

4 Downtown / Main Street — DMS

DMS

NCC

NC

SD

CCC

RCC

The following sample approach is designed to encourage a community to describe its location and characteristics — its unique local assets. Based on these assets and the community’s goals for the future, an intent / vision statement can be crafted. Land uses, guidelines, and standards are then suggested to support a vision specifically oriented towards the DMS, as one of six prototype commercial districts.

Location and Characteristics

The Sierra Nevada’s downtowns and main streets are the historic commercial “heart” of our towns and traditionally contain a mix of commercial and residential uses. Many of our downtowns are a collection of well-preserved historic buildings with civic buildings located at prominent locations in the community. The classic Sierra main street has short blocks, wide sidewalks and on-street parking. It is a compact assembly of storefront buildings and is typically 2-5 blocks in length. Main streets are the Sierra’s great public gathering places, and their intimate character makes these streets special places for the community. The street space is well defined with multi-story buildings up along the edge of the sidewalk, enclosing the street like walls of a large outdoor room. The retail windows, architectural details, signage that complements the historic character, covered walkways, and the people on the street create visual interest and vitality.

Intent

New infill development and major renovations / historic rehabilitations should enhance the “main street” feeling by maintaining the streetwall and by following the scale and articulation of the adjacent historic buildings. Multi-story, mixed use development will ensure that the DMS remains the retail and civic center for the community.



The position, scale, and local building materials used in these historic Auburn buildings set a high standard for new commercial buildings.

Land Use



Appropriate Uses — Ready, Set, Go

- Retail sales and service under 5,000 sf (e.g. pharmacies, coffee shops, bookstores, clothing stores, bars, restaurants that encourage high levels of visitation and pedestrian activity)
- Residential — in upper stories or on ground floors when not in storefront space
- Government use (e.g. library, town hall, post office, courthouse, museum)
- Special events — farmers’ markets, parades, celebrations linked to area culture
- Offices and clinics
- Services (e.g. dry cleaners, ATM)
- Entertainment (e.g. theater)
- Lodging
- Town square, plaza, trail connections, formal parks, and open space
- Transit hub



Conditional Uses — Proceed with Caution (Appropriate Design Solution Required)

- Retail sales and service over 5,000 sf (greater if articulated)
- Schools
- Manufacturing less than 5,000 sf with retail outlet



Non-Appropriate Uses — Stop

- Wholesale
- Outdoor commercial storage
- Drive-through services (e.g. restaurant, lube shop, bank)
- Manufacturing and production
- Warehouse, freight, distribution
- Vehicle sales and service — vehicle fuel sales



General guidelines are discussed in Chapter 3 with sample guidelines for DMS included in Appendix B.

Standards

Lot

- Floor area ratio (floor space to land area) — minimum 0.3 - 0.4 to 1.
- Site frontage — 90% of façades within the minimum and maximum setback (maximized for retail display).
- Front yard setbacks — minimum 0 ft. to maximum 10 ft.
- Side yard setbacks — 0 ft.
- Rear yard setbacks — allow for parking wherever possible.

Building

- Building height — minimum 25 ft. to maximum 40 ft., follow historic pattern.
- Building width — minimum 15 ft. to maximum façade width that fits historic patterns.
- Building transitions — height transitions or step-downs adjacent to residential development.
- Building projections — balconies, canopies, or awnings whenever appropriate to create protected, covered sidewalks.
- Architectural features — proportioned as per the historic pattern.

Streetscape / Landscape

- Traffic — two-lane, bi-directional streets. Narrow lane widths slow traffic.
- Bicycles — Class III bicycle lanes each direction. These also serve as parking / traffic lane buffers.
- Sidewalks — wide sidewalks. May have patterned surfaces. Minimum 8 ft., maximum 20 ft., with outdoor dining / display areas linked to the building uses. Bench seating every 100 ft. maximum.
- Crosswalks — bulbouts with crosswalks to slow traffic for the pedestrian, with different pattern and texture than traffic lanes.
- Plaza — provide plaza spaces with gathering areas, seating, tree canopy, planters, bicycle racks.
- Trees / planters — street tree canopy with surrounding planter areas, some raised with seating at perimeters where on-street parking is provided and in landscape parkway strips where on-street parking is not provided.

- Lighting — street lighting appropriate for historic character with pedestrian orientation.
- Signage — of historic scale and character, no backlit signage.
- Snow storage — haul-off site near DMS.

Parking

- Parking — create a “park once” environment. Mixed parking types are preferred. Where appropriate, parallel or diagonal parking is desired to keep pavement widths narrow. Parking structures could be appropriate if site restrictions permit.
- Transit stops — required and part of Transportation Element of the General Plan.
- Density — min. 2 spaces / 1000 sf (shared use) — max. 4 spaces / 1000 sf.
- Fee structure — parking-in-lieu fee option available. Historic rehabilitation projects should receive financial incentives (e.g. reduction of in-lieu fees.)
- Orientation — off-street parking in rear, public garage or off-site linked to shuttle service.
- Special events — street closure with shuttle availability.
- Parking authority — consider early coordinated effort (usually financed through parking fees) to balance parking needs with historic integrity and ensure residential parking access with retail needs. It is much harder to resolve these tough parking issues once oversaturation occurs.

Genoa showcases Sierra architectural standards in the oldest bar in Nevada.



4 The Arbors in Murphys — A DMS Case Study¹

Implementing CMU Approaches in The Arbors

Community

The Arbors used a CMU approach to address a number of key community issues:

- Linking peripheral retail stores with the downtown and extending Main Street
- Providing additional housing in the DMS
- Restoring some historic buildings

Buildings

- The Arbors consists of eight buildings. Each holds a conglomerate of 2-4 retail establishments that appear to be separate buildings given the detailed façade treatments. The widths of the façades reflect the historic retail patterns of Murphys. The building heights of 15-30 feet follow the historic patterns and include numerous height transitions to enhance the façade.
- The buildings create a street wall (0 ft. setback) with their façades on both Main Street and the side street, maximizing retail display.
- Five-foot side setbacks created a ten-foot division between buildings. These were used for pedestrian access to parking areas and to create needed fire code separation.
- The building façades vary in texture from stone, to weathered wood lap siding, to wood board and batten, to stucco, to shingle, to a plaster base with faux-aged detailing. These different textures, varying rooflines, height transitions, and alternating paint colors clearly define retail spaces as separate entities and contribute to a sense of historic scale. Siding materials vary with retail establishments and reflect standards from the historic area.
- Architectural features were inventoried from true historic buildings. These elements were incorporated into the living areas, balconies, and awnings. The cornices, dormers, pillars, gables, and parapets use different materials including metal, wood, shingle, and plaster, and detailing with corbels, caps, and dental treatments.
- The Arbors preserved three historic structures, one as a single-family home and one as an office building, maintaining the residential feel of the back street. The third is a small shed that provides ambience to the plaza.

Walkways

- The walkways incorporate balconies, awnings, and canopies for pedestrian comfort. Designs of multiple styles of awnings and porches include tin roofs, wood shingles, wood shakes, corrugated metal, and canvas.
- Sidewalks — 6-foot-wide sidewalks link The Arbors to the downtown. On heavy tourism days, this is barely enough width to accommodate the pedestrian load.
- The lighting on the buildings is consistent with the historic character. Traditionally designed outdoor lighting with black wrought iron complements similar signage and fits the historic context on Main Street.

Landscaping

- Early antipathy toward the project from local residents created a need for regular outreach and visioning to incorporate local concerns. Once articulated, local concerns were primarily for the preservation of the mature tree canopy and respect for historic character of the downtown. The existing street trees were preserved. The tree cover is enhanced by canopies, providing needed shade on sunny foothill days.
- Curvilinear landscape edges create a more park-like setting that notably differs from the rectangular DMS approach and separates the internal sidewalk from the street curb and gutter.
- Plaza — Open space includes benches, tree canopy, trash enclosures, planters, and expanded walkways.

Parking and Services

- Murphys enjoys a “park once” environment where people take advantage of the pedestrian scale to walk from The Arbors up Main Street.
- The site plan downplays the automobile, attracting pedestrians while providing rear and side parking at convenient locations.
- On-street parallel parking is provided on side and back streets. The residential back street has parallel parking and a landscaped sidewalk strip along with access to a parking area for the loft residents, an office, and a single-family home.



Parking and Services *(continued)*

- Two additional parking lots are built into the interior with small node lots in rear. These parking spaces accommodate service / delivery, residential parking, handicapped spaces, and public parking at 3 to 3.5 spaces per 1000 sf.
- Utilities were undergrounded along Main Street while the buildings along side streets are served overhead.
- Service areas are placed behind buildings, with architectural details on the shared garbage enclosures linked to the buildings.

Incentives

The project developers point to a particularly flexible lender as a major reason for their success. Pacific State Bank endorsed the CMU approach and met their financing needs. They also secured several variances including the right to extend porches and canopies over the sidewalks – technically encroaching on the county right-of-way. Thanks to their efforts to engage local residents, the community was supportive of the development and a successful CMU project was built.

The historic district in downtown Murphys includes a vibrant Main Street and side streets lined with buildings of varying architectural styles and materials. Three of the Arbors buildings, depicted below, showcase this unique town character.



Current Status

- 17,000 new square feet of retail were created including a gift store, an upscale market, art shops, a florist, and a garden store. The retail is mainly oriented toward specialty shops for tourists, such as the auto memorabilia and a rock store, with less emphasis on local needs.
- Outdoor meeting areas are popular and bring life to the street. The open plaza and outdoor restaurant / bar, along with pedestrian amenities, enhance Murphys' street vitality.
- Before the project, downtown retail rent was less than \$1.00 per square foot. Within two years, rent was raised to between \$1.60 and \$2.00 per square foot.
- Services such as public restrooms were incorporated for the town's visitors.
- Seven new second-story lofts / vacation rentals and a restored home were added to a town where there are limited housing options.
- Residents and visitors alike admire the architectural details and painstaking design that went into The Arbors, acknowledging that it has brought renewed vitality and a strong "sense of place" to Murphys.