

Rural Community Center — RCC

The following sample approach is designed to encourage a community to describe its location, characteristics, and 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 RCC and its evolution, as one of six prototype commercial districts.

Location and Characteristics

Our region's rural areas have long been served by historic commercial centers located at crossroads or along major roads. Many of these centers began as trading posts, serving travelers and immigrants. Some of the original stops along the Pony Express Route (e.g. Cooks Station along Highway 50) provided lodging, food, a post office, and a social center for weary travelers to exchange tales. As the surrounding population expanded, many of these centers evolved to cater to the local population. These Rural Community Centers (RCCs) range in size from 3 to 10 acres and cater to a variety of needs, including today's efforts to adjust to new retail demands from "ranchette" residents. Many also have public spaces and community facilities and serve as the "social anchor" for the rural area.

Intent

Protect the character of the historic pattern of clustering and commercial uses that provide needed services for residents and visitors. Highlight the historical significance, scale, and architecture of the centers. Engage in public / private partnerships to invest in, restore, and preserve old centers (e.g. gold mines, old ranches, Strawberry Lodge on Highway 50, etc.). RCCs are in danger of evolving into Commercial Corridors so encourage nodal development and strong historic standards to encourage evolution into a Downtown / Main Street as growth warrants.



Mixed use at the historic Genoa crossroads.

Land Use



Appropriate Uses — Ready, Set, Go

- Retail sales and service under 7,500 sf (e.g. general store, coffee shop, newsstand)
- Agricultural services (e.g. feed stores, tractor sales, saddle store, hardware) up to 20,000 sf
- Residential — in second floor above retail or in historic homes within RCC
- Government use (e.g. town hall, post office, Forest Service / BLM offices)
- Special events — farmers' markets, seasonal markets linked to area culture
- Clubs and religious institutions (e.g. Grange Hall)
- Office, clinics, and services under 5,000 sf
- Manufacturing less than 5,000 sf with retail outlet
- Lodging / restaurants / bars
- Public gathering area (e.g. park, playground, open space)
- Transit stop
- Schools and daycare
- Entertainment (e.g. theatre)



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

- Non-agricultural retail sales and service over 5,000 sf.
- Vehicle service under 10,000 sf
- Vehicle fuel sale
- Warehouse, freight, and distribution



Non-Appropriate Uses — Stop

- Large format retailers
- Non-agricultural vehicle sales
- Drive-through services (e.g. restaurants, banks)



General guidelines are discussed in Chapter 3 with sample guidelines for RCCs included in Appendix A.

Standards

Lot

- Floor area ratio (floor space to land area) — consistent with historic and rural context.
- Site frontage — 90% of façades within the minimum and maximum setback (maximized for retail display towards the street).
- Front yard setbacks — minimum 0 ft. to maximum 20 ft.
- Side yard setbacks — minimum 0 ft. to maximum 20 ft. wider setback where parking is provided.
- Rear yard setbacks — allow for parking wherever possible.

Building

- Building height — minimum 15 ft. to maximum 40 ft. follows historic pattern.
- Building width — minimum 20 ft. to maximum 100 ft.
- Building transitions — height transitions or stepdowns should be provided adjacent to residential development.
- Building projections — balconies, canopies, or awnings should be used to create protected, covered sidewalks.



This RCC market and post office are located on a major rural intersection.

- Architectural features — doors, windows, siding, and trim should be proportioned as per the historic pattern.
- Building massing — to be appropriate for evolution into a DMS or an NC.

Streetscape / Landscape

- Traffic — two-lane bi-directional rural highway, narrow lane widths to slow traffic. Traffic control at intersection to slow traffic and accommodate pedestrian use across highway.
- Bicycles — Class III bicycle lanes each direction, also serving as parking / traffic lane buffers.
- Front entry porches and / or boardwalk — sidewalk widths should be planned for potential expansion to DMS. Bench seating at storefronts.
- Crosswalks — slow traffic for the pedestrian.
- Gathering site / open space — outdoor seating / eating area near junction.
- Trees — street tree canopy established for shade and anticipation of future DMS.
- Lighting — street lighting appropriate for historic character. Provide minimal safe lighting for pedestrian walkways with porch lighting. Recommend www.darksky.org standards.
- Signage — of historic scale and character, no backlit signage. Pedestrian-oriented with concealed light sources directed downward.

Parking

- Parking area established with 600 sf parking / 1,000 sf retail given relatively unstructured parking.
- On-street parallel parking preferred to keep total pavement width narrow. 90-degree or diagonal parking orientation if width is available, as opposed to wider travel lanes.
- Transit stops — long-distance buses have set stop.

Sierraville — A RCC Case Study¹

Location and Characteristics

Sierraville is located at the crossroads of Highways 89 and 49 in Sierra Valley, the largest alpine valley in California. Serving first timber mills and dairy farmers and then ranchers, Sierraville's apex was in the 1940s. The region is struggling to maintain a vibrant economic center as agricultural operations consolidate into larger ranches, beef prices fluctuate, and cheap commercial areas are easily accessible in Reno. A number of local businesses have closed, made worse by the closing of the nearby Loyalton mill. Current businesses serve residents, and increasingly tourists, particularly bicyclists, motorcyclists, birders, and others who enjoy the beautiful rural setting. There are vacant and underutilized lots at the crossroads. Sierra County is working to maintain a viable ranching economy and is struggling with pressures to create bedroom communities for Reno and Truckee. Unlike the other case studies, there are no clear commercial financial investors for this RCC at this time.

Intent

Protect the character of the historic RCC and increase the financial vitality of the crossroads and area. Highlight the historical significance, scale, and architecture of Sierraville, particularly the utilitarian Victorian patterns in the hotel, residences, and major restaurant. Encourage retail stores into a nodal

Two historic buildings anchor the Sierraville crossroads.



development at the intersection. Currently stores are in a linear pattern down the highway — e.g. post office is one-half mile north on 89. Encourage new development on the streetfront to create a more pedestrian feel. The RCC currently has many different architectural styles, but it is still possible to envision Sierraville transitioning over time into a charming downtown that respects its past.

Land Use

Actual Uses

- Retail sales and service under 5,000 sf
- Convenience store
- Gas
- Petting farm that attracts families
- Agricultural service — feed store
- Residential — in historic single family homes within RCC
- Government use (e.g. post office, Forest Service office, fire station, Caltrans yard)
- Elementary school
- Custom wood milling — manufacturing
- Special events — weekend barbecues
- Restaurant — 1 large restaurant / bar (2 restaurants closed in 2003)
- Motel
- Lodging — historic hotel provides overflow function for nearby hot springs.

Standards in Place

Lot

- Floor area ratio (floor space to land area) — consistent with historic and rural context.
- Site frontage — 50% of façades are on streetfront in historic style — some newer buildings are set further back, disrupting the street wall.
- Front yard setbacks — minimum 0 ft. to maximum 50 ft.
- Side yard setbacks — minimum 0 ft. to maximum 20 ft. Using vacant lots for parking.
- Rear yard setbacks — none. Parking generally in front or on side.



Building

- Building height — maximum 35 ft. on hotel and historic restaurant.
- Building width — varies depending upon lot width and use.
- Building height transitions — no standards evident.
- Building projections — most buildings have maintained porches as common architectural treatment, but no clear standard is evident.
- Building massing — historic buildings are large and set context for crossroads. Newer buildings have not stayed consistent with that context. It is common for an RCC at this stage to have various sizes reflecting different periods.
- Architectural features — historic utilitarian Victorian architecture has been maintained in older buildings. School and Forest Service buildings from 1930s have brick-stucco siding / composition roof, creating a greater sense of spatial and period separation from the crossroads, but are well designed in their own right. Many newer buildings are not based on an historic pattern.

The Mediterranean style school building built in 1931.



Streetscape / Landscape

- Traffic — two-lane bi-directional rural highway, narrow lane widths to slow traffic. Traffic stop and flashing red light to stop traffic on Highway 89. No traffic calming features on Highway 49.
- Bicycles — Sierraville has become a major road bike touring area. Bicycles are evident throughout intersection, and many roads have striping indicating safer Class III bicycle lane area.
- Many buildings have front entry porches, and there are beautiful boardwalks on two historic commercial buildings. Bench seating at historic storefronts.
- Crosswalks — no striping or special texture available for pedestrians at crossroads. One crosswalk near school.
- Gathering site / open space — open yard next to General Store used for barbecue, picnic tables, and child entertainment with small petting zoo of farm animals. Another major gathering site is the rodeo grounds approximately 3 miles away. Residents tend to meet at the feed store and post office and, when functioning, local cafes.
- Trees — tree canopy on non-continuous sections of Highway 89, but not well established on Highway 49.
- Lighting — One street light at intersection. Building lighting on historic buildings and large-scale yard lighting in newer facilities like Caltrans and fire station.
- Signage — many historic wooden painted signs remain, adding character to the crossroads. Creates confusion as closed retail establishment signage still in place. No standards evident as newer backlit signs also in place.

Parking

- Parking areas on dirt lots near commercial establishments. Unclear whether set aside or vacant lots.
- On-street parallel parking provided on both highways at crossroads. More distant commercial areas south on Highway 89 have front parking areas.
- Bus stops in place.

Implementing CMU Approaches in Sierraville

Community

- Historically CMU existed in Sierraville with retail at the crossroads and adjacent residences. Today, the two-lane highway structure, the strength of the historic buildings at the crossroads, and attractive local residences preserve the scale and charm of the RCC.
- Over the past decades, commercial and central services have extended south on Highway 89 beyond pedestrian reach. Infill development is needed to connect these uses to the historic RCC and at crossroads in vacant buildings. Encourage additional retail at the intersection.
- Rural highways need to remain two-lane with crosswalks and a slowing mechanism for Highway 49 added.
- Existing convenience stores are well used and keep busy mainly with visitors, providing minimal convenience foods for residents. Currently residents must go beyond RCC for a more extensive line of products.
- Sierraville has fabulous viewsheds and extensive natural areas in the surrounding valley. While this is the main tourism draw, there are no current marketing brochures or maps for tourists to spend more time and money in the area beyond visiting the Sierra Hot Springs. Sierraville also has no clear trailheads or directions to the public lands from the crossroads.
- Encourage new residences within and around RCC as part of an infill development to bring more vitality to area. Sierraville has charming homes and cottages. Consider master planning neighborhoods to expand the grid street system.

Buildings

- The two Victorian-style historic buildings on the intersection provide dominant historic forms with similar height and setbacks. These two buildings set the standard for the evolving RCC streetwall and provide a unique and special character to Sierraville.
- Sierraville has two distinct historic building forms — Victorian commercial and residential at the cross roads and a different architectural style north on Highway 89 with a stucco Mediterranean feel to the schoolhouse and Forest Service offices. The predominantly Swiss / Italian immigrants who moved to the Valley in the late 1800s brought their architectural influences with them. The Sierra has examples of successfully merging these rich and diverse architectural styles and highlighting the history of these settlers as reflected in local architecture.
- Buildings with a strong utilitarian Victorian character have shingle awnings, vertically oriented rectangular windows, metal roofs, wooden porch pillars, and lathe-turned columns and balustrades on the porches of the streetfront.
- Buildings with Mediterranean feel have plastered brick base, vertically oriented rectangular divided lite windows, arched entry gable, gabled rooflines, and trim.
- Newer buildings range from ranch style approaches like the convenience store and motel to European chalet-style buildings. Feed store has Old West style façade. The lack of complementarity in newer buildings detracts from RCC. New infill buildings should be encouraged to recreate historic scale and extend street wall.



A popular Mexican restaurant now anchors the crossroads in an historic building.



Walkways

- Sidewalk connections or expanding historic boardwalks to connect new infill would be advantageous.
- Historic buildings encourage pedestrian access. Ground floor commercial / retail is oriented toward the principal street with appropriate canopies and awnings for weather.
- Uses such as the fire station and Caltrans, proximate to the RCC, attract commerce and bring people and vitality to the crossroads. However, the buildings must tie into RCC street wall to encourage, rather than discourage, pedestrian use.
- Tourism is increasing among bikers, birders, and tour drivers using scenic Highway 49. Current Class III bike lanes are a major improvement. Need to plan for and expand bicycle lanes and build retail to service this population.

Landscaping

- The sketchy street tree canopy along both Highways 89 and 49 provides mature trees as a base for growing the street wall over time.
- Special events — weekend barbecues are popular and bring life to the street. Expand outdoor bench seating and picnic areas into more central area to encourage more gatherings.

Parking and Services

- To ensure that this RCC does not evolve into a commercial corridor (CC), new parking should be established in the rear. Maintain parallel parking in front of buildings.
- Set aside parking areas as opposed to current practice of pulling into any open dirt area.
- Transit bus stop is provided.



The Victorian-style Globe Hotel graces the Sierraville