

CHAPTER 12

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS



Introduction

This chapter provides design guidelines for public sector improvements in the downtown. This includes streetscape design, as well as the design of public buildings.

Policy Base

The Downtown Specific Plan establishes key policies for development in the downtown, which include:

- To preserve the historic character of downtown as a whole
- To respect the different contexts or subareas within the downtown
- To enhance the pedestrian experience and promote pedestrian connections into adjacent neighborhoods
- To extend the pedestrian-oriented commercial area out from Commercial Row along Donner Pass Road to the west and to Jibboom Street behind Commercial Row.

The streetscape guidelines reflect these policies. They also reflect other objectives related to traffic and parking:

- To improve traffic flow in the downtown
- To reduce congestion and some intersections
- To provide parking in an organized manner
- To minimize the visual impacts of parking in surface lots

In addition, the Downtown Streetscape Plan also provides some design standards for public improvements within the street right-of-way. In case of differences between these guidelines and the Streetscape Plan, the Streetscape Plan shall take precedence.

Downtown Truckee Specific Plan
Volume 2: Policies and Programs
Final Plan • November 1997

- Executive Summary page 11: "Provide coordinated street furnishings."
- Chapter 5 page 2: "The degree to which these improvements are used in each sub-district should vary somewhat, reflecting the anticipated level of use by pedestrians and the relationship to other features in the area."
- Chapter 5 page 3: "Use decorative paving to identify pedestrian areas."
- Chapter 5 page 3: "Coordinate streetscape elements in other DSA sub-districts and Master Plan areas with improvements in the Downtown Commercial Core."
- Chapter 5 page 7: "Crosswalks at intersections located along major pedestrian circulation routes shall be constructed with decorative unit pavers or other suitable material."
- Chapter 5 page 7: "Simple materials, forms and features compatible with the historic buildings are appropriate."
- Chapter 5 page 7: "4. Selected furnishings must complement the historic and natural setting of the Downtown Commercial Core while accommodating the needs of a contemporary resort community."
- Chapter 5 page 10: "Fixtures and poles may vary by street segment, but should contribute to the overall charm of Downtown."

Balancing Objectives

These design guidelines seek to balance the objectives of historic preservation, economic development and traffic engineering. Achieving a workable balance is key. Overall new streetscape improvements should remain subordinate to the historic structures that survive, while also providing an attractive place for pedestrians.

For much of the town's early history, streets were unpaved and few sidewalks existed. Historically, the streetscape was not exactly hospitable to pedestrians, although early photographs demonstrate the community's efforts to improve these conditions.

On the other hand, as the downtown seeks even more to cater to visitors and residents, pedestrian systems are needed that are inviting and that visually establish a sense of connectivity among different subareas of the commercial core. This includes the introduction of additional sidewalks, decorative paving and lighting. While sidewalks are being introduced in some areas, traffic flow and parking systems must also be considered.



Historically, many streets were rustic in character, as this view of Jibboom Street demonstrates.

Historic Character of the Streetscape

Early photographs portray a rustic street scene in Truckee, but evidence of efforts to enhance the setting appear from the outset. What is apparent is that streetscape features such as boardwalks, fences and benches occurred somewhat randomly.

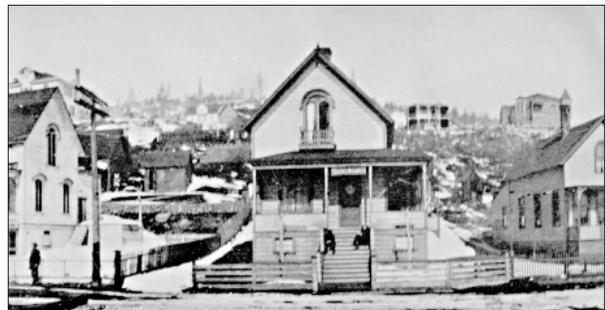
Initial improvements included boardwalks in some areas, primarily along Front Street, but also in other isolated applications as well. Later, simple concrete walks were installed. Most residential streets, however, remained without formally defined pedestrian ways. Within an individual property, owners sometimes constructed boardwalks as well. These led from the street to the front entrance.

Some service areas were screened with solid plank fences, which were similar in character to the wood finishes of nearby buildings.

Frequently, residential yards were defined by fences, in a variety of wood picket designs.



Simple wood utility poles reflect a character of the street that may relate to street lighting concepts.



A variety of fences were used to define yards

1. Public Buildings

Public buildings include churches, schools, libraries and governmental offices. Traditionally, buildings for these uses contrasted with the framework of storefronts and houses: While they are not aligned along a block like commercial buildings, they stand alone framed by a lawn as a foreground. Their large scale, however, distinguishes them from their residential counterparts. Entrances are also more prominent. They are clearly a part of the downtown, however, with entrances oriented to the street and walkways that promote pedestrian use. This helps to convey their function as a gathering place. This tradition of designing civic institutions as landmarks in the urban fabric should continue.



Civic buildings, including churches stood out as accents of the town fabric.

A. Locate civic institutions such that they encourage pedestrian traffic to nearby downtown businesses.

- 1) Design civic institutions to reinforce the system of streets and sidewalks downtown.
- 2) Convenient pedestrian connections should link abutting civic institutions.
- 3) Provide edges of a civic property that are inviting to pedestrians.
- 4) Provide outdoor spaces designed for public use.

B. Minimize the visual impacts of automobiles.

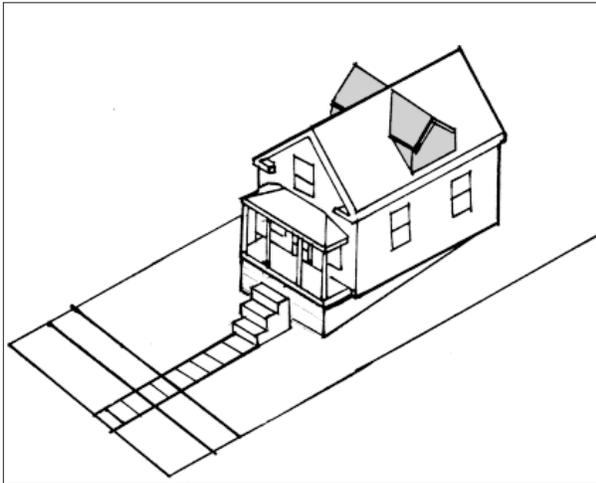
- 1) Locate primary entrances to face the street, not a parking lot.

C. Convey a sense of human scale.

D. Minimize impacts on adjacent historic resources.



While many streets had no sidewalks at all, early photographs do show that wooden boardwalks were used frequently.



In an area that historically was residential, maintain some yard space between the sidewalk and the building. Historic porches and steps also should be preserved.

2. Streetscape Design Character

Enhancements to the streetscape should occur that enhance one's ability to perceive the historic character of downtown, improve pedestrian circulation and visually link properties within a neighborhood.

In a sense, the street is being adaptively reused, to accommodate changing needs, just as many historic buildings are.

A. The overall character of the streetscape should not impede one's ability to interpret the historic features of the area.

- 1) Highly ornamental elements, for example would suggest an inaccurate heritage of the community.
- 2) The overall streetscape should be modest in character, while also meeting contemporary functional needs.

B. The overall character of the streetscape also should reflect the subarea within which it is located.

- 1) An area that historically has been residential should continue to reflect this character in the manner in which landscape materials are used, for example.

3. Sidewalks

While many streets had no sidewalks at all, early photographs do show that wooden boardwalks were used frequently. Where they were employed, they provided a visual unity to an area, with a simple textured surface. This tradition should be continued.

A. A sidewalk design should reflect the character of its historic context.

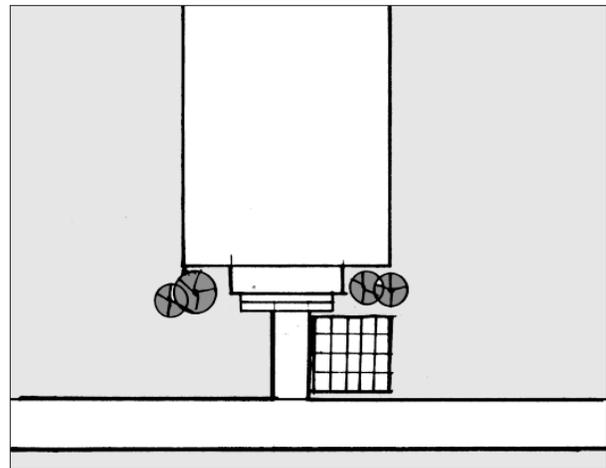
- 1) In general, sidewalk designs should be modest in character.
- 2) In a commercial area, the sidewalk should be attached to the curb, when feasible.
- 3) In an area that historically was residential, maintain some yard space between the sidewalk and the building. Historic porches and steps also should be preserved. (See also Site Design Guidelines.)

B. Sidewalk paving should be a simple concrete finish.

- 1) Broom-finished, grey concrete is preferred for the predominant material.
- 2) A scored concrete, which reflects the texture of boardwalks used historically, also may be considered.
- 3) The exception is along Commercial Row, where a decorative modular paver is used.

C. Decorative paving may be used to define special functional areas.

- 1) For example, using decorative paving at crosswalks and in courtyards is appropriate.
- 2) Decorative paving should be similar to the paver used in Commercial Row.



Decorative paving may be used to define special functional areas, as illustrated above, with paving defining a seating area.

4. Street Lighting

In Truckee's earliest history, no public street lighting was used. Then, when the first street lights were installed, they were simple, utilitarian devices. New street lights should continue this tradition of simplicity, while accommodating new needs.

A. Street lights should have a simple design character.

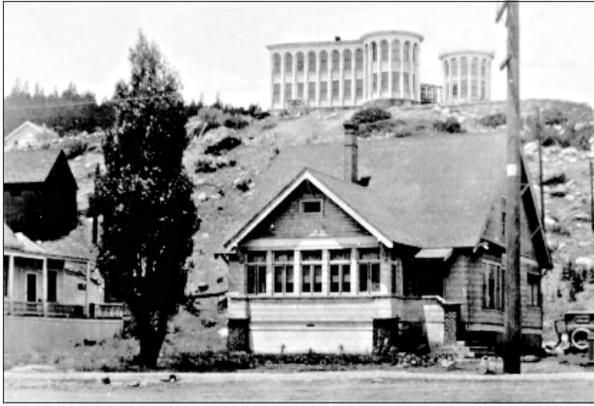
- 1) Highly ornamental lights that convey a history that was not a part of Truckee are inappropriate.
- 2) The exception is along Commercial Row, where ornamental lights are presently installed.

B. Street lighting should be shielded.

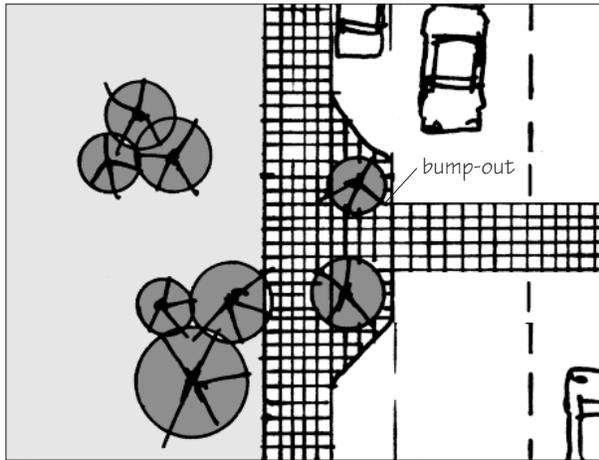
- 1) This will help to minimize glare into the nighttime sky and reduce light spill onto adjacent properties.



Street lights should have a simple design character.



Historically, trees were planted randomly and located in yards



Consider clustering trees in defined planting areas.



Use of plank fence for screening service areas

5. Street Trees

Historically, trees were planted randomly and located in yards, rather than in the public right-of-way (although the informal layout of many streets may have resulted in some trees appearing to be in the street). Rows of uniformly spaced street trees were not a part of the design traditions of downtown. While installation of some street trees may occur, the informal planting patterns should be continued.

A. Where they are to be used, street trees should be planted randomly, to convey an informal character.

- 1) Consider clustering trees in defined planting areas.

B. Use a variety of species for street trees.

- 1) This will help to convey the diversity and irregularity of the historic character of the area.

6. Planters

Formally defined planters were not a part of the historic character of downtown. Today, planters are a desirable feature that can enhance the pedestrian experience. Where they are used, however, they should not impede one's ability to interpret the historic character of the area.

A. Where they are to be used, planters should be placed randomly, to convey an informal character.

7. Fences

Fences have been used traditionally to define areas of special functions and to screen service areas. This tradition should be continued in streetscape designs.

References:

- ☞ See also Chapter 10: Design Guidelines for Site Features.