

# CHAPTER 18

## THE CHURCH STREET CHARACTER AREA



The Church Street Character Area includes the Church Street neighborhood identified in *Fire and Ice*. Historically, these neighborhoods were visually associated. The construction of the highway separated the eastern and western portions, but nonetheless, the design policies for these areas are related.

The Character Area is directly east of the Commercial District. It is roughly bounded by Jibboom Street on the north, Bridge Street on the west, the railroad right-of-way on the south and those properties east of Highway 267.

### Historic Significance

George Schaffer was an early Truckee pioneer and one of the several houses that he built is located behind the Truckee Hotel, which is at the northeastern corner of Front and Bridge Streets. A stone firebreak exists between this house and the hotel. Dr. William Curless, Joseph Gray and Reverend T.S. Unen were some of the neighborhood's other leading residents. Joseph Gray, Truckee's first "white" resident, also fought for the rights of the Chinese community.

The two neighborhood churches—the Methodist church and the Catholic church—remain the focus of the neighborhood today. The First Methodist Church was constructed in 1869 and the Assumption Catholic Church was constructed in 1885. It was originally built at the east end of Church Street, but in 1907, was moved next to the large rock to the east of the Methodist church. During construction of Highway 267, the church was moved one more time to its current location.



*Today, the Methodist church remains in its original location and serves as a focal point for the neighborhood.*

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☞ Please see page 97 (Chapter 13: General Guidelines for New Buildings) for a map that shows this Character Area in its Truckee context.

For many years, an elementary school was also located in the Church Street neighborhood. The school was replaced, however, by another institutional building: the Truckee Donner Recreation Center.

The area was noted for ice harvesting at the Trout Creek Ice Company, although very little evidence of these ice harvests remain today. The Church Street Character Area displays un-patterned architectural construction including the Catholic church and associated rectory, and an eclectic mix of historic and modern residential buildings.

## Historic Character Description

The Church Street neighborhood was mostly residential in character with a few institutional buildings serving as accents. Comparing two historic maps (from 1898 and 1907) for the Church Street neighborhood, several clues to the development of the area can be discerned.

First, the area primarily consisted of small residences that lined Church Street. These houses were all set back a similar distance from the street, had front porches and small side yards. There appeared to be more residences in the western portion of the neighborhood, closer to the downtown. Development thinned out as the neighborhood approached the railroad right-of-way at the eastern end. Porches also varied in design. Many were full-width, but some wrapped around the side of a house. A few even wrapped around three sides of a house.



*Across the street from the Methodist church and the Recreation Center stand a row of houses that exhibit the traditional characteristics of the area.*

## Current Character

The Church Street Character Area is noted for Highway 267 that runs northeasterly through the neighborhood. The highway separates it into two parts. The western half contains the greatest concentration of buildings. In the heart of the neighborhood, Church Street is quite wide, reading as a large open space. Many cars park here, however.

A mix of building types, that date from 1890 to 1930, provides a sense of visual diversity. Both traditional domestic and institutional architecture are found here.

The Methodist church, the Catholic church and the Truckee Tahoe Recreation Center dominate the western portion of the Character Area. At the east end of Church Street, only three historic properties survive: two residences—one of which was a hospital—and a railroad warehouse.

Although most of the buildings in the western portion of the area have original residential associations, many have been converted to commercial uses. Several commercial properties (hotel, restaurant, offices) can be found here.



*The northern part of the Character Area.*

Most residential architecture in this neighborhood is simple, gable-fronted vernacular, although several buildings with Folk Victorian detailing have survived. Many residences that are located on the south side of Church Street have rear yards and secondary structures that are exposed along Highway 267.

The far northeastern corner of the Character Area possesses a small, unique group of vernacular buildings that all display an excellent level of integrity, although their condition is somewhat deteriorated.

Most buildings are simple in design, although some ornamentation was used historically. The smaller buildings tend to exhibit very few details, reserving most ornamentation for porches.

Exterior wall materials traditionally were horizontal lap siding, for commercial and residential architecture alike. Masonry was used generally for foundations.

The limited combination of roof forms found on the buildings creates another striking feature. Most are simple gables. Wood shingles and standing seam metal were used, while today composition shingles are frequently used.



*A mix of building types in this Character Area, that date from 1890 to 1930, provides a sense of visual diversity.*

Some key design characteristics of this Character Area include:

- Churches dominate and anchor area
- On-street parking
- Adjacent to Trout Creek
- Small residential neighborhood pockets
- Wood lap siding is the dominant material
- Front porches face the street (some are inset and some are projecting)
- Standing seam metal roofs
- One to one and one-half stories
- Front facing gable
- Buildings are adjacent to the street without a yard on the south side of the street
- Buildings are set back from the street with a front yard on the north side of the street
- On-street parking
- Outbuildings to the rear of a lot
- No curb cuts along Church Street itself
- Trout Creek is partially enclosed
- Retaining walls along Trout Creek
- East of Highway 267 is visually separate from the west side



*Although always having a "back yard" character, it was not until the later addition of Highway 267, that many residences on the south side of Church Street have rear yards and secondary structures that are now exposed.*

## Design Goals & Policies

The Church Street Character Area should continue to develop with buildings that relate in mass and scale to the building forms seen historically.

The design goals for the Church Street Character Area are:

- To emphasize the preservation and restoration of historic structures, when feasible (the restoration of "Supporting" buildings to upgrade rating is a priority in this area)
- To continue the use of traditional building materials
- To maintain traditional building mass, scale and forms
- To encourage the use of residential building forms (institutional buildings should serve as accents only)
- To encourage the use of front porches that face the street
- To encourage detached garages that are subordinate in character and scale to the primary structure
- To visually reconnect the eastern portion by promoting new infill that draws upon characteristics seen in the west side



*Residential type structures align along the street.*



*Encourage the use of residential building forms such as these small houses in the northeastern portion of the Character Area facing a narrow lane that overlooks Trout Creek.*



*An early view of the south side of the Methodist Church.*

# Design Guidelines for New Buildings

## 1. Building Setbacks

Most front facades align with relatively uniform setbacks in each block. The rhythm created by the placement of buildings and side yards is an especially important characteristic of the area. This historic development pattern contributes to the visual continuity of the neighborhood and should be preserved.

### A. Maintain the alignment of building fronts along the street.

- 1) Setbacks should fall within the established range of setbacks in the block.
- 2) For additions to existing buildings, set them back from the front of the structure such that they do not alter the perceived character of the front.
- 3) Landscaping and fences that help define the yard's front edge are encouraged.

## 2. Mass and Scale

The height, width and depth of a new building should be compatible with historic buildings within the Church Street Character Area and especially with those structures that are immediately adjacent to the new building. There may be exceptions to this rule in the case of institutional structures that serve to anchor the neighborhood. The size of a building also should relate to its lot size and placement on the lot. A limited mix of "small" and "large" building sizes exist in the Church Street Character Area. Even on larger lots where larger buildings occur, the traditional building size is preserved. This established size should be maintained.

### A. New construction should appear similar in mass and size to historic structures found in the Church Street Character Area.

- 1) Residences in the Character Area range from one to two stories, but are typically one and one-half story.
- 2) The tradition of one- to two-story street facades should be continued.

### B. A facade should appear similar in dimension to those seen historically in the Character Area.

- 1) Break up the massing of larger buildings into components that reflect the traditional size.

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#### References:

☞ See also Chapter 10: Design Guidelines for Site Features and Chapter 13: General Guidelines for New Buildings.

### 3. Building and Roof Form

The traditional residential building form consists of a simple rectangular mass capped with a gabled or hipped roof. Additions are usually located to the rear of the main building. In a basic sense, it is the combinations of these shapes that establish a sense of scale for the neighborhood. These characteristic forms should be preserved.

#### A. Use building forms similar to those found traditionally.

- 1) Vertically-oriented rectangular shapes are typical and are encouraged.
- 2) One simple form should be the dominant element in a building design.
- 3) Building forms that step down in size to the rear of the lot are encouraged.
- 4) Smaller, secondary buildings should be simple rectangular shapes, as well.

#### B. Use traditional roof forms.

- 1) Sloping roof forms, such as gabled, hip and shed, should be the dominant roof shapes. Avoid flat roofs.
- 2) Traditional roofs are simple and steeply pitched and most have hip or gabled ends facing the street. Most primary roofs have pitches of 9:12, although some are as low as 7:12. Shed roofs, on additions, have a wider range of pitches from 4:12 to 12:12.
- 3) Non-traditional roof forms are inappropriate.
- 4) Orient primary ridge lines perpendicular to the street.



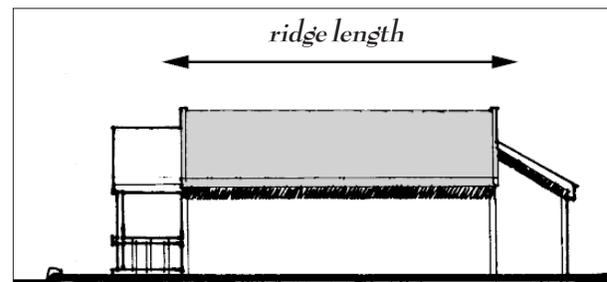
*Use building forms similar to those found traditionally.*

#### C. The number and size of dormers should be limited on a roof, such that the primary roof form remains prominent.

- 1) Dormers should be used with restraint, in keeping with the simple character of buildings in Truckee.
- 2) The top of a dormer roof should be located below the ridge line of the primary roof and set back from the eave.

#### D. Roofs should be similar in size to those used historically on comparable buildings.

- 1) The length of a roof ridge should not exceed those seen historically on comparable buildings. Historically, in residential contexts, the maximum ridge length was 35 to 40 feet.



*The length of a roof ridge should not exceed those seen historically on comparable buildings.*

## 4. Porches

A majority of the residences in the Church Street Character Area have front porches. These serve to reinforce the visual continuity of the neighborhood.

**A. The use of a porch is strongly encouraged and they should appear similar to those seen traditionally.**

- 1) The porch floor and roof height shall appear similar to those seen traditionally on the block.
- 2) Use similar building design elements and materials as those seen traditionally.

**B. The front porch shall be "functional," in that it is used as a means of access to the entry.**



*The use of a porch is strongly encouraged and it should appear similar to those seen traditionally.*

## 5. Garages

Although not a part of the historic street scene in Truckee, the automobile and its associated storage is part of contemporary life. Therefore, the visual impacts of parking, which include driveways, garages and garage doors, should be minimized. On-site parking should be subordinate to other uses and front yards should not be used for parking.

**A. A garage should not dominate the street scene.**

- 1) A garage should be subordinate to the primary structure on the site.

**B. A detached garage is preferred.**

- 1) In order to minimize the impact of a garage on the street scene, locate it to the rear of the building. Setting a garage back substantially from the primary building front, may also be considered.
- 2) This will help reduce the perceived mass of the overall development.
- 3) The material and detailing of a detached garage should be utilitarian, to be compatible with other historic accessory structures.

