

3. Community Design Element DRAFT

Surrounded by mountains and forests, and located around creeks and meadows, the Feather River and Humbug Valley, Portola is inherently an attractive community. One challenge to living in this setting is to develop a built environment that is compatible with the natural amenity. Poor quality design and construction, and poor maintenance of existing buildings, has the ability to seriously detract from the surrounding beauty and diminish the very features and character that attract people to live here. This is not to imply that human occupation of the forest and mountains is inherently incompatible with the natural surroundings. Indeed, attractive buildings designed to be compatible with the natural surroundings have the ability to inspire, and to be an attractive complement to the natural setting. The community can be designed to sustain and be in harmony with the environment.

The first priority is to not destroy the natural amenities that make the area so attractive. The guidelines are simple. Do not remove more trees than necessary to construct a building and do not unnecessarily modify the natural land form or the natural flow of water through grading. Compliance with these fundamentals will inherently protect the natural character of the community. The companion priority is to develop the community in a manner that is compatible with and protective of the surroundings. The Community Design Element defines specific details for development of the City. These details address building characteristics and common area features such as landscaping, signs, neighborhood design, and community form.

Authority

The Community Design Element is an optional element of the General Plan under Section 65303 of the Government Code.

"The general plan may include any other elements or address any other subjects which, in the judgment of the legislative body, relate to the physical development of the county or city."

Relationship to Other Elements

The Community Design Element establishes intent and guidance for community development and is closely related to the Land Use Element. The Land Use Element defines the location and use of land. The Community Design Element defines the characteristics of the land use and provides guidelines and standards for development. This is the basis for new development standards that will be applied in the subsequent amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, the Improvement Standards, and Subdivision Ordinance in the Municipal Code.

The Community Design Element includes guidelines for developed area relationship to open space and forested areas, and guidelines for development in sloping or highly erodible areas. These fundamentals are also addressed in Open Space and Conservation Element and the Safety Element. The Community Design Element is also related to the Circulation Element in the recommendations for street, parking, public transit, and pedestrian and bike system features.

Community Design Goals

The fundamental goal for the Community Design Element is to encourage development that:

- is economically and environmentally sustainable; relates well to the natural setting;
- is sustainable because it is well constructed of durable, quality materials appropriate to the setting; and
- offers memorable buildings and spaces.

The underlying principle in this Community Design Element, indeed throughout the General Plan, is that natural amenities and the man-made environment are not mutually exclusive. Portola residents and visitors will be able to enjoy the built environment integrated into the natural beauty of the region.

Goal CD-1.	Guide development of the community in a manner that will sustain the natural resources and amenities and will be economically sustainable over time.
Goal CD-2.	Foster creativity and design excellence consistent with community objectives, the environmental characteristics of the area and the economic conditions inherent in a small, rural community.
Goal CD-3.	Ensure that development will be compatible with the natural features that define the existing City and surrounding area.
Goal CD-4.	Establish high standards so that the future development will be attractive, distinctive, and functional.
Goal CD-5.	Protect natural environmental features and integrate the built environment with the natural environment.
Goal CD-6.	Establish quality development appropriate to the local history, culture, and natural environment.
Goal CD-7.	Build for long term durability and economic life cycles.

Goal CD-8.	Establish well designed, distinctive gateways, lighting, and signage that will distinguish Portola as an attractive community.
Goal CD-9.	Retain and enhance the existing, well-defined form of the City.
Goal CD-10.	Provide public spaces to accommodate visitors with minimal impact on City residents.
Goal CD-11.	Establish attractive, well-designed, and distinctive districts such as Commercial Street and a business park to enhance employment and economic development opportunities.
Goal CD-12.	Enhance and preserve the existing neighborhoods and restore or replace existing housing stock in the older neighborhoods.

Protection and Enhancement of Natural Amenities

Policies: Protection of Open Space and Natural Resources

CD-P- 1. Where contiguous to open space, development will be designed to provide views to meadows, creeks, rock outcroppings and other natural features.

CD-P- 2. Meadows and riparian corridors along drainage ways and the river are to be maintained in the natural condition. No structures will be permitted in meadows or riparian corridors other than small structures incidental to recreation, agriculture, forest management, environmental management, or education activities. Such structures may include open pavilions, seating areas, small informal amphitheaters, kiosks, open shelters for recreation, small structures for storage required for maintenance, and similar basic structures. Major structures such as lodges, residences, restaurants, resorts and other similar buildings will not be permitted in a meadow or riparian corridor.

CD-P- 3. The edge of the City adjacent to forests and meadows will provide a transition from urban to open space by reducing the intensity of land development.

CD-P- 4. The urban portion of the City will be clearly distinct from the unincorporated area along the major roads entering the City.



Implementation: Protection of Open Space and Natural Resources

CD-I-1. All applications for tentative maps, conditional use permits, and planned unit developments pursuant to the Municipal Code will be required to show:

- the location and character of any natural features, such as a spring, meadow, rock outcropping, or defined drainage way;
- the location of trees to be removed in the development;
- a grading plan that indicates cut and fill banks.

CD-I-2. At the discretion of the City Council, applications for tentative maps, conditional use permits, and planned unit developments pursuant to the Municipal Code shall include a reforestation plan that provides for replacement of trees removed in construction. The replacement plan shall indicate the location and method of replacing one tree for each tree cut. The reforestation may occur in the project site, or in another location acceptable to the City.

CD-I-3. The review of all such applications will consider the effect of the proposed development on major natural amenities, such as a large rock outcrop or view to a major peak.

CD-I-4. Adopt design guidelines for development adjacent to creeks that include consideration of the following:

- streets abutting the bank;

- discourage rear lot lines along creeks;
- provide public access and visual easements to creeks;
- linkages to other open spaces and open space systems;
- trails for pedestrians and bicyclists;
- planting for erosion control and riparian enhancement with native shrubs, groundcover, and riparian trees.

CD-I-5. Work with Plumas County to support implementation of the Scenic Highways policies in the County General Plan.

CD-I-6. Work with the United States Forest Service (USFS) to implement the Wild and Scenic Rivers standards in the Plumas Forest Master Plan.

CD-I-7. Maintain view corridors to the river along the existing streets leading from Highway 70. New development or redevelopment of existing properties abutting or within these corridors must be designed to maintain the view to the river.



Building Quality and Durability

Policies: Building Quality

CD-P-6. New construction, and redevelopment of existing buildings, should use durable materials that will age well and will require minimal maintenance.

CD-P-7. Use of native materials and design features associated with the history of the area is encouraged.

Implementation: Building Quality

CD-I-13. The Building Inspector will provide information to building permit applicants on suitable building materials and forms for the Portola area.

CD-I-14. The City will take the opportunity with City buildings and public improvement projects to demonstrate cost effective use of suitable materials.

CD-I-15. The City Planning Commission and/or City Council will consider the durability of materials and the appropriate use of materials in conjunction with other considerations in review of development applications.

City Landmarks and Gateways

The existing City boundaries are well-defined by natural land forms. Traveling west on Highway 70, one enters the east end of the City over a low pass that establishes a distinct entry to the City (refer to location "A" in Figure 3-3). Driving east from Delleker, one enters the City around a curve in the highway adjacent to the river, and the south side of the City where the rail museum buildings come into view (refer to location "B" in Figure 3-3). This approach provides a natural gateway and an attractive view up the river toward the Gulling Street Bridge.

Policies: City Landmarks and Gateways

CD-P-9. Enhance the visual impact of the natural features that mark the major entries to the City.

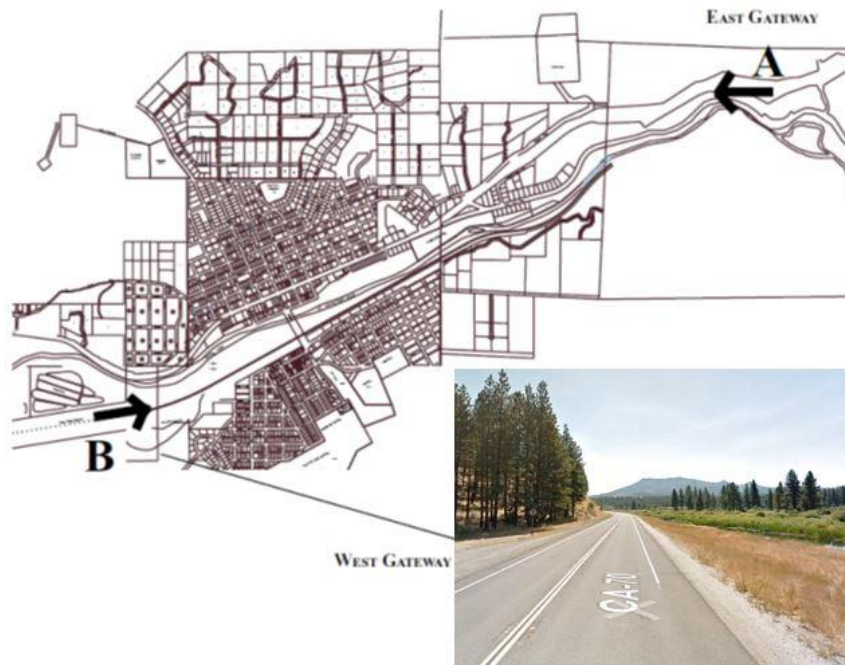
CD-P-10. Establish visual landmarks throughout the city that will guide visitors to major activity areas.

CD-P-12. Retain views and public access to the river from Highway 70.



Figure 3-3
Major Gateway Entries

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Implementation: City Landmarks and Gateways

- CD-I-16.** Continue to work with Plumas County to establish design standards and land use controls on the unincorporated area in a corridor extending along Highway 70 and along the Lake Davis Road and County Road A-15 within 2 miles of corporate limits of the City.
- CD-I-17.** Continue to maintain land at the east and west entries to the City along Highway 70, including gateway features with includes major signs, a small visitors parking area, an information kiosk with information and directional signs, interpretive signs and a small picnic area, as applicable.
- CD-I-18.** Encourage design standards for gateway features that reflect the historic character of the town. This may include elements of

railroad, mining, ranching, timber, or recreation, but is not intended that any gateway feature incorporate all of these elements.

CD-I-19. Continue to implement a landmark and sign feature to direct people to the Old Town commercial area, the railroad museum and the Civic Center in highly visible locations throughout the City, including, but not limited to, the southwest corner of the intersection of Gulling Street and Highway 70.

CD-I-21. Establish requirements for providing landmark features in new development. Landmark features may include gateway elements and landscaping, special lighting and paving, and sculptural elements.

CD-I-22. Continue implementation of the City Improvement Matrix as amended as a design standard for major streets that differentiates them from small collector and residential streets through landscaping, signs, and lighting. Refer to the landscape guidelines for the City streets in this element and the street standards in the Circulation Element.

Policies: City-Wide Directional Signs

CD-P-13. Continue the City-wide sign program to encourage a common design element and provide directional features to guide people in the city.

Implementation: City-Wide Directional Signs

CD-I-23. Continue to implement the public directional sign program that includes three dimensional elements as well as signs. The intent is to establish a common design theme throughout the City. At a minimum, the public directional sign program will include directions to City Hall, the library and parks, the sheriff's substation, the Railroad Museum, Old Town and the hospital. The sign program will include a standard lettering style and color, and background color and base materials so as to provide a uniform image that is easily recognizable as part of the City program.

Neighborhood Conservation and Development

The City contains many old neighborhoods that predate the common use of automobiles. The character of these neighborhoods is small, individualized homes that reflect the distinctive tastes of many occupants over several decades. The General Plan goal (CD-12) is to enhance the existing neighborhoods and restore or replace the existing housing

stock. The underlying purpose of this goal is to create more attractive neighborhoods that will retain property values and encourage private investment in individual properties.



Policies: Residential Neighborhoods

CD-P-16. Improve the overall streetscape in residential neighborhoods by providing improvements such as a public sidewalk, street lighting, and directional signs, in accordance with the City Improvement Matrix as amended.

CD-P-18. Actively enforce the Municipal Ordinance sections regarding trash collection and disposal in residential yards, and the replacement or renovation of dilapidated or unsafe buildings.

Implementation: Residential Neighborhoods

CD-I-25. Assist in the organization of neighborhood associations for the purpose of identifying and implementing local improvement projects. Assistance may include the provision of mailings, meeting facilities, and research.

CD-I-26. Maintain a category in the annual municipal budget for local improvements such as street tree planting, annual clean-up days, sidewalk installation and repair, and similar local activities to enhance the visual quality of the City.

CD-I-28. Establish an inventory of dilapidated properties as candidates for restoration or removal.

- CD-I-29.** Identify sources of funding and community support for restoration of residential properties for low income households.

Civic Core and Public Spaces

It is anticipated that Portola will grow as the economic center and an attraction to visitors to Eastern Plumas County. The City needs an attractive core area that can accommodate large numbers of visitors without detracting from the quality of the natural environment and the quality of life for residents. This will be done by maintaining the compact form of the major institutional and commercial uses, by designating the core area as an extended “visitor’s center”, and by establishing high quality building design and amenities throughout the core area. The general boundaries of the core area are shown in Figure 3-5.

Policies: Civic Core and Public Spaces

CD-P-19. The existing civic core area, including City Hall, the post office, library, sheriff substation, Courthouse, and City Park shall remain the institutional center of the City. The City will seek to expand the City offices as necessary to keep pace with the service demands of increased population.

CD-P-21. The commercial core area of the City, including Highway 70, Commercial Street, the Railroad Museum area, and the civic center core will provide multiple locations to accommodate visitor activities. The intent is to enable the City to host large single events in multiple centers of activity, such as a craft or music festival, or to host different small but concurrent events.

CD-P-22. The multiple venue locations will be linked by a vehicle and pedestrian system and accessible by public transit and parking.



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Implementation: Civic Core and Public Spaces

- CD-I-31.** Invest in expansion of public services and other civic uses into the core area.
- CD-I-32.** Provide support uses, such as parking, pedestrian spaces and sidewalks, and public transit access to ensure that the civic core area remains viable.
- CD-I-33.** Adopt a Public Events Master Plan to identify multiple event centers and define their potential function. The Public Events Master Plan will include an operations component for coordinating multiple venue events and a facilities component that describes the venues and their supporting services and infrastructures.
- CD-I-35.** Identify the network of parking areas, pedestrian connections, public transit stops, and public activity spaces in the Public Events Master Plan.

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Figure 3-5
Civic Core Area

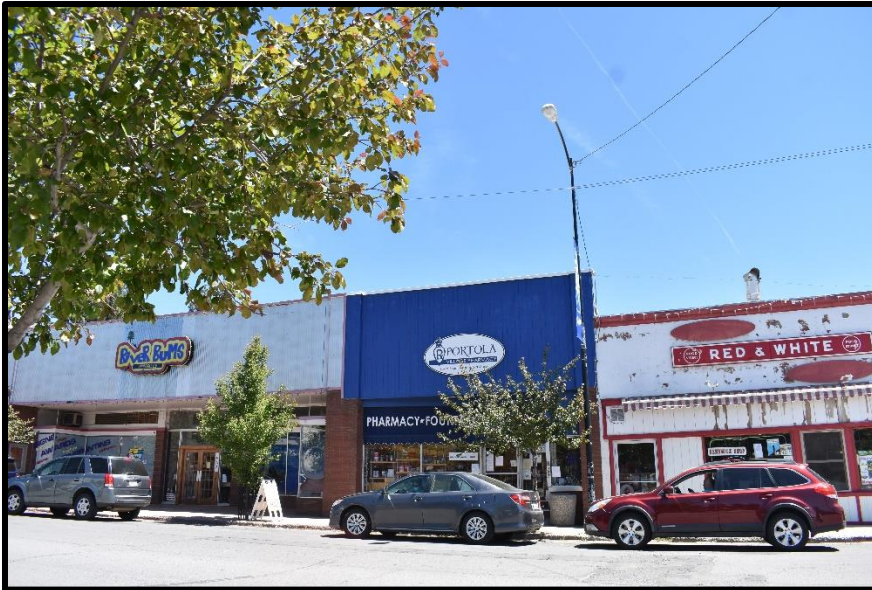


Commercial Areas

Policies for the commercial areas are closely linked with the standards for the civic core and public spaces. In part, the intent is to provide public spaces within the commercial core area that encourage public activity and patronage of the retail and service businesses.

There are two distinct commercial areas, Old Town and Sierra Street. Old Town is envisioned as a small scale retail and service area with restaurants, small shops, and service for tourists as well as local residents. The proximity of the Railroad Museum offers

special opportunities for visitor oriented services and retail. A high level of pedestrian amenities (including broad sidewalks, shade, seating, fountains, low level lighting) will



establish a unique character for this commercial area.

Sierra Street and the adjacent side streets will provide the more conventional business center for the City and the region. Auto-oriented businesses catering to local residents, as well as travelers along Highway 70, will be the primary uses in this area. Although it is a primary traffic route of regional significance, the Sierra Street corridor should incorporate pedestrian amenities as well. Continuous sidewalks setback from the street edge, shade structures, seating areas, and pedestrian scale lighting and signs will provide a more pedestrian friendly corridor.

Policies: General Commercial

CD-P-23. Establish design standards to retain and enhance the Old Town core area and Sierra Street corridor as the primary commercial and tourism centers in the east Plumas region.

CD-P-24. Establish quality design of buildings on Commercial Street and the Sierra Street corridor to identify them as the center of primary commercial activity.

CD-P-25. Signs and lighting for commercial and office uses will contribute to a common theme element that becomes a visual symbol for the City.

CD-P-26. Encourage preservation and enhancement of commercial buildings with architectural character or historic significance.

Implementation: General Commercial

- CD-I-39.** All applications for commercial use pursuant to the Municipal Code will be required to show the location and features of any exterior space intended for public use.
- CD-I-40.** All applications for commercial use pursuant to the Municipal Code will be required to show access to parking and the pedestrian route to the parking area.
- CD-I-41.** Adopt guidelines for commercial buildings that reflect the history of the region, and compatible with the climate.

Policies: Old Town Commercial Area

- CD-P-27.** Establish a special pedestrian area in Old Town to accommodate tourism and shopping and services for local residents.
- CD-P-28.** Provide a direct, clear, and convenient pedestrian connection between Commercial Street and the Railroad Museum.
- CD-P-30.** Provide additional parking on the perimeter of the Old Town areas along First Avenue, and in other convenient locations.
- CD-P-31.** Provide convenient pedestrian connections between parking areas and the Commercial Street businesses.

Implementation: Old Town Commercial Area

- CD-I-42.** Adopt a Street Lighting and Sign Program for placement of a unique sign and lighting standard in all commercial areas along Sierra Street. The program will adopt a lighting and sign structure standard that will be a form and constructed of materials that evoke the history of the City and surrounding area. The form will include one or two standard locations for placement for individual business signage, and a lighting fixture that casts light downward on the sidewalk and the adjacent street. Business signs will be front lighted and must be within size parameters and proportions established by the City program.
- CD-I-43.** Adopt standards and an improvement plan for Commercial Street that includes at a minimum:
- pedestrian level street lighting;
 - special sidewalk pavement or a boardwalk along the store fronts;

- crosswalk signs, striping and special paving;
- street furniture including benches, trash collection containers, directional and interpretive signs;
- designated areas for street vendors, performing arts, and train watching;
- guidelines for building facades, window and door treatments;
- canopies over the storefront sidewalks;
- street trees;
- on-street parking.

CD-I-44. The City will work with the merchants and landowners in the Old Town area to install a street lighting program consistent with the pedestrian use of the street and the “Old Town” theme.

CD-I-45. The City will work with the Railroad Museum Association to improve the visibility and attractiveness of the main museum buildings when viewed from Highway 70.

CD-I-46. Encourage the Railroad Museum Association to include a landmark architectural element, such as a clock tower, in the museum facilities.

CD-I-47. Develop a reuse plan for the former railroad hospital site for commercial or public access uses that will include attractive new structures and landmark elements.

CD-I-48. As additional commercial uses develop, adopt standards and an improvement plan for a landscaped corridor along First Street, Second Street, Pacific Street, California Street and Main Street to provide a pedestrian corridor from the west end of Commercial Street to the museum.

Sierra Street and Riverfront Commercial

The commercial uses along the south side of Sierra Street are a special condition because of the interface with the river. The Sierra Street corridor has the unique advantage of being contiguous to the Feather River along a substantial portion of the reach through the City. This provides very attractive views and opportunities for access to the river corridor. The River Park extends for one half mile from Beckwith Street to the US Forest Service Park. The Feather River is a special resource because it retains the character of a relatively

unimproved water course. As a federally designated Wild and Scenic River, the Feather River has a natural, scenic quality. Unlike many communities that developed with buildings facing away from a natural amenity, such as the river, Portola retains undeveloped edges along the north bank of the river. This provides opportunities that are unique to Portola for recreation, public open space, and a strong identity.

The purpose of these policies is to ensure that the future development of commercial use along the south side of Sierra Street will take advantage of this unique opportunity by providing access and an attractive interface with the open space corridor. The intent is to provide a distinctive character for Sierra Street that relates to the river, and to the role as “main street” for the eastern Plumas Region.

Policies: Sierra Street and Riverfront Commercial

CD-P-33. Pedestrian and bikeway connections will be provided by businesses between Sierra Street and the River Park corridor from the west gateway to the USFS park.

CD-P-34. Businesses will provide a view toward the river from the main sales or dining area where feasible. Decks and terraces oriented to the river are encouraged.

CD-P-35. Refuse, storage and service areas will be screened and/or located to have minimum visual impact from the river.

CD-P-36. Small-scale signs oriented to the river that identify the business will be allowed pursuant to approval of an Administrative Permit.

CD-P-39. The City shall continue to seek to acquire land for recreation and public purposes.

Implementation: Sierra Street and Riverfront Commercial

CD-I-49. The City will implement a program to support installation of a sign and lighting structure along Sierra Street. The location of the structure will be coordinated with adjacent landowners, but will be placed to facilitate spacing the structure at approximately regular intervals along the street.

CD-I-50. City review of any building permit for new construction or renovation, conditional use permit, rezone or other entitlements for commercial use along the south side of Sierra Street shall consider:

- siting with respect to the views toward the river;
- orientation of sales areas, dining areas, terraces and decks overlooking the river;

- pedestrian access corridors between Sierra Street and the river corridor within blocks;
- pedestrian walks between the businesses and the River Walk pathway;
- provision of small signs oriented to the river to identify the businesses;
- provision of amphitheater seating or other seating areas overlooking the river.

Business Professional and Industrial Areas

Historically, industrial uses within the City were few, and primarily related to railroad operations. Office uses are typically located in small buildings in the commercial areas. The General Plan is based on the premise that the quality of life in the City will attract new businesses not previously associated with the community. Such businesses will include office uses, light manufacturing, and assembly. The City currently offers very little land area, and few improved buildings suitable for such businesses. They will require relatively small, affordable space to become established and grow. Perhaps more important, the space will need to be of high quality and amenity to attract and retain quality businesses.

The Land Use Element identifies new land use categories for businesses, including Commercial Mixed Use (CMU) and Business Professional-Light Industrial (BP/LI). The Land Use Diagram (Figure 2-2) designates specific locations within the City to accommodate these uses.

These policies are intended to ensure that the business professional offices and light industrial uses are compatible with the natural setting, functional in the emerging telecommunication technologies, and distinguished by a high level of amenities.

Policies: Business Professional and Industrial

- CD-P-40.** Encourage the development of high quality business professional and industrial parks that accommodate a range of small business activities.
- CD-P-41.** Business and industrial parks will provide an attractive landscape and sign program including directional signs and major entry features.
- CD-P-42.** Truck access and storage areas will be screened from view from the primary street frontage and any adjacent residential use.
- CD-P-43.** Business and industrial parks will provide pedestrian and bicycle access and bicycle parking.

CD-P-44. Business and industrial parks will be designed to be integrated with the natural setting to provide an attractive work place and minimize the impact on the environment.



Implementation: Business Professional and Industrial

CD-I-51. City review of any building permit for new construction or renovation, conditional use permit, rezone or other entitlements for business professional and industrial use shall consider:

- siting with respect to natural features such as creeks, meadows, rock outcroppings and significant trees in the adjacent forest;
- the scale of the proposed buildings relative to adjacent land uses;
- location of truck access and storage areas;
- pedestrian access, and bicycle access and parking areas;
- location of and character of major signs and landscape features, and directional signs.

CD-I-52. The City will designate the location of major sign and gateway features for business and industrial park locations