

## 4.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

This section describes the visual resources of Truckee and provides an evaluation of the effects the proposed 2025 General Plan would have on these resources, including visual character, scenic views and vistas, scenic resources, and light and glare.

### A. *Existing Setting*

The following subsection describes the existing regulatory and physical setting regarding aesthetic and visual resources in Truckee.

#### 1. **Regulatory Setting**

##### a. **Development Code**

Other than the General Plan, the Town of Truckee's Development Code is the primary document that regulates the form and character of development in the Town. The Development Code is part of the Town's Municipal Code, and includes the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Code. It also regulates the appearance of new development through a series of design guidelines.

The Development Code is one of the primary regulatory documents that implements the goals and policies of the General Plan. State Law requires that the Development Code be consistent with the General Plan. Since the 2025 General Plan would amend and augment many of the existing policies and actions of the 1996 General Plan, the General Plan update would also call for the Development Code to be updated to reflect those changes.

Article III: Site Planning and General Development Standards, of the Town of Truckee Development Code includes a number of chapters and sections related to the Town's aesthetic and visual resources. Key among them are the following:

*i. Design Guidelines*

Chapter 18.24 of the Development Code (Truckee Municipal Code, Title 18) is intended to assist property owners and project designers in understanding the Town's goals for attaining high quality development that is sensitive to the Town's unique character. Two of the key overall design objectives are to:

- ◆ Consider Truckee's small-town scale and mountain environment and demonstrate sensitivity to the contextual influences of the surrounding area.
- ◆ Articulate building forms and elevations to create interesting roof lines, building shapes, and patterns of shade and shadow, and avoid box-like structures with large flat wall planes.

Specific guidelines address the following issues:

- ◆ Protect views and natural features by siting buildings to preserve significant views, vegetation, and existing land forms. Projects should be designed so they complement rather than dominate the natural landscape.
- ◆ Consider views in project design, and do not obscuring scenic views.
- ◆ Place buildings to optimize off-site views, with building placement that optimizes views to mountains, open space, or watercourses whenever possible.
- ◆ Construct buildings on slopes that step to follow the natural terrain. Projects that significantly alter the natural slope can have a great visual impact and are strongly discouraged.

Other aspects of the Development Code address aspects such as appropriate building materials and building forms to respond to Truckee's local climate conditions.

*ii. Historic Preservation Overlay District Design Guidelines*

Chapter 18.26 provides design guidelines for the Downtown Specific Plan area, intended to attain high quality development that is sensitive to, and compatible with, the historic character of the Downtown area, as well as to

preserve the existing stock of historic buildings and structures in the Downtown.

In addition to the above-described regulations, Section 18.20.040 specifies the requirements of the Historic Preservation (-HP) Overlay zoning district, for areas of the Town that are particularly important to Truckee's historic character. Chapter 18.83 regulates the demolition of buildings constructed before 1940.

*iii. Hillside Development Standards*

Chapter 18.36 establishes regulations for development within hillside areas. Some of these regulations are to:

- ◆ Preserve and protect the views to and from hillside areas in order to maintain the identity, image and environmental quality of the Town.
- ◆ Ensure that development in the hillside areas is concentrated on the most level portions of the site and is designed to fit the existing land forms.
- ◆ Preserve significant features of the natural topography, including swales, canyons, knolls, ridgelines, and rock outcrops.
- ◆ Correlate intensity of development with the steepness of terrain in order to minimize the impact of grading, unnecessary removal of vegetation, land instability, and fire hazards.

*iv. Landscape Standards*

Chapter 18.40 provides standards, and Chapter 18.42 provides the more specific guidance, for the provision of landscaping with development to enhance the aesthetic appearance of development throughout the Town, preserving and enhancing the positive visual experience of the built environment and preserving neighborhood character, and including native vegetation and appropriate plant species for the Truckee climate.

*v. Sign Design Guidelines*

Chapters 18.54 and 18.56 provide design guidelines to encourage signs that are not unnecessarily large or visually obtrusive, and include high-quality graphic design and materials.

b. Downtown Specific Plan

Adopted in 1997, the Downtown Specific Plan identifies a wide-ranging series of goals and policies for the Downtown area. These address redevelopment of several key sites within the Downtown, most notably the redevelopment of the Railyard site at the east end of the Town center as a new mixed-use district, and revitalization and improvements along the West River Street corridor. The Specific Plan provides policy and planning guidance for the entire Downtown area, addressing land use, vehicle circulation and parking, pedestrian and bicycle circulation, public services, environmental preservation (particularly in regard to the Truckee River), historic resource preservation, and public parks and gateways. The Specific Plan also calls for a streetscape improvement program to improve the overall appearance of the Downtown's commercial core, and programs to fund the rehabilitation of the numerous historic buildings that contribute so strongly to the area's visual character.

c. Downtown River Revitalization Strategy

Adopted in October 2005, the Downtown River Revitalization Strategy identifies opportunities sites along the Truckee River and West River Street for redevelopment to improve the uses and visual appearance of this corridor, create opportunities for new mixed-use, commercial and public spaces along the Riverfront, increase access to the River, and improve connections to the Downtown.

**2. Existing Visual Character and Quality**

This subsection describes the existing visual character of the Town, including first an overview of the overall visual character of the Town as a whole, and of its various composite parts.

Truckee’s visual character, as it exists today, comprises both natural and built elements that combine in a various and interrelated ways throughout the different parts of the community. The Town encompasses a number of community and neighborhood areas, each with differing visual character and qualities based on the patterns and types of built development and land uses within each area, the type and extent of open space areas in and adjacent to those areas, and topographical variation and natural features. Topographic variation also contributes to numerous vistas and scenic views from many places within the Town to mountain peaks and ridges beyond the Town limits; these views and vistas are discussed in Section 3, below.

a. Community Visual Character

Truckee is situated in a valley containing the Truckee River and is surrounded by prominent peaks and ridgelines of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. In Truckee itself, elevations range from 5,540 feet in the vicinity of the Boca Reservoir to near 7,500 feet in Tahoe Donner. Topographically, the Town is divided into several distinct terrain areas. These include the Truckee River valley and adjacent bluffs, which cut through the central part of the Town from the south to the northeast. Varied upland terrain is located around Donner Lake in the west part of the Town, in the Tahoe Donner Area, north of I-80, and in the Glenshire area. Flatter alluvial areas extend through the east and southeast part of the Town. Terrain is steeper in the eastern part of Truckee. Figure 4.1-1 shows the major topographical areas and prominent hills, slopes, bluffs and ridgelines within the Town.

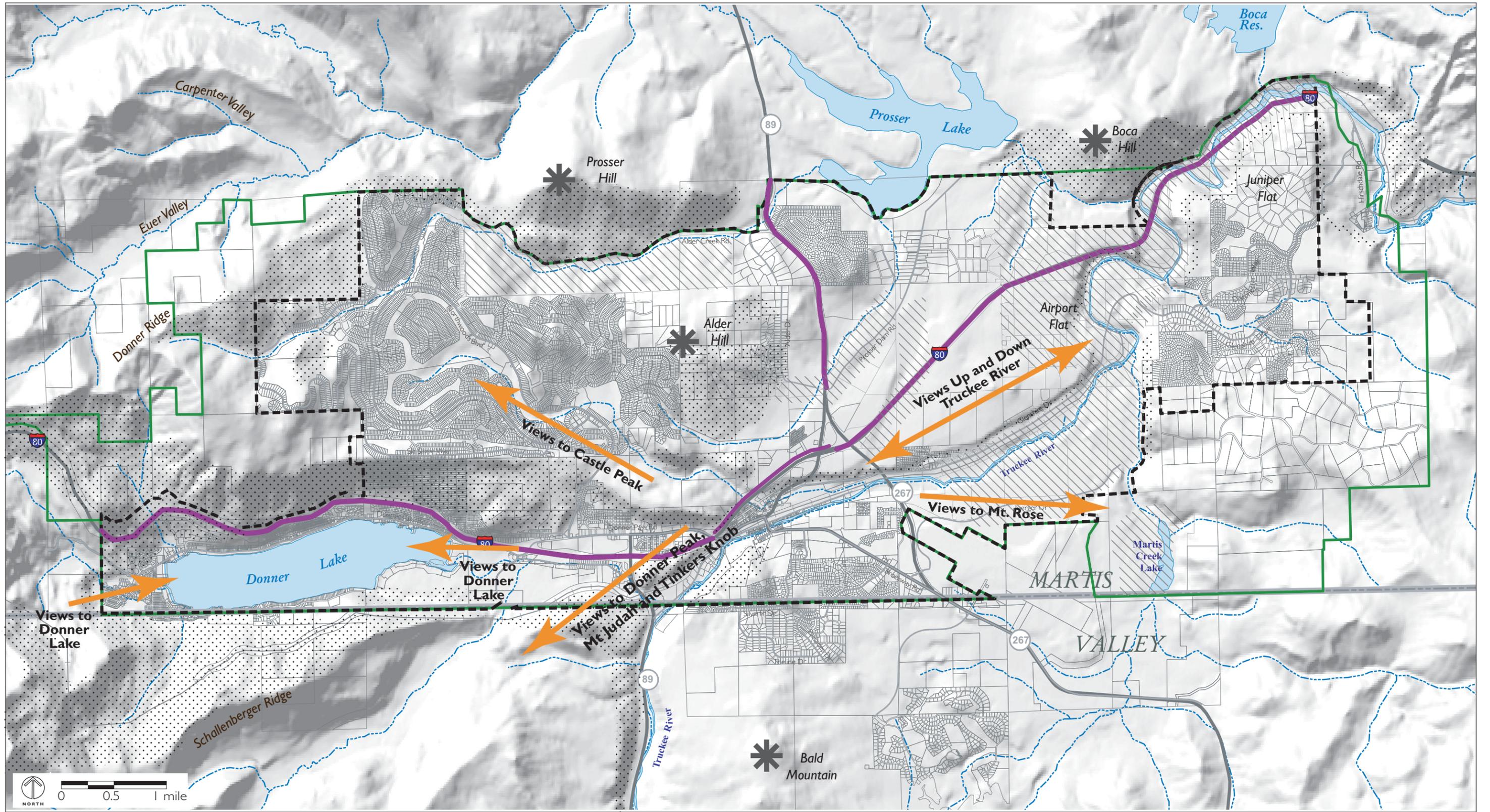
The broad visual character of Truckee’s built environment is that of a series of discrete and dispersed neighborhoods and districts of individually varying visual character, separated by areas of open space. Due to the Town’s relatively recent incorporation, the patterns of development that occurred under County land use control, and the physical barriers and constraints presented by topography and elements such as the Truckee River, the Railroad, and I-80, there are few instances where gradual or coherent visual transitions between neighborhoods occur.

Truckee's community areas include the Town's historic core, a compact assembly of historic and newer buildings situated within the Truckee River Valley near the confluence of Trout Creek; the Gateway Area, a more recent concentration of commercial and public uses located along Donner Pass Road north of the freeway and the Downtown; the Donner Lake area, which includes a variety of residential and vacation homes clustered around the shores of the 830-acre lake; a variety of more recently developed residential and commercial areas with more typical post-war suburban characteristics, distributed throughout the Town; several areas of low-density rural residential development, mostly found within the northern part of the Town; and two light industrial employment centers. In neighborhoods and districts beyond the Downtown, most of which were developed under a master plan or planned unit development model, architecture, land uses, building types and site layouts tend to be relatively homogenous. The individual character of many of these areas is described in greater detail below.

*i. Downtown/Historic Core*

Truckee's core consists of the historic Downtown, the early population and commercial center of the Truckee community, and adjoining areas of the Railyard and a transitional industrial area to the south along West River Street.

The strong linear form of the Downtown is defined by the alignment of the Truckee River and the Railroad; the Downtown is contained within the broad valley of the River, and edged by bluff and hills. The Downtown core contains a mix of commercial, residential and civic uses, many of which are housed in a series of well-preserved historic buildings that display an eclectic mix of styles and functional types. The small-scale, narrow streets and modified grid pattern of the Downtown feature a diversity of architecture and streetscape features that combine to create an inviting, well-connected pedestrian environment, centered around the distinctive series of facades of Commercial Row, along Donner Pass Road, opposite the railway station.



-  Truckee Town Limits
-  Proposed Sphere of Influence
-  County Boundary
-  Interstate or Highway
-  Railroad
-  Scenic Corridor\*
-  Scenic Vista
-  Prominent Slope, Ridge Line, Bluff Line or Hillside
-  Creek or Drainage
-  Other Views

\* I-80 Scenic Corridor applies to north side of highway only in the Downtown area.

FIGURE 4.1-1

SCENIC RESOURCES

Back of Figure 4.1-1: Scenic Resources

The Railyard is a large, vacant area to the east of the developed Downtown core that was historically used for railcar storage and other railway functions. A large “balloon track” is used for turning trains. The flat site is largely barren of vegetation, with scattered buildings and railway related elements.

The West River Street Corridor connects the Downtown from Bridge Street to SR 89 South, alongside and south of the Truckee River and the rail tracks. This corridor has a predominantly industrial appearance, with low-rise utilitarian buildings, many with chain-link fenced yards used for storage of equipment and raw materials. Views to the north of McIver Hill are prominent from West River Street. Currently, existing development along West River Street and Riverside Drive limits physical and visual access to the river and detracts from the natural character of this important environmental asset within the Downtown.

*ii. Gateway Area*

The Gateway Area is a strip commercial corridor, along with some small residential areas, along the length of Donner Pass Road between the Cold Stream Road/I-80 interchange and the Central Truckee I-80 interchange. Donner Pass Road is a three lane roadway in this part of Truckee. The wide thoroughfare generally lacks street trees, landscaping, and pedestrian facilities. Businesses in the Gateway Area primarily cater to the daily shopping needs of Truckee’s residents in a number of strip shopping center developments.

The character of development in the Gateway Area today stands in contrast to that of the Downtown. Commercial development along Donner Pass Road in the Gateway Area evolved through the 1970s and 1980s into a near-continuous strip of mostly auto-oriented development. Most of the Gateway Area’s retail developments are set back from the roadway, fronted by large parking areas, and were developed as standalone commercial developments with little attention paid either to the pedestrian environment or to providing connections to each other.

*iii. Donner Lake Area/PC-1*

The Donner Lake Area is another distinctive visual area of the Truckee landscape, dominated by the 830-acre freshwater lake, and ringed by a diverse assortment of homes and cabins ranging from rustic wood-frame units to modern condominium complexes and luxury lakefront homes of more recent construction. Steep slopes rise from the shores of the lake into a series of wooded hills among which the neighborhood's buildings are clustered. Views across the Lake are spectacular, encompassing the waters of the lake and dramatic forested ridgelines beyond, including the undisturbed open space of Donner Memorial State Park at the Lake's southeast corner.

Although not strictly part of the Donner Lake Area, the Planned Community Area 1 site lies just east of the State Park, and is accessed by the same freeway exit as Donner Lake. This site is a former gravel mining quarry, and currently consists of a series of large ponds and extensively disturbed soils, south of Deerfield Drive and west of Cold Stream Road.

*iv. Brockway Road Area*

The Brockway Road area is one of the more intensively developed areas of Truckee. Brockway Road was formerly SR 267, which connected from I-80 through Downtown Truckee before its re-alignment into a new bypass, and remains a key Town arterial. Although quite intensely developed along its length, the corridor retains a wooded feel, with much of its development set back from the roadway and screened behind trees. This rural feel is more pronounced on the north side of the corridor, where open space uses such as the Ponderosa Golf Course and a public park are found. Beyond the corridor lie a series of residential areas, including the Sierra Meadows and Ponderosa Palisades subdivisions.

The SR 267 corridor to the east retains a much more open space feel, passing as it does through public lands and undeveloped areas, and skirting the edge of the Truckee-Tahoe Airport as it approaches the Brockway Road Intersection. The flat expanse of the Martis Valley stretches to the southeast, so the cluster of light industrial and office buildings and the airport's runways and

hangars form dominant visual elements against the distant ridgelines of the Carson Range. The area around the intersection of Brockway Road and SR 267 is the location of the area is designated as Planned Community 3; a site which is both visually prominent due to its location and topography, and locationally significant as a gateway to Truckee from the south.

*v. Other Neighborhoods*

In addition to those described above, Truckee has a number of other residential neighborhoods that can be defined as either “town” or rural residential in visual character.

Truckee's town residential neighborhoods comprise most of those built in the 1960s and 1970s, including Sierra Meadows and Ponderosa Palisades, Tahoe Donner, much of Glenshire/Devonshire, and Olympic Heights. In general, these neighborhoods consist mostly of single family homes, with some duplexes and triplexes, and a few larger multi-family developments. These neighborhoods are typically built at medium densities, with winding streets and cul-de-sacs. Development is visible and obvious along roadways; homes are built fronting the street and in relatively close proximity to one another. While, like all Truckee neighborhoods, trees and open space are scattered through the neighborhood, nature is secondary in prominence to the development that is all around. Open space is found in the form of neighborhood parks and greenways and in the landscaping associated with individual properties.

Rural residential neighborhoods encompass other neighborhoods in Truckee where the natural environment dominates the built environment. They include some of the residential development areas on the outskirts of Glenshire/Devonshire, such as the Meadows neighborhood, some of the Prosser neighborhoods, the Armstrong Tract, some of the Gray's Crossing neighborhoods, and much of the area surrounding Donner Lake. Two recently approved projects, the Gray's Crossing Planned Community, and Old Greenwood, will become new clustered rural residential/resort community areas located in north central Truckee.

Homes are set “in the trees,” and adjacent stretches of open space and large lots provide a balance between the built environment and the landscape. Houses are frequently situated forward on their lots, although with substantial setbacks from the roadway. In the most rural context, such as in the very dispersed development areas on the outskirts of Glenshire/Devonshire, and south of Prosser Lake, homes are screened by trees and vegetation to such an extent as to become almost invisible in the wider landscape.

*vi. Employment Districts*

Employment districts in Truckee encompass the relatively few places where non-retail job-generating uses, such as light industrial, office, warehousing and other commercial activity, are concentrated. They include the Pioneer Commerce Center and adjacent industrially-designated land, as well as the commercial and light industrial zone located near the Truckee-Tahoe Airport. Both are very visible: the Pioneer Commerce Center from I-80 and the Airport area from SR 267. The older commercial and light industrial development near the airport reflects the more typical style of office and warehouse buildings found in many cities in the US, with limited detail, blocky facades and prominent parking lots. Buildings of more recent construction in this area and in the Pioneer Commerce Center reflect the higher design standards demanded by the Town’s recently adopted Development Code, with architectural styles and building materials that are more sympathetic to the local context and harmonious with the natural landscape.

*vii. Low Intensity Public and Resource Lands*

As previously noted, much of the Town’s area is in open space uses of various sorts, the topographical character of which is described in Section 2.a., above. Unlike many communities, where there is a gradual sequential transition from a more urbanized through progressively lower density development, to open space and rural areas beyond, large blocks of open space exist throughout the Town. Some of this land is in extremely low density residential use, such as the area east and south of Tahoe Donner; other land consists of large forested areas under ownership of the US Forest Service. There is a large

concentration of open space lands in the eastern part of the Town, with almost the entire area between Old Greenwood and Glenshire, extending to the southern Town limits east of SR 267 in open space or used as low intensity public lands, and for mining.

b. Corridors and Gateways

Figure 4.1-2 shows the locations of the Town's corridors and gateways. Corridors are linear features, located along major thoroughfares, which connect various parts of the community. Gateways are a particular type of corridor feature, with special status due to their important role in conveying first impressions to visitors and a sense of arrival or transition from one place to another. It should be noted that some of Truckee's gateways are located along the key corridors discussed in the following section, and in those cases, are addressed under the discussion of the corridor in question. Truckee's important corridors and gateways include:

- ◆ **West River Street Corridor/McIver Crossing Gateway.** The West River Street Corridor is described in Section 2.b.i, above. As noted there, this key Town corridor connects the Downtown from Brockway Road to SR 89 South, along the alignment of the Truckee River. This corridor marks an important point of entry and transition into Downtown Truckee.
- ◆ **SR 89 South Gateway.** At the west end of West River Street is the SR 89 South Gateway. Passage through the Mousehole railroad undercrossing on SR 89 South provides a distinctive entrance from Placer County into Truckee.
- ◆ **Donner Lake Corridor/Western Donner Pass Road Gateway.** Donner Pass Road in the Donner Lake area follows the alignment of old Highway 40, connecting the Gateway Area and Downtown Truckee to Donner Summit. This corridor is unique in Truckee with its open and expansive views across Donner Lake to mountain ridges beyond. The westernmost Donner Pass Road exit from I-80 serves as the gateway into

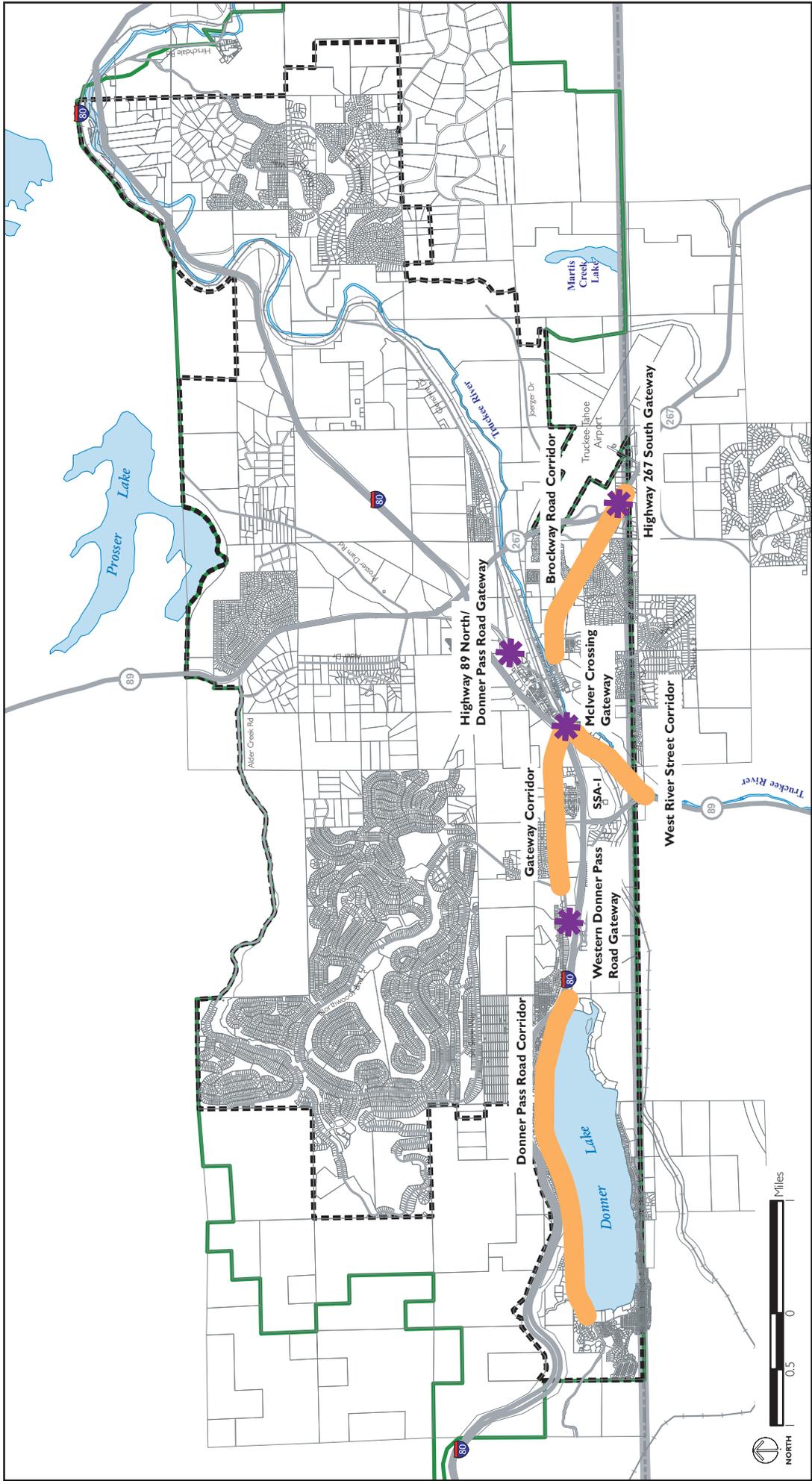


FIGURE 4.1-2

- Corridor
- Gateway

**CORRIDORS AND GATEWAYS**

Truckee from the west, providing access to Donner Lake and Donner Memorial State Park to the west, and to the Gateway Area to the east. It also provides a gateway to the major highway commercial area of the Town.

- ◆ **Eastern Donner Pass Road Gateway/SR 89 North.** The SR 89 North and Donner Pass Road gateway delimits the entry into central Truckee from I-80 and SR 89 to the north, and from Glenshire to the east, traveling along Donner Pass Road. An important feature of this gateway is the perspective upon the Downtown that is gained as one travels downward into the river valley.
- ◆ **Brockway Road Corridor and Gateway.** The Brockway Road Corridor, and particularly the node created at the intersection of SR 267/Soaring Way, is one of the major gateways to Truckee from the south. It is described in greater detail in Section 2.b.iv, above.

### 3. Scenic Vistas

Truckee's unique natural environment defines many of the most important aspects of the Town's community character. The mountain landscape dominates the built environment in Truckee. There are numerous scenic views of surrounding mountain peaks and ridgelines and sweeping vistas of the forested hillsides, meadows, and the river valley in which the Town lies. Distinct ridgelines create a sharp contrast with the sky, draw the eye and reinforce the sense of the Town nestled in the Truckee River Basin, a refuge from the high, rugged mountain environment.

Truckee has exceptionally varied topography, and valleys, hillsides and ridgelines that comprise the Town's diverse landscape provide a rich array of scenic resources, and afford numerous vantage points from which scenic vistas can be gained. Significant scenic resources in Truckee include vistas of mountains, open space areas, the Truckee River, the historic Town Center, and Donner Lake. These are mapped in Figure 4.1-1, above, and described below. These various scenic resources are defining features of the Town and valued community assets, contributing strongly to Truckee's sense of place and its community character. Many of these resources are visible from the desig-

nated scenic corridors in Truckee, which are discussed separately in Section A.4, below.

*i. Peaks and High Mountain Ridges*

Scenic views of peaks, prominent slope exposures, and ridge and bluff lines can be experienced from numerous locations within the Town, and are most pronounced when looking to the east from central Truckee, to the east and southeast from upland neighborhoods like Tahoe Donner towards Mt. Rose, and west/northwest to Castle Peak.

*ii. Open Space Vistas*

There are scenic vistas of surrounding forested hillsides, meadows, and the river valley in which the Town lies. Some of Truckee's most sweeping open space vistas occur from the bluffs north of the Truckee River and along I-80 and Glenshire Drive looking south towards the Martis Valley. As described below, the high vantage point afforded by the SR 267 bridge also provides extensive open space vistas across the Martis Valley and towards Northstar ski resort.

*iii. Truckee River*

The orientation and alignment of the Truckee River valley defines a natural corridor that provides a unifying visual and physical element of the Town landscape along its axis. It reinforces the linear form of the historic Downtown and the alignments of the railroad and I-80 as they pass through Truckee, as well as the steep escarpment that lies along the river's edge for much of its eastern reaches within Truckee.

*iv. Townscape*

Roadways connecting into Downtown Truckee provide a different sort of scenic vista, that of the townscape of the historic center within the natural setting of the river valley and the forested hills that flank it. These views are particularly prominent from I-80 and from Brockway Road as it descends into the Downtown. Additionally, the new SR 267 bridge has introduced a new, human-made landscape element to views of Truckee and provides a per-

spective on the Town to drivers crossing the bridge, 90 feet above the valley floor.

*v. Donner Lake*

Donner Lake provides one of the most distinctive elements of the Town's natural landscape, with its open waters flanked on three sides by steep, forested mountain ridges. The Lake, its shoreline, and views across the Lake's open waters to forested Schallenberger Ridge to the south; Donner Ridge to the north; and the Sierra crest to the west, constitute an additional key scenic resource for the Town.

#### **4. Scenic Highways**

There are no State-designated scenic highways that run through Truckee. Both I-80 and SR 89 are eligible to be State Scenic Highways but are not officially designated as such.<sup>1</sup> The 1996 General Plan designates two scenic corridors in Truckee. One encompasses the length of I-80 where it passes through the Town limits, excluding the south side of the highway in the Downtown area; and SR 89 North, between Prosser Dam Road and the northern Town limits.

The scenic corridor designation recognizes the high scenic value of the landscape along these thoroughfares, and the need to actively protect the corridors from the encroachment of visually incompatible development and advertising signage that could impair the scenic quality within the roadway's viewshed. Truckee's scenic corridors are shown in Figure 4.1-1.

The alignment of I-80 and its elevation above the Truckee River valley means that it affords numerous viewpoints to the south and southeast across the valley and beyond. The Interstate hugs the northern edge of the Downtown through central Truckee, providing important views of the Town to the many millions of motorists that travel the highway annually.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic\\_highways/index.htm](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm) California Scenic Highway Mapping System, accessed April 3, 2006.

SR 89 north of Prosser Dam Road is a designated scenic corridor in recognition of the need to protect the scenic and rural qualities of the landscape visible from the roadway.

### **5. Light and Glare**

Light pollution refers to all forms of unwanted light in the night sky around and above us, including glare, light trespass, sky glow and over-lighting. Views of the night sky are an important part of the natural environment, particularly for a mountain community like Truckee. Excessive light and glare can also be visually disruptive to humans and nocturnal animal species, and often reflect an unnecessarily high level of energy consumption. Light pollution has the potential to become an issue of increasing concern as new development contributes additional outdoor lighting installed for safety and other reasons. Truckee is threatened not only by light pollution from development within the Town's own borders, but also suffers from sky glow associated with the intensive and sprawling development of the Reno/Sparks metropolitan area.

#### ***B. Standards of Significance***

Implementation of the 2025 General Plan would have a significant impact on aesthetic and visual resources if it would:

- ◆ Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.
- ◆ Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
- ◆ Substantially degrade the view from a scenic highway, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings.
- ◆ Expose people to substantial light or glare.

### *C. Impact Discussion*

At buildout of the 2025 General Plan, an estimated 3 million square feet of commercial and office development, including retail commercial, office, government office and religious uses could be in place in Truckee. About 1.5 million square feet of new light industrial or warehouse uses, and almost 1,400 lodging units would also be allowed. The land use designations in the Plan would allow for a total of approximately 20,082 units within the Town of Truckee, of which just under 11,000 would be year-round occupied units.

A certain amount of development that would occur under the 2025 would be infill of residential and commercial parcels in areas of Truckee that are already extensively developed. The 2025 General Plan also envisions substantial amount of new development would occur within areas that are currently vacant or undeveloped. Both the introduction of new or redeveloped uses in existing community areas, and new development on currently vacant lands have the potential to alter the visual character and qualities of those places, and potentially to degrade the Town's aesthetic character. However, the General Plan contains numerous policies and actions that would work in conjunction with existing Town design and development standards to ensure that new development generally complements the existing aesthetic environment of the Town and adjacent areas, and does not impair scenic vistas, affect scenic corridors, or worsen conditions of light and glare.

#### **1. Proposed Visual Character and Quality**

As described in the existing setting section, Truckee's visual character comes from its mountain environment and dramatic alpine setting, its varied topography and extensive open space areas, as well as the character of its historic center and dispersed residential neighborhoods. Implementation of the 2025 General Plan would allow on-going growth and redevelopment in Truckee's established community areas, and the extension of growth on some sites and into some areas that are currently undeveloped open space.

The following sections consider first the impacts of that new development on the visual quality of the Town as a whole, and the goals, policies and actions of the General Plan that would be applicable to all new development and would help to avoid impacts to visual quality on a town-wide basis. It is followed by a discussion of the impacts of the proposed Plan within a number of different parts of the community.

a. Town-wide Visual Quality Impacts

There are two primary ways in which the 2025 General Plan would influence the future visual quality of Truckee on a town-wide basis. The first is through a change in the appearance of the open space areas that contributes so strongly to the overall visual character of the Town, and the conversion of that land to urban, rather than open space uses; the second is the effect that the form and appearance of new development that could occur under the Proposed Plan. Individually and cumulatively, particularly where development under the 2025 General Plan would occur on a larger or broader scale and on land that is currently in open space, such as the Planned Community Areas, these changes could result in a significant adverse change to the visual quality of the Town. However, as is described below, the General Plan includes a wide range of goals and policies that seek to direct growth into the most appropriate locations, to encourage high quality design and uses that support and enhance the aesthetic qualities and character of the Town, and to achieve a balance between new development and preserving Truckee's valued open spaces and scenic resources. These various goals and policies would reduce the potentially adverse impacts of new development allowed under the Plan to a *less-than-significant* level.

Land Use Element Goal LU-1 is to manage growth so that Truckee maintains its small mountain town character; in support of this, Land Use Element Policy P1.1 would require all new development to meet community goals for promoting high quality design and preservation of open space, and Action A1.1 would have the Town develop a "rating system" for development approvals, based on the project's ability to fulfill community goals in a number of areas, including preservation of community character and open space, high

quality urban design, and minimization of sprawl. Goal LU-3 and accompanying policies P3.1, P3.2, and P3.3 would also discourage urban sprawl by restricting the locations of new freeway-oriented development, discouraging future subdivision of large residential parcels outside of existing subdivisions, and accommodating new growth within infill areas by allowing the highest residential densities there.

The 2025 General Plan places considerable emphasis on the concept of clustered development as a means to preserve as much land as possible in open space, direct the location of new structures so as minimize disruption to the open space character of an area, and preserve the key scenic components of a site. Goal LU-7 and accompanying policies P7.1 through P7.5 outline the ways in which the Town would implement clustering requirements for purposes of preserving open space, including that of high scenic value. Policy P1.3 in the Community Character Element also supports this goal.

Other goals and policies in the General Plan aggressively pursue open space preservation as a means to preserve Truckee's scenic values. Conservation and Open Space Element Goal COS-1 aims to achieve this end, with lands of "high scenic value," pristine open space, and large blocks of undeveloped open space identified in accompanying Policy P1.1 as priorities for open space acquisition and preservation. The other policies under Goal COS-1 and Action A1.1 through A1.5 support this goal, through strategies that would fund, acquire and manage open space, prepare an Open Space Acquisition and Management Plan, and establish an Open Space Commission for the Town. Community Character Element Goal CC-1 also support this goal, with particular regard to the role that open space plays in Truckee's visual and community character. Goal COS-2, and Policies P2.1, P2.2, P2.3, P2.5 and P2.6 would more specifically seek to preserve and enhance the Truckee River Corridor, including its scenic values.

Other goals and policies in the 2025 General Plan also aim to preserve visual quality and character and to maintain a high standard of community design town-wide by regulating the form, type and location of new development.

As noted above, Land Use Element Policy P1.1 and Action A1.1 would include quality design as a criterion by which new development was evaluated.

The Community Character Element includes a number of goals, policies and actions in regard to the form of Truckee's built environment. Goal CC-5 and its supporting policies all seek to maintain a high standard of community design in Truckee. Community Character Element Policy P5.1 would require that all planning and development decisions respect the character and context of existing development, the landscape and the natural environment; enhance the desired character of different areas of the Town and support the retrofit of existing development to more closely adhere to the Town's current design standards. Policy P5.2 requires all new development to "incorporate high-quality site design, architecture, and planning so as to enhance the overall quality of the built environment in Truckee and the Town's unique character, and create a visually-interesting and aesthetically-pleasing town environment." Policy P5.3, prohibits corporate or franchise commercial architecture in most instances. Policies P5.6 and P5.7, regulate the design of signs, and call for the elimination of all billboards in Truckee, respectively. Other policies under Goal CC-5 support measures that would improve the quality of the built environment, including additional public art, and planting of trees and landscaping.

The 2025 General Plan encourages development that tends to support a higher-quality urban environment, and would support revitalization and improvement of the visual character of some of Truckee's key community areas. This would include mixed-use development, stronger neighborhood centers, and better links between different parts of the community. Goal LU-5 supports mixed-use development, particularly in locations such as the Downtown, Gateway area and Donner Lake (P5.1); transitional uses such as neighborhood-serving commercial development in residential areas (P5.2) are also encouraged. Goal CC-9 would also support mixed-use centers in Truckee, with policies that encourage redevelopment and infill of auto-oriented centers to mixed-use pedestrian-oriented centers (P9.1), support connectivity of these centers (P9.4), and high quality, pedestrian-oriented design

(P9.5). Land Use Element policy P5.3 supports strengthening of neighborhood centers, as does Goal CC-10 and its associated policies.

Policies P2.1, P2.2, P2.3 and P2.4 under Goal CC-2 would address development in visually sensitive areas such as hillsides along ridgelines and bluff lines, and in visible meadow- and forest-land areas by prohibiting intensive and visually obtrusive development in these areas, requiring development to be clustered within the least visible areas, and requiring that new development contributes to the scenic quality and visual harmony of those areas.

Together, these goals, policies and actions set a town-wide framework that would balance open space preservation with the new development allowed under the 2025 General Plan, and would ensure that new development supports high quality urban design and architecture and preserves and improves the visual quality of Truckee. The impact to town-wide visual quality would therefore be *less than -significant*.

b. Community Area Impacts

The following sections analyze the potential visual impacts that could result from the implementation of the 2025 General Plan on a number of specific sites in Truckee. The discussion below includes reference to the specific goals, policies, and actions contained in the 2025 General Plan that would avoid significant visual impacts to the existing character of those area, or, in some cases, result in an improvement to visual quality. In all cases, the goals and policies outlined in the previous section would be applicable, and would support and supplement the area-specific policies described below.

*i. Downtown/Historic Core*

Development within Downtown Truckee would occur as identified in the 1997 Downtown Specific Plan; this would include approximately 1,130 new housing units; 650,000 square feet of non-residential uses, and 690 lodging units. This amount of development would affect the visual character of the Downtown by introducing new infill development and redevelopment on

smaller parcels scattered throughout the Downtown and on several larger vacant sites, notably the Railyard.

Land Use Element Policy DSA-P1 calls for the historic mountain character of the Downtown to be preserved and enhanced, and goals and policies in the Community Character Element further reinforce this focus. Goal CC-6 is to maintain Downtown as the pre-eminent Town center in Truckee. Policy P6.2 would preserve the rich legacy of historic buildings and sites that make a substantial contribution to the visual quality of the Downtown, and ensure that new development respects the character and context of those resources (P6.2). Policies under Goal CC-18 also seek to protect the historic resources of the Town that might be threatened by demolition (P18.1), provide support for appropriate modes of adaptive re-use (P18.2 and P18.7), and preservation and rehabilitation (P18.3), as well as for implementation of the Town’s Historic Preservation Program (Action A18.1). Policy P11.3 in the Community Character Element would regulate the design of new development in residential neighborhoods in the Downtown area to ensure compatibility with the existing residential areas.

Other policies of the 2025 General Plan address key sites and critical change areas within the Downtown, in particular the Riverfront and the Railyard. Both of these are visually prominent sites that are currently underutilized and are not well integrated into the urban design fabric of the Downtown. The 2025 General Plan seeks to improve the character of both of these areas and make them attractive and integral parts of the Downtown, complementing and supporting the overall character of development.

The 2025 General Plan calls for the Railyard to be redeveloped as a location for future mixed-use development, including both local- and tourist-serving commercial uses, as well as residences and public uses (DSA-P8); to accomplish this, the General Plan calls for a Master Plan to be developed for the Railyard, (Policy LU-6, Action A6.4). Policies under Goal CC-7 in the Community Character Element expand upon the contents of this Master Plan, calling for design guidance for “character areas” within the project site, design

that is sensitive to the site's context and historic heritage, connections within the Railyard and to the rest of the Downtown, incorporation of a variety of uses, and improvements to Trout Creek.

The 2025 General Plan foresees the transformation of the West River Street corridor from its current industrial orientation to a town-oriented corridor that connects to the Downtown and the Truckee River, with the extension of commercial development and medium and high density housing along the length of the corridor, new public open spaces, and improvements to both the physical and visual connections to the Truckee River.

Action A6.5 under Goal LU-6 would implement the recommended programs of the 2005 Riverfront Revitalization Strategy, which are aimed at improving the appearance and uses along West River Street and the Truckee Riverfront, providing better access and connections between the River and Downtown Truckee, and enhancing the open space, housing and commercial opportunities along this corridor. Other policies in Community Character Element support these efforts to improve the visual character of the West River Street corridor, including those under Goal CC-15 which would ensure that new riverfront development along West River Street protects the scenic and environmental quality of the Truckee River (P15.1), and would supports relocation of industrial uses along West River Street and improvements to the visual appearance of those that remain (P15.2 and P15.3).

Together, the 2025 General Plan's Goals and Policies for the Downtown and for the key change areas within it would uphold the visual quality of development in the Downtown, and indeed, would likely have a beneficial impact on the aesthetic quality of this part of Truckee.

*ii. Gateway Area*

Although there would be some changes to the visual quality and character of the Gateway Area under the 2025 General Plan, these changes, as guided through the goals, policies and actions of the 2025 General Plan, would be overwhelmingly positive in terms of their impact. The General Plan seeks to

re-orient the visual character of the corridor from an auto-oriented thoroughfare with minimal visual or streetscape amenity to become a central hub of the community, with a rich mixture of residential, commercial and public uses, attractively landscaped along its length, with a high level of pedestrian amenities.

The Land Use Element designates the Gateway Area as a Neighborhood Overlay Area, and specifies a series of policies and actions that would require new development and land uses to support attractive streetscape, pedestrian-oriented design, and high-quality mixed-use (GW-P1); encourage upgrading of existing development to a higher design standard (GW-P2); and call for development of an urban design plan (GW-P4, and Action A6.6).

The Community Character Element also supports the overall goal to improve the character and urban design quality of the Gateway Area so that it becomes a true Town Center for Truckee (Goal CC-8). Policies related to this goal seek to encourage the rehabilitation of existing strip commercial development to improve pedestrian access, and visual appearance (P8.3). More specifically, proposed policies seek to build designs proportionate to the width of the street (P8.5), improve the visual appearance of properties along road frontage (P8.10), and reinforce the commercial and mixed-use qualities that contribute to the “town” orientation of the Gateway corridor (P8.2).

*iii. Donner Lake Area/PC-1*

This section discusses the impact of the 2025 General Plan on the area around Donner Lake itself, as well as on the Planned Community 1 Area located just to the east of Donner Lake.

The Donner Lake Area is largely built out, so most new development that would occur under the 2025 General Plan would be in the form of infill on existing single-family residential parcels or the redevelopment of more modest cabins, on small lots, into larger single-family homes. Both of these forms of development have the potential to introduce visually incompatible elements into this highly scenic area. However, the General Plan’s goals and policies

specifically recognize and seek to protect the visual character of Donner Lake, and so the overall impacts of new development would be *less than significant*.

In particular, policies in the Land Use Element applicable to the Donner Lake Neighborhood Area would ensure that new development minimizes visual impacts to views across the Lake, and is compatible with the character and scale of existing development (DL-P1). Goal CC-16 and its supporting policies would reinforce these requirements, calling for development regulations to minimize visual impacts from construction of large homes on small lots (P16.1) and to ensure compatibility of new development with the scenic qualities of the lake (P16.2).

Redevelopment of the Planned Community 1 Area could substantially change the character of this site located east of Donner Lake; due to physical constraints, new development on this site would likely be clustered towards the north part of the site, adjacent to Deerfield Drive and Cold Stream Road.

A mix of land uses would be allowed in the PC-1 designation, which also has specific design standards and guidelines that are tailored to the specific needs of the site (PC1-P6) and must be included in a Specific Plan for the PC-1 area. Other standards address the design of retail shopping areas, so they are oriented and scaled to the pedestrian realm and avoid "strip commercial" site layout (PC1-P5), and require parking areas that promote attractive streetscapes and reduce the visual impacts of paved areas through distributed landscaping, landscaped berms, and other measures (PC1-P7).

*iv. Brockway Road Area*

The General Plan identifies the Brockway Road Corridor as location for substantial amounts of new development. This would occur as infill development, and, most significantly, through development of the Planned Community 3 site into a new commercial center for Truckee. PC-3 is in a highly prominent location at the intersection of Brockway Road and SR 267 and is currently undeveloped open space. The Ponderosa Golf Course is also identified as a future site for new residential development. In both cases, new de-

velopment could result in a significant adverse change to the visual character of this corridor. However, the General Plan also identifies a series of goals, policies and actions that would regulate the design and character of development along the Brockway Road Corridor, and, in concert with those described in Section C.1.a, above, would render those impacts *less than significant*.

The 2025 General Plan identifies the Brockway Road Corridor both as a Neighborhood Overlay Area, and as an important corridor and gateway for Truckee. The Ponderosa Golf Course is further designated as a Special Study Area. Land Use Element Policy BR-P1 supports the preservation of the corridor's open space qualities, and requires that all new development, particularly in PC-3, support the gateway status of Brockway Road. Action 6.7 in the Land Use Element calls for a streetscape design plan to be prepared for the corridor, and Policy SSA-P2 for the Ponderosa Golf Course would regulate any new development on the site to respect the open space character of the corridor. These goals would be further reinforced by Community Character Element Goal CC-14 to enhance the character and qualities of the Brockway Road Corridor as a gateway to Truckee, including policies that would require appropriate buffering and screening from the road corridor, interspersing development areas or nodes with green space (P14.1), ensuring that the design quality and character of the PC-3 development is compatible with the gateway qualities of the south end of Brockway Road (P14.3) and an action to design and install a formal gateway element at or near the Brockway Road/SR 267 intersection (A14.3)

Additional policies in the 2025 General Plan are applicable to the development of PC-3, which would require preparation of a Specific Plan, including design standards to provide for architectural consistency of development on the site (PC3-P2). The Specific Plan would be required to minimize visual impacts of proposed development to the SR 267 corridor (PC3-P3) and include standards for the design of retail shopping areas that avoid "strip commercial" site layout, and that are oriented and scaled to the pedestrian realm (PC3-P4).

Therefore, goals, policies and actions proposed in the General Plan related to the visual character of Brockway Road and the SR 267 South Gateway would mitigate any potentially significant impacts to *less-than-significant* levels.

*v. Other Residential Neighborhoods*

Development allowed under the 2025 General Plan could result in potentially significant impacts to the visual character of the Town's neighborhoods. However, there are goals, policies and actions proposed in the General Plan that would regulate the design and character of new development and would encourage sensitive and context-specific design for development in Truckee's town residential and rural residential neighborhoods. These would complement the town-wide goals and policies for open space preservation, clustering, and architecture and urban design described in Section C.1.a., above, and together would result in a *less-than-significant* impact to the visual quality of Truckee's other residential neighborhoods.

The Community Character Element includes goals to strengthen, improve and enhance the character of Truckee's town residential neighborhoods (Goal CC-11) as well as rural residential neighborhoods (Goal CC-12). Policies related to these goals would encourage new residential development to have street layouts, and building designs in keeping with those found in Truckee (P11.1); preserve the open space and natural features that contribute to the character of rural residential neighborhoods through the clustered development requirement (P12.1); and incorporate materials, color schemes and architectural styles to blend into the landscape and be less visible from adjacent roadways (P12.2).

*vi. Employment Districts*

The 2025 General Plan could affect the visual quality of the Town's two main employment districts by introducing new development into those areas.

The Community Character Element, however, addresses the design and character of employment districts with policies to sustain high design standards

for new commercial development in employment districts, particularly where development is visible from along major arterial and roadways (P13.1), and to ensure that new development within Truckee's light industrial areas and employment districts would be designed in a way that is sensitive to adjacent residential development (P13.2).

Given these and the other 2025 General Plan goals, policies and actions to mitigate potentially adverse impacts of new development, the 2025 General Plan would result in *less than significant* adverse impacts on the visual or aesthetic character of employment districts.

*vii. Low Intensity Public and Resource Lands*

The proposed 2025 General Plan does not visualize any major changes to lands that are currently designated for low-intensity public and resource uses.

Exceptions to this include the National Forest Lands located at the SR 267/I-80 intersection, which could be developed with low-density clustered residential development if the lands were sold by the USFS. An area at the southwest corner of the I-80/SR 267 intersection, which is designated for public use, has been identified as a possible site for the relocation of the Town's existing corporation yard facility, as well as new USFS facilities, including an administrative and maintenance complex.

The General Plan's goals and policies concerning clustered development would be expected to result in *less-than significant* impacts to visual resources that could occur as a result of this development.

c. Corridor and Gateway Impacts

Development associated with implementation of the 2025 General Plan could have adverse visual impacts on Truckee's major corridors and gateways by allowing new development that could introduce incompatible visual elements and disrupt or change the appearance of those corridors and gateways.

The West River Street, Brockway Road, and West Donner Pass Road (Donner Lake) Corridors are included in the discussion of their respective areas in Section C.1b., above. As noted there, the General Plan's policies would reduce any potential visual impacts from development along these corridors to a less than significant level.

The 2025 General Plan also includes Goal CC-17 in the Community Character Element, which addresses gateways. Goal CC-17 calls for the Town to preserve and enhance all entryways and gateways to the Town, to create a positive image of Truckee. Policy 17.1 and its Implementing Action A17.2 would have the Town develop and implement a gateway improvement strategy for each of the Town's important gateways. This would provide a beneficial impact to the visual character and quality of the Town's corridors and gateways.

## **2. Scenic Vistas**

Scenic views and vistas, including those of high mountain ridges and peaks, expansive undeveloped or minimally developed open space, the townscape of Downtown Truckee, and specific natural features like the Truckee River corridor and Donner Lake, contribute strongly to the visual character of the Town. The 2025 General Plan contains numerous goals, policies and actions intended to preserve these resources into the future, which would result in a *less than significant* impact to scenic vistas under the proposed General Plan.

Many of Truckee's vistas are associated with the Town's open space resources. The numerous goals, policies and actions aimed at preserving these resources described in some detail in Sections C.1.a. and C.1.b above. These include Goal LU-1, which seeks to manage growth so as to maintain Truckee's mountain community character, Goal LU-7, which would preserve scenic open space through clustering, and Goal CC-1 and CC-2, both of which specifically call for preservation of Truckee's scenic open space and other visual resources. Policies under Goal CC-2 identify preservation of scenic views of hillsides and ridgelines, protection of the Truckee River and other natural waterways, safeguarding the scenic values of Donner Lake, and

more specific strategies such as undergrounding of utility lines, and implementation of landscaping to improve views. Action A2.2 under Goal CC-2 would have the Town review and comment on proposed development within the Town's Planning Area, outside of the Town limits, so as to encourage visually-compatible development on adjacent County lands and preserve the scenic qualities of lands within Truckee's viewsheds (A2.2). This would include development within the Martis Valley, which might be visible from locations within Truckee, and interrupting scenic vistas to the southeast.

Goals and policies concerning the character of development in Downtown Truckee and the railyard are discussed in Section C.1.b.i.; these policies would help to ensure that new development improve, rather than detract from the visual quality of the Truckee townscape as viewed from I-80 and the SR 267 bridge, and that the impact from new development would be *less than significant*.

### 3. Scenic Highways

As previously mentioned, there are no State-designated scenic highways in or through Truckee. As a result, the 2025 General Plan would not impact visual resources within a State-designated scenic highway. However, the two scenic corridors designated in the General Plan could be impacted by development under the 2025 General Plan.

Development could include new low-density residential uses north of I-80 and adjacent to SR 267; public uses at the SR 267/I-80/SR 89 North Triangle; the new USFS District Ranger facility/Town Corporation site, also in this area; and expansion of industrial uses near the Pioneer Commerce Center, among others.

Goal CC-3 of the Community Character Element is to protect and enhance public views within and from Truckee's designated scenic corridors. Policies under this goal would regulate the visual appearance and location of development within identified buffer areas along I-80 and SR 89 North in order to protect the visual quality of these corridors and the views that are available

from them (P3.1). Policy 3.3 is to work with Caltrans to improve the visual quality of freeway interchanges and designated scenic corridors in Truckee, including improvements to roadside landscaping and lighting.

Policies associated with the development of the Gray's Crossing project, which includes housing and a mixed-use center, call for the project to maintain the undeveloped open space character of the viewsheds along SR 89 and I-80 (GC-P5). Additionally, the proposed General Plan strongly discourages the installation of sound walls within the freeway and highway corridors (P3.5).

Therefore, development allowed under the 2025 General Plan would result in *less-than-significant* adverse aesthetic and visual impacts to the Town's scenic highway corridors.

#### **4. Light and Glare**

Development implemented under the proposed 2025 General Plan could increase the amount of light and glare, through installation of new exterior lighting in conjunction with new uses. However, Goal CC-4 in the Community Character Element includes policies and actions to protect views of the night sky and minimize the effects of light pollution.

Policies P4.2 and P4.3 require light fixtures to be designed and sited so as to minimize light pollution, glare, and light trespass into adjoining properties. These policies also encourage the removal, replacement or retrofit of light fixtures that contribute to light pollution.

General Plan actions related to light and glare, A4.1 and A4.2, propose amending the Development Code to provide Town-wide standards for outdoor lighting that reduce light pollution, conducting a study to identify the most serious instances of light pollution in Truckee, and implementing a program to work with relevant public and private property owners to retrofit, remove or replace polluting fixtures.

The policies and actions that implement this goal would reduce potentially significant impacts of light and glare on the Truckee community to a *less-than-significant* level.

#### *D. Cumulative Impact Discussion*

Aesthetic resources in the Town of Truckee would be impacted by future development; however, as a result of the protective goals, policies and actions set forth in the 2025 General Plan, these impacts would be *less than significant*. However, significant amount of new development is proposed outside of Truckee in the Martis Valley. Together with the development proposed within the Town limits, there would be an incremental shift in the visual quality of the Truckee region away from a predominantly natural or open space character to one that is more urbanized in nature. Given the centrality of natural open space to the overall visual quality of the Town and its surrounding area, this would be a *significant* impact.

Despite the 2025 General Plan's extensive range of goals and policies that seek to minimize the visual effects of development, the General Plan would contribute to long-range impacts to visual resources. Since this visual change would occur as an intrinsic part of land use changes, and since development outside of Truckee would be beyond the Town's ability to regulate or control, the cumulative change would create a *significant and unavoidable* impact.

#### *E. Impacts and Mitigation Measures*

Since the implementation of the 2025 General Plan would result in *less-than-significant* project-level impacts to aesthetics or visual quality, no mitigation measures are required.