

# CHAPTER 17

## DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR THE RIVER CHARACTER AREA



The long River Character Area includes properties along East River Street, West River Street, East South River Street and Riverside Drive, extending in an east/west corridor along both sides of the Truckee River and south of the railroad right-of-way.

### Historic Significance

American Indians made spring and summer camps along the river's banks before the neighborhood began to develop. Permanent settlement of the River Character Area was initiated by Italian immigrants in the 1870s. A Truckee pioneer, Johnathan Moody, also developed a small subdivision at the eastern end of East River Street between 1890 and 1910.



*The Truckee River runs through the middle of the River Character Area.*

For a short time a Chinese neighborhood also existed in a part of this area. Today, very little remains architecturally to suggest the significant history associated with the Chinese community. The three buildings with historic associations that survive have been substantially modified. The Chinese Herb Shop has undergone major remodeling, but is the only remaining property that has proven connections to a significant aspect of early development associated with the Chinese community. Perhaps what is most notable about this area is the absence of large buildings along the south side of the street, which are clearly depicted in historic photographs.

### Historic Character Description

Along East and West River Streets a single family residential neighborhood developed, although other uses were also constructed along portions of East River Street. Some boarding houses, commercial uses and even some multifamily residences were found. Nonetheless, the predominant character was still that of a residential neighborhood.

Most of these houses were small and located on small lots with narrow side yards between structures. A variety of building widths was seen, however. As with many of the residential neighborhoods in Truckee, those along River Street also incorporated a front

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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.

porch that faced the street. These houses faced north towards the rail yards and the Commercial District, not the river.

The rear yards of these structures backed onto an unimproved "lane" which was to become Riverside Drive. The simpler "cabins" found along this lane were the only structures on the north side of the river to face south and take advantage of the views to the river. As one moved east towards East River Street, the single family residential character became much more pronounced and the density of development increased. Additions to the rear of houses were also a strong part of the tradition here.



*The Chinese Herb Shop has undergone major remodeling, but is the only remaining property that has proven connections to a significant aspect of early development associated with the Chinese community.*



*This historic photo, taken of the River Character Area looking north toward the Brickelltown Character Area, illustrates the variety of building widths that occurred and the consistent orientation of structures toward the railroad. Gable roofs are predominant. Rear yards of these structures backed onto an unimproved "lane" which was to become Riverside Drive.*

## Current Character

The River Character Area is noted for the Truckee River which runs through the middle of the neighborhood. Most buildings date from 1890 to 1930, with the exception of those few historic structures in the Chinatown/South Truckee neighborhood that date from 1878 to 1890.

This area is dominated by residential architecture. While residential building types dominate, some commercial and industrial architecture is found in this large neighborhood. Many early commercial properties (including hotels, saloons, boarding houses, bakeries and laundries) were mixed in with the residences. These streets reflect the wide variations in building plans, forms and architectural styles for the community. Representative styles include Vernacular, Frontier Vernacular Commercial, Queen Anne, Folk Victorian, Italianate and Craftsman. Similar to the commercial district, this area was affected by fires in the early 20th century and as a consequence, new architectural styles were constructed to replace earlier buildings.

Although it is one integral neighborhood, the River Character Area includes four distinct streets that have subtly different design characteristics. The south side of River Street has many of its original Victorian era structures. These buildings all exhibit a relatively uniform alignment from the street edge. This is also the

only street that does not back directly onto the Truckee River. The back yards of these structures face onto Riverside Drive. Whereas, on East River Street more contemporary structures are found. The back yards of these structures also slope down to the river's edge. Riverside Drive has many smaller, more utilitarian structures than those seen on East and West River Streets. Finally, South River Street, that area historically associated with the Chinese, is the only street in the Character Area on the south side of the river. Most of these structures also are more contemporary.

Most historic buildings are relatively simple in design. Many newer residences have been added to the area since its historical development; however, a portion that originally were used as residences have been converted to commercial uses.

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



*Some early, neighborhood commercial structures also can be found in the area.*

Some key design characteristics of this Character Area include:

- Transitional residential neighborhood
- Mix of commercial, residential and industrial uses in neighborhoods
- False-front commercial buildings (along West River Street)
- Gable-front residential buildings
- One- and two-story buildings
- Wood lap siding is the dominant building material
- Retaining walls are located along yards adjacent to the river
- Newer construction incorporates landscaped front yards and off-street parking
- River Street widening removed some on-street parking
- Front porch
- Buildings on River Street have rear yards that back onto Riverside Drive
- Buildings on River Street have a relatively uniform alignment
- Buildings on East and South River Streets have front yard setbacks that fall within a narrow range
- Buildings on East River Street have landscaped front yards
- Buildings on East and South River Streets have rear yards that slope down to the river
- Alley character along Riverside Drive
- Informal, native vegetation along river edge



*Riverside Drive has many smaller, more utilitarian structures than those seen on East and West River Streets.*

## Design Goals & Policies

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

The design goals for the River Character Area are:

- To emphasize the preservation and restoration of historic structures, when feasible
- To maintain views to the Truckee River
- To continue the use of traditional building materials
- To maintain traditional building mass, scale and forms
- To maintain the general alignment of building fronts
- To encourage the use of residential building forms
- To encourage the use of front porches that face the street
- To encourage detached garages and outbuildings that are subordinate in character and scale to the primary structure



*The use of a front porch that faces the street is strongly encouraged in the Character Area.*



*The preservation and restoration of historic structures in the River Character Area is an important goal.*



*In order to get parked cars off the street, detached garages that are subordinate in character and scale to the primary structure are encouraged.*



*Preserving the character of the Truckee River as it runs through the Character Area is an important goal.*

# Design Guidelines for New Buildings

## 1. Positive Open Space

A variety in open space is a part of the character of this area that should be maintained. Therefore, site plans in the River Character Area should be developed with open spaces in mind.

### A. Open spaces should be developed to enhance yards and view corridors.

- 1) Open spaces should not simply be "left over" space.
- 2) Develop outdoor areas that promote pedestrian activity.

## 2. Views

Views of the natural setting of Truckee are some of the community's greatest assets that contribute to the quality of life and value of properties and should be protected and enhanced whenever feasible. Views to the Truckee River are outstanding and give special identity to this Character Area. These amenities should be protected as much as possible. All projects should be planned to reinforce and preserve existing public view corridors and to establish new view opportunities. In doing so, consideration should be given to how views from existing projects may be affected by new construction. When feasible, planning for views should be in balance with traditional site layouts and yard spacings.

### A. Preserve views to significant features such as the Truckee River.

- 1) Respecting established side yard setbacks will help to maintain views to the river.
- 2) Alternative positioning of buildings on the site may be considered when doing so would maintain significant view corridors.
- 3) Landscaping is encouraged, and in some situations, may be required in order to mitigate other visual impacts. Such landscaping, when mature, should maintain existing views and solar access corridors.

### B. Building forms that respect existing views are encouraged.

- 1) For example, rectangular forms oriented with the long side perpendicular to the street will often provide views through the property.
- 2) Reduced building footprints that increase side yard view corridors are also encouraged.

## 3. Building Setbacks

Most front facades align at a relatively uniform setback from the street 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.



*Maintain the alignment of building fronts along the street.*

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## References:

- ☞ See also Chapter 10: Design Guidelines for Site Features and Chapter 13: General Guidelines for New Buildings.
- ☞ See also Chapter 18.20.050 - River Protection Overlay District, of the Truckee Municipal Code for development standards along the Truckee River.

## 4. Building Orientation

Traditionally, a building was oriented with its primary wall planes in line with the parcel's property lines. These traditional patterns of building orientation should be maintained.

### A. Orient a new building parallel to its lot lines, similar to that of historic buildings.



*Orient a new building parallel to its lot lines, similar to that of historic buildings.*

## 5. Plant Materials

With portions of the River Character Area being more established in their development, it is important for new projects to take advantage of any site features that are existing. Existing stands of vegetation, for example, are important in the history of Truckee and add character to the area as a whole. These features should be retained whenever feasible.

### A. Incorporate existing stands of native vegetation in landscape plans.

### B. For properties adjacent to the Truckee River, maintain the natural character of the river edge.

### C. Preserve and enhance wildlife habitats along the river edge.

## 6. Mass and Scale

The mass and scale of buildings are among the elements that have greatest influence on compatible construction in the area. The height, width and depth of a new building should be compatible with historic buildings within the River Character Area and especially with those structures that are immediately adjacent to the new building. Residences in the Character Area range from one to two stories, but are typically one and one-half story. Therefore, the tradition of one-to two-story street facades should be continued.

### A. New construction should appear similar in mass and scale to historic structures found in the River Character Area.

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



*Residences in the Character Area range from one to two stories, but are typically one and one-half story.*

## 7. Building and Roof Form

Traditionally, simple building forms appeared in Truckee. Most were modest rectangular shapes. In some cases, larger masses were achieved by combining two or more simple masses, in which case one of the masses typically appeared to be the "dominant" element, while others appeared to be attached to it. The "integrity" of the dominant form was a distinctive feature. Maintaining this tradition of building is vital to the protection of the character of Truckee and the visual relationship with the River Character Area.

**A. Use building forms similar to those used traditionally in the River Character Area.**

**B. The simple forms of gable, hip and shed roofs are appropriate.**

- 1) Dormers should be simple and subordinate to the overall roof form.
- 2) Alternative roof element shapes may be considered in instances where views and solar access are to be protected and preserved.

**C. Roofs should be similar in size to those used historically on comparable buildings.**

**D. Buildings adjacent to the Truckee River should step down in height toward the river edge of the property.**



*The simple forms of gable, hip and shed roofs as seen in this image, are appropriate.*

## 8. Porches

A majority of the residences in the River 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 it 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.
- 3) The front porch shall be "functional," in that it is used as a means of access to the entry.



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



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