right-of-way there is room for Class III bicycle paths and landscaped parkways to buffer walkways. Buildings can then be placed on the edge of the right-of-way. With exceptionally wide Caltrans and NDOT rights-of-way, parallel parking can curtail multiple vehicle lanes, bringing life to the street frontage.

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CC Community Design Guidelines (continued)

- Incorporate drive-through and ubiquitous franchise stores only when tied to nodal development, zero lot lines, and use of appropriate regional architecture. Disallow look-alike franchise architecture.
- Set square foot restrictions (e.g. 40,000 sf or less) or set architectural requirements to meet local character to discourage big boxes or provide clear guidelines for how they can fit into the community character.
- Buffer adjacent neighborhoods with mixed use buildings, live-work units and / or multi-family homes to encourage employee housing, apartments, rental housing, and / or medium-priced housing.
- Provide clear pedestrian access through sidewalks, bike trails, and safe road crossings and links to wider trail system.

Site Design Guidelines

- Place new retail and mixed use facilities on street front to shield large parking areas and improve pedestrian flow.
- Utilize new reuse technologies for site-based reconstructions given the potential for high levels of demolition and reconstruction in converting a CC. See www.thereusepeople.org or www.gbapgh.org.
- Place parking entrances approximately every 250 feet into internal street grid to move traffic behind building façades on street front and into nodes.
 - Convert frontal parking or poor-quality strip malls to outdoor spaces to enhance view corridors and host special events to bring vitality to node.
 - Create shared parking plans to manage retail parking during day and more restaurant / theater availability in evening to cover 16 spaces per 1000 sf as biggest demand.
 - Develop articulated parking nodes oriented to SD façades and multi-tiered

parking to convert huge asphalt areas and provide infill opportunities for plazas and new buildings. Parking nodes should be clustered on side, in rear, or in public garage, subordinate to pedestrian use.

- Maintain a street tree canopy or covered pedestrian space along the building façades and walkways to ease pedestrian access to parking areas.
- Provide service areas removed from public façades and maximize phased deliveries in non-peak hours.

Building Design Guidelines

- Redesign old strip buildings into portions of interior nodal development with new buildings placed on lot line. Consider how old strip buildings can be refurbished into a nodal structure before deciding if they should be demolished or not and enhance reuse.
- Transition “cheap one-story box” buildings with parapet and other designs so they visually fit into two- to three-story designs of the full SD environment. When built to accommodate heavy snow load, the roof area can be converted into outdoor patios / restaurants, etc. that tie into the second floor of adjacent buildings.
- Convert CCs standard box architecture to local design vernacular to respect community character. Redesign façade with three-dimensional relief relating to pedestrian scale using parapet levels, projecting gables, awning treatments, columned porches, etc. The widths of the façades can reflect historic retail patterns even with larger stores within.
- Link exterior treatment to interior uses to make conversion real and encourage specific retail nodes within wider structure. Convert big box stores into interior malls with similar treatments.
- Accommodate residential units on upper floors with a possibility of two-story townhomes / condominiums on second and third floors with retail below in remodeling CCs.

Appropriate regional architecture is a critical first step in enabling franchises to fit into Sierra communities.



Rural Community Center — RCC

These sample guidelines are designed to help ensure that RCCs, with population growth, will evolve into a Downtown / Main Street rather than a Commercial Corridor, continuing to provide a strong sense of place to the rural community.

Community Design Guidelines

- Zone for a commercial and mixed use 10-acre area to transition to residential neighborhoods. Set higher density in this area than in surrounding rural county.
- Manage rural highways to ensure that widening does not eliminate ease of pedestrian use of RCC. Transition the highway from “vehicle-design-speed scale” well outside the RCC to ensure pedestrian safety.
- Establish a grid road / sidewalk network to encourage compact growth.
- Cluster and direct commercial uses to the RCC crossroads with a definable edge (3-10 acres) to provide needed services for residents and visitors. This provides the RCC, with time and population growth, an opportunity to evolve into a more classic Sierra DMS (e.g. Genoa).
- Incorporate plaza areas – many RCCs have open area in front of civic buildings, vacant lots, parking areas, etc., that should be preserved to serve as the outdoor social meeting center and ensure view corridors and open spaces with good solar exposure to create attractive people spaces.
- Link the RCC to the public lands through trailheads, purchasing connecting lots and / or building trails along roadways, or through trail easements along the perimeter of large agricultural properties.
- Provide clear pedestrian access through sidewalks, bike trails, and safe road crossings and links to wider trail system.
- Plan ahead for, or maintain, a street tree canopy to contribute to the sense of a ceiling to the “outdoor public room.”

Site Design Guidelines

- Set zero lot line in all new buildings and renovations to contribute to the “outdoor wall.” Design and locate buildings to create a strong identity by defining the street and public space, protecting view corridors, establishing and retaining landmark features.
- Encourage safe pedestrian areas for walking on road shoulder where necessary and establishing sidewalk connections. Build a transit stop.
- Provide off-street parking in rear or in RCC set-aside parking area.
- Encourage outdoor restaurant space, retail areas, and pedestrian amenities such as benches and historic streetlights to bring life to the street.
- Provide service functions in the rear.

Building Design Guidelines

- Respect historic character of RCC. New buildings should complement, not replicate, the proportions, forms, patterns, and materials of the historic structures around them while making it clear they are not of the historic period of significance.
- Highlight historic assets such as ranches, Pony Express sites, and old mines that attract visitors and provide a sense of place.
- Provide incentives for historic buildings that retain good historic integrity to be rehabilitated and restored. Renovations, rehabilitations, and additions shall be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation.
- Enhance covered walkways and pedestrian space with the use of balconies, canopies, and awnings consistent with historic buildings.
- Align cornices with adjacent buildings and use historic patterns on architectural features such as doors, windows, siding, and trim to enhance the unique streetscape.
- Disallow retail and commercial uses of franchise architecture.

Historic RCC buildings such as this schoolhouse in Lee Vining provide proportions, forms, and patterns that can be a basis for complementary new design.

