

# CHAPTER 15

## THE COMMERCIAL DISTRICT CHARACTER AREA



The Commercial District Character Area constitutes the business core of the historic downtown, in which most buildings were constructed with storefronts close to the sidewalk edge. This area roughly stretches between Bridge Street and Spring Street along Front Street. A portion of Jibboom Street also lies within this Character Area.

### Historic Significance

After a fire destroyed Coburn's Station in 1868, some of the first buildings were erected in the Commercial District area. By 1885, much of Front Street, between Spring and Bridge Streets, was a well established commercial center. Fire, however, would continue to destroy parts of the downtown for years to come, resulting in the prevalent use of brick in the construction.

Behind Front Street was Jibboom Street. This area was home to the first residence in Truckee, Joseph Gray's log cabin (built in 1863), and also the location of Truckee's first Chinese settlement. By 1875, Jibboom Street was well known for an entirely different reason. The area became Truckee's "red light" district, and it continued as such until the 1940s.

### Historic Character Description

Comparing historic maps from 1898 and 1907, a clear progression of development can be seen. The intersection of Bridge Street and Front Street was the main corner in downtown Truckee. Development was most dense at this intersection, and a solid wall of buildings stretched between Bridge and Spring Streets. These buildings, however, were only on one side of Front Street. Storefronts aligned at the sidewalk edge and faced south to the railroad tracks and many hotels and depots located in that extensive right-of-way.

Canopies were also significant architectural features on the majority of commercial buildings. Historic maps and photographs show a solid line of them



*The Commercial District Character Area constitutes the business core of the historic downtown.*

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

stretching from Bridge to Spring Streets. Over the years, breaks in this canopy line occurred. This coming-and-going of the canopies, however, was also a part of the tradition of building in Truckee.

Jibboom Street, on the other hand, was not as densely developed as its Front Street counterpart. In fact, much of the land was a large corral. A more diverse mix of uses also occurred along Jibboom Street. Many residential building types could be seen, especially along the eastern two-thirds of the street. These “residences” were widely spaced along the street, and more than likely had gable roof forms and front porches.



*Jibboom Street serves as a transition between the downtown core and residential neighborhoods on the hillside.*

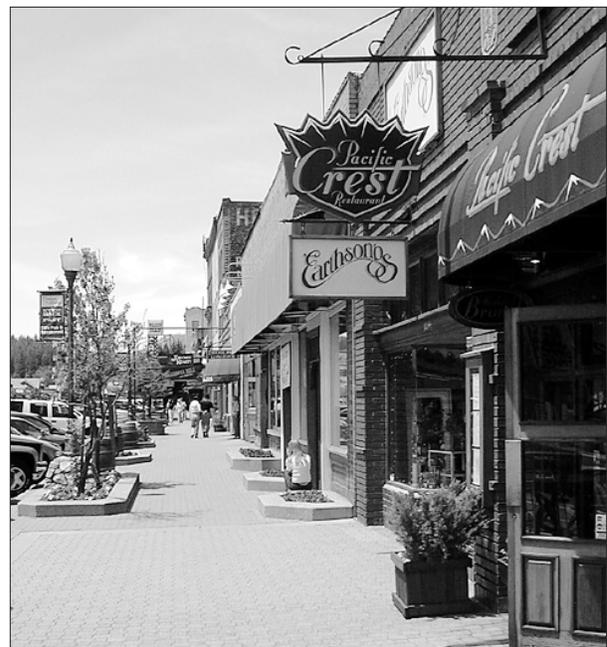


*The west end of the Downtown District serves as a transition to the residences in the Brickelltown Character Area. Buildings step down in scale and exhibit many residential characteristics.*

## Current Character

Today much of the Commercial District, except for Jibboom Street, reflects commercial development over a broad period between 1870 and 1940. Because of this, a variety of commercial building types exists. The buildings are, however, related to each other through the use of masonry construction, the existence of a storefront and their historical setting near the railroad’s freight and passenger depots. A “refined” image is presented to the street, with decorative trim and painted finishes, while the rear facades are utilitarian in nature and constructed of simpler materials.

Front Street has a high concentration of historic buildings. Twenty-one of the twenty-two buildings located here are officially designated as historic structures. The vast majority of the structures seen along the street are two-story. However, four are three-story, three are one-story, and one (Sierra Tavern) is four stories tall. Ground-level floors orient to pedestrian views with large display windows and recessed entries highlighting the goods and services offered inside. Upper-story windows are vertically oriented, usually rectangular, and appear as smaller openings in a predominantly solid wall. A horizontal band of molding separates the



*A “refined” image is presented to the street.*

ground floor from upper portions of the facade and the entire building is capped with a parapet or decorative cornice. All of these elements combine to establish a linear emphasis on the street.

There are eleven buildings that are constructed entirely of brick and concrete block. These buildings are concentrated at each end of Commercial Row. Most of the structures in the middle of the strip are at least partially brick, with stucco or wood used in combination.

A recently improved sidewalk on Front Street is made up of several different patterns of custom brick shapes in combination with a variety of concrete finishes. The walk is continuously covered on the western one-third, mostly by second story balconies above. The remainder of the Commercial Row sidewalk is open to the sky above. Details such as the ornamental lampposts and the scale of signage and storefronts increase visual interest.

Some key features of this Character Area are:

- Buildings align at the sidewalk edge
- Vernacular commercial buildings
- One, two and three story buildings
- Masonry construction is predominant, although several wood sided buildings also exist here.
- Transparent ground floor with smaller windows "punched" into predominantly solid upper floors
- Predominantly flat-roof buildings, although gabled buildings with false fronts existed
- Canopies along Front Street
- Alley access to the commercial row
- Parking on the street and alley
- Jibboom Street serves as a transition between the downtown core and residential neighborhoods on the hillside
- Simpler building forms and styles found along Jibboom Street



*The buildings seen along the street are one to two stories in height, with some reaching heights of four stories.*



*Several small, one-story buildings exist in downtown Truckee.*



*Canopies align at the sidewalk edge along Front Street.*

## Design Goals & Policies

The design goals for the Commercial District Character Area are:

- To emphasize the preservation and restoration of historic structures, when feasible
- To continue the use of traditional building materials found in the area
- To maintain the traditional mass, size and form of buildings seen along the street
- To design new commercial buildings with storefront elements similar to those seen historically but without direct imitation of historic details
- To design new construction that reinforces the retail-oriented function of the street and enhances its pedestrian character
- To promote friendly, walkable streets
- To align the setbacks of new buildings at the sidewalk edge on Front Street
- To reflect the historic building alignment in new construction on Jibboom Street
- To provide variety of building forms on Jibboom Street, which has a mix of storefronts with gable roof structures



*New buildings, like the one on the right, should continue the use of masonry construction.*



*One of the important design goals is to align new buildings at the sidewalk edge on Front Street.*

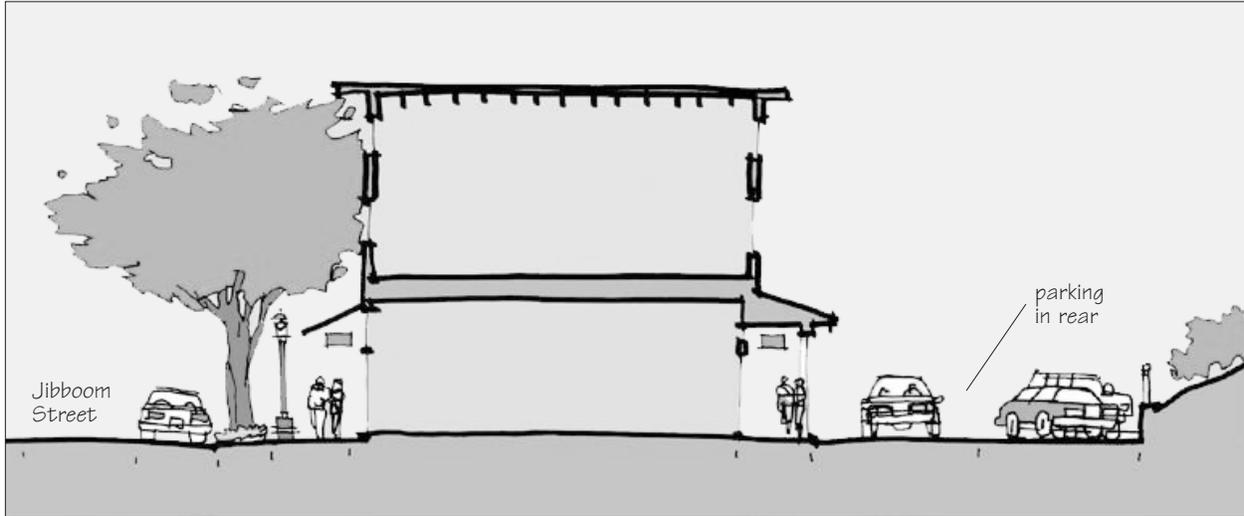


*Another important design goal is to provide a variety of building forms on Jibboom Street, which has a mix of storefronts with gable roof structures.*

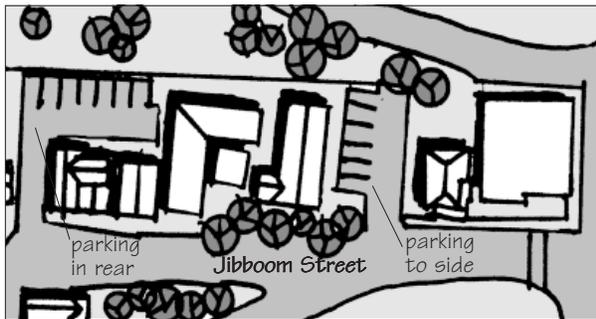


*Jibboom Street serves as a transition between the downtown core and residential neighborhoods on the hillside.*

## Design Goals & Policies, cont.



*In some cases, commercial buildings may be "double-fronted", orienting to the street and to parking in rear.*



*This sketch illustrates a variety of building forms on Jibboom Street, which has a mix of storefronts with gable roof structures.*



*Design goals include designing new commercial buildings with storefront elements similar to those seen historically but without direct imitation of historic details.*

These guidelines in this chapter are presented in two sections. The first section applies principally to Front Street. The second section applies to Jibboom Street.

## Design Guidelines for New Buildings

### Front Street

#### 1. Building Setbacks

Buildings create a strong edge to the street because they traditionally aligned on the front lot line and were usually built out the full width of the parcel to the side lot lines. Although small gaps do occur between some structures, they are the exceptions. These characteristics are vitally important to the historic integrity of the district and should be preserved.

##### A. Maintain the alignment of facades at the sidewalk's edge.

- 1) Locating an entire building front back from the established storefront line is inappropriate.

#### 2. Mass and Scale

Patterns are created along the street by the repetition of similarly-sized building elements. For example, uniform facade widths evenly spaced along Front Street create a rhythm that contributes to the visual continuity of the district. These features and similar patterns are some of the most important characteristics of the Commercial District Character Area and should be respected in all rehabilitation and new construction.

##### A. Maintain the average perceived size of buildings.

- 1) Facade heights of new buildings should fall within the established range of the block, and respect the historic proportions of height to width.
- 2) Floor-to-floor heights should appear similar to those of historic buildings in the area.

##### B. Traditional spacing patterns created by the repetition of uniform building widths along streets must be maintained.

- 1) No facade should exceed 50 feet without a clear expression of this standard module.
- 2) Where a building must exceed this width, use a change in design features to suggest the traditional building widths. Changes in facade material, window design, facade height or decorative details are examples of techniques that may be considered. These variations should be expressed through the structure such that the composition appears to be a collection of smaller building modules.

#### 3. Building and Roof Form

One of the most prominent unifying elements of Front Street is the similarity in building form. Commercial buildings were simple rectangular solids, deeper than they were wide. This characteristic is important and should be continued in new projects.

##### A. Rectangular forms should be dominant on commercial facades.

- 1) Rectangular forms should be vertically oriented.
- 2) The facade should appear as predominantly flat, with any decorative elements and projecting or setback "articulations" appearing to be subordinate to the dominant form.

##### B. Use a flat roof line as the dominant roof form.

- 1) Gabled roofs may also be used as accents.
- 2) Parapets on side facades should step down towards the rear of the building.

##### C. Along rear facades, a building should step down in height, and not be a continuous two- or three-story facade plane.

- 1) This is especially encouraged when rear areas are anticipated to have pedestrian activity.
- 2) Consider using additive forms, such as sheds, stairs and decks. These forms must, however, remain subordinate to the primary structure.

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#### References:

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

## 4. Recessed Entries

Many primary entrances to commercial buildings are recessed, providing a shaded area that helps to define doorways and to provide shelter to pedestrians. The repetition of this feature along the street contributes to the traditional or human scale of the area, and should be continued in a portion of the future projects.

### A. Maintain the pattern created by recessed entryways.

- 1) Set the door back from the front facade an adequate amount to establish a distinct threshold for pedestrians. A recessed dimension of four feet is typical.
- 2) Where entries are recessed, the building line at the sidewalk edge should be maintained by the upper floor(s).

## 5. New Storefront Character

The street level floors of traditional Truckee commercial buildings are clearly distinguishable from the upper floors. First floors are predominantly fixed plate glass with a small percentage of opaque materials. Upper floors are the reverse—opaque materials dominate, and windows appear as smaller openings puncturing the solid walls. These windows are usually double-hung. The street level is generally taller than the upper floors. Storefronts of 12 to 14 feet high are typical, whereas second floors of 10 to 12 feet are typical. This typical storefront character should be maintained.

### A. Maintain the traditional spacing pattern created by upper story windows.

- 1) Maintain the historic proportions of windows.
- 2) Headers and sills of windows on new buildings should maintain the traditional placement relative to cornices and belt courses.

### B. Maintain the distinction between the street level and the upper floor of a new building in the Commercial Row.

- 1) The first floor of the primary facade should be transparent glass predominantly.
- 2) Upper floors should be perceived as being more opaque than the lower floor.
- 3) Highly reflective or darkly tinted glass is inappropriate.
- 4) Express the traditional distinction in floor heights between street levels and upper levels through detailing, materials and fenestration.

### C. A canopy may be considered on commercial storefront types.

- 1) The designs should be simple in character.

## 6. Detail Alignment

A strong alignment of horizontal elements exists at the first floor level with moldings and canopies that are found at the top of display windows; at upper floor levels, alignment is found among cornices, window sills and headers. This alignment of horizontal features on building facades is one of the strongest characteristics of the street and should be preserved. It is important to note, however, that slight variations do occur, which add visual interest.

### A. The general alignment of horizontal features on building fronts must be maintained.

- 1) Typical elements that align include: window moldings, tops of display windows, cornices, copings and parapets at the tops of buildings.
- 2) When large buildings are designed to appear as several buildings, there should be some slight variation in the alignment of horizontal features.

## 7. Corner Lots

Many buildings on corner lots exhibit special features that add accent to both Front Street and the crossing streets. Corner entrances, towers and storefront windows that extend along both street facades are examples. These elements are appropriate in corner lot locations and should be encouraged.

### A. Special features that highlight buildings on corner lots may be considered.

- 1) Develop both street elevations to provide visual interest to pedestrians.
- 2) Corner entrances, bay windows and towers are examples of elements that may be considered to emphasize corner locations.
- 3) Storefront windows, display cases and other elements that provide visual entrances to facades along side streets are also appropriate.

## *Jibboom Street*

### 1. Mass and Scale

Jibboom Street is characterized by a collection of relatively small scale structures. Although a few larger institutional structures exist, the smaller size and sloping roof forms of the simple residences and businesses dominated the scene historically and should continue to do so.

#### A. Maintain the average perceived scale of one- and two-story buildings along Jibboom Street.

- 1) As a means of minimizing the perceived mass of a project, consider developing a set of smaller buildings, with one primary building and other subordinate structures, rather than one large structure.
- 2) Consider a series of small building modules, or components, that may be interconnected.

#### B. Maintain the range of building heights that existed historically on Jibboom Street.

- 1) The apparent height of a primary facade should not exceed two stories.

#### C. New construction should relate to existing historic buildings in mass and scale.

- 1) Maintaining the historic mass and scale of buildings on Jibboom Street is of primary importance. Where a new project abuts a designated historic structure, step the building down at the property edge to minimize abrupt changes in scale, or increase side yard setbacks to reduce the impact.
- 2) Maintain the traditional proportions of building height, width and depth found in existing historic buildings.
- 3) Attachments that provide variety in building form are encouraged. Rear additions that step down in scale are also encouraged.

#### D. Use building masses that reinforce the perception of the natural topography.

- 1) Buildings that cut into slopes are encouraged where they can help minimize the perceived mass and size.
- 2) Step buildings down at hillside edges, to minimize visual impacts and reduce the apparent height.

## 2. Building and Roof Form

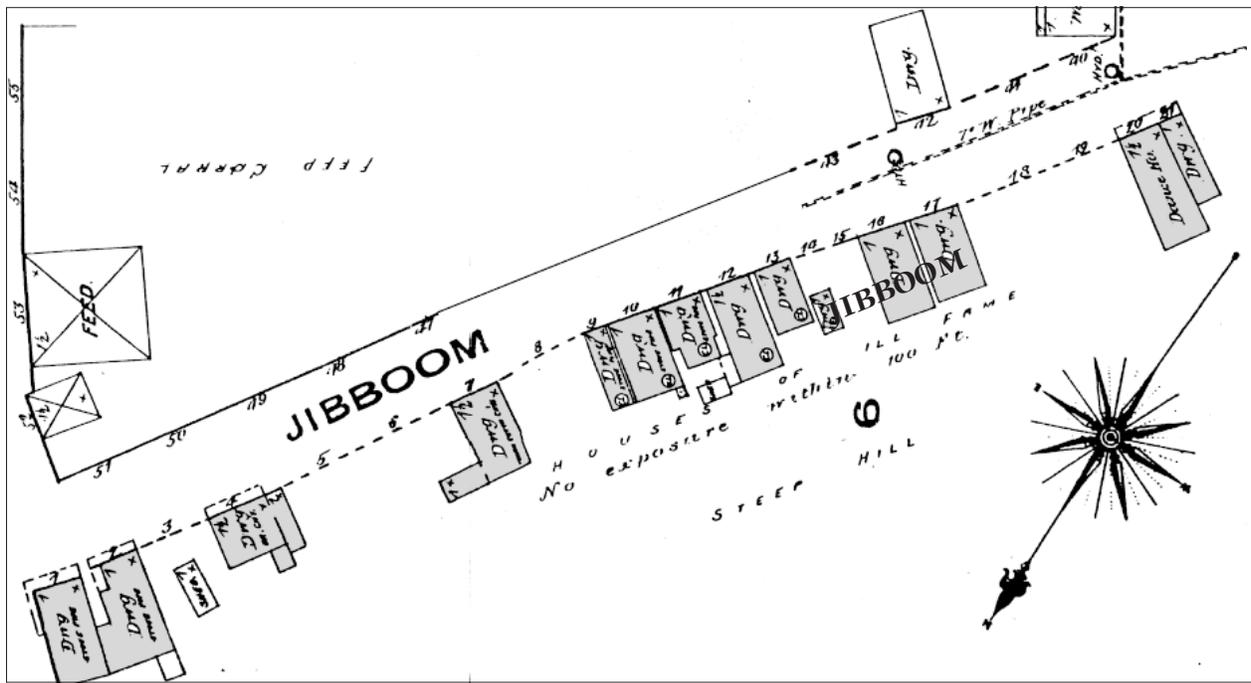
Historically, individual building forms were simple rectangular solids with gabled roofs. Some had false-front facades obscuring the gable. These traditions should be continued in new developments.

#### A. Use roof forms that are similar in size and shape to those seen historically.

- 1) Sloping, gable roof forms should be the dominant roof shapes on residential type buildings.
- 2) Roofs composed of a combination of roof planes, but simple in form, are also encouraged.
- 3) Each individual roof should be in scale with those on historic structures.

#### B. Rectangular forms should be dominant on commercial facades.

- 1) Rectangular forms should be vertically oriented.
- 2) The facade should appear as predominantly flat, with any decorative elements and projecting or setback "articulations" appearing to be subordinate to the dominant form.



As seen in this 1885 historic map of Jibboom Street as a group, buildings in this area vary somewhat in their relationship to the street.

### 3. Building Setbacks

As a group, buildings in this area vary somewhat in their relationship to the street. Residential buildings are typically set back from the street edge, behind a small front yard, while commercial buildings are located at the sidewalk edge. New development should therefore respect these siting patterns.

#### A. A new building should sit within the range of setbacks as seen historically.

- 1) Some structures should align at the sidewalk edge. Others should be set back, with small courts or yards.
- 2) A large development should include varied setbacks.
- 3) Landscaping and fences that help define the yard's front edge are encouraged.

#### B. Provide variety in side yard spacing.

- 1) Side yard widths should fit within the range seen historically.
- 2) Side yards are more varied in the northern part of this Treatment Area, and more flexibility in design will be given.

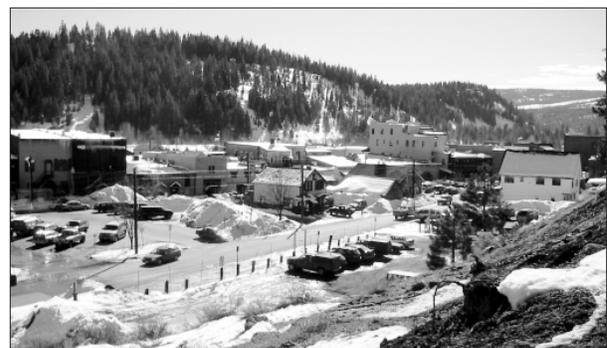
### 4. Positive Open Space

Open space and landscaping should be developed to enhance the appeal of the area to pedestrians.

#### A. Locate open space on the site so it is visible from the street.

- 1) Courtyards and arcades that open to the street are encouraged.
- 2) Rear yards between primary and secondary structures were found traditionally and are also appropriate.

#### B. Courtyards and lawn area should reflect the relatively modest character of historic landscapes along Jibboom Street while accommodating contemporary functions.



Open space and landscaping should be developed to enhance the appeal of the area to pedestrians.

## 5. Architectural Character

Historic buildings in the area were simple in style, and did not have much architectural ornamentation. New buildings should also be simple in architectural character.

### A. Building details that maintain the simple character of this area are encouraged.

- 1) Ornamental trim and decoration that is in character with the manner in which ornamentation has been applied historically is encouraged.
- 2) Consider eaves, mullions, corner boards and brackets.
- 3) Use architectural ornamentation in limited amounts on individual buildings.
- 4) Traditional locations for decorative elements are porches and eaves.

### B. Repeat the patterns created by similar shapes and sizes of traditional building features.

- 1) Double-hung, vertically proportioned windows similar to those used historically are particularly encouraged.

### C. Use porches, balconies, decks and stoops which are similar in form and scale to those found traditionally, to provide visual interest and a human scale.



*Historic buildings in the area were simple in style, and did not have much architectural ornamentation.*