

Chapter 18: Aesthetics

Introduction and Setting

Nevada County is an area of extraordinary scenic quality - from the covered bridge at Bridgeport to the vista of Lake Donner from the heights of Old Highway 40. Views of the valleys created by the South Fork of the Yuba River and its smaller tributaries to the many peaks of the mountains comprising the Sierra Nevada Range such as Castle Peak provide spectacular scenery.

In addition to scenic values, aesthetics in Nevada County also consist of aggregate appearance of all the structures that comprise the cities, towns and suburban areas, which defines the urban design quality of the County. Scenic preservation is accomplished by such measures as the scenic highways, establishment of permanent open spaces, public forests, conservation areas and agricultural zoning. Urban design quality is accomplished by architectural controls, historic preservation ordinances and even zoning that controls land use patterns.

In addition, land use patterns and areas preserved as open space contribute significantly to the County's aesthetic quality and preservation of scenic values. The ownership and operation of forests by the U.S. Forest Service in the Tahoe National Forest and the open lands under the control of the Bureau of Land Management also preserve a significant portion of the County for permanent scenic quality.

The scenic highways in Nevada County administered by the State Department of Transportation are an important scenic program within Nevada County - State scenic route designations include:

- Route 20 from near Grass Valley to Interstate 80 near Emigrant Gap;
- Route 49 throughout the entire County;
- Route 174 throughout the entire County;
- Interstate 80 throughout the entire County; and
- Route 89 throughout the entire County.

Any highway that is a part of this State Scenic Highways Master Plan is eligible for official designation as an "Official Scenic Highway" and to be publicized on official maps. This program includes signage, roadside rests, vista points and other improvements by the State. Other opportunities for designated scenic routes, include several County roads, State Route 267, and the Yuba-Donner Scenic Byway sponsored by the Tahoe National Forest.

Further discussion of scenic values as related to open space is contained in Section 4: Open Space/Conservation Inventory, of Volume 2 of the General Plan; additional material related to historic resources is contained in Chapter 12 of the Nevada County Master Environmental Inventory, which is part of Volume 3 of the Nevada County General Plan.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The scenic values and aggregate appearance of all the cities, towns, and suburban areas define the aesthetic quality of Nevada County. Achieving a desirable aesthetic character involves attention to both urban design and scenic preservation.

Additional goals, policies and objectives generally related to aesthetics are located in Chapter 1: Land Use; Chapter 5: Recreation; Chapter 6: Open Space; Chapter 11: Water; Chapter 13: Wildlife and Vegetation; Chapter 15: Forest; Chapter 16: Agriculture; and Chapter 19: Cultural Resources.

Goal 18.1

Promote and provide for aesthetic design in new development which reflects existing character.

Objective 18.1

Develop appropriate community design guidelines to ensure aesthetic design in new development.

Action Policy

Policy 18.1

The County shall prepare Community Design Guidelines applicable to the various General Plan Designations and zoning classifications, and adopt such guidelines as part of Comprehensive Site Development Standards, to be used in the project site review of all discretionary and ministerial project permits. The guidelines may include, but not be limited to the following:

- a. Community identity
- b. Preservation of natural landforms
- c. Protection and management of viewsheds
- d. Protection and management of river corridors and other significant streams

These Guidelines shall be the base design standards applicable to all projects. Area-specific Design Guidelines, where adopted by the County pursuant to Policy 18.2, shall be applicable in addition to the base guidelines within the specified area.

Directive Policy

Policy 18.2

The County may adopt Specific Design Guidelines for areas within *Community Regions, Rural Places, and Rural Centers* to provide for the maintenance of community identity, scenic resources and historic sites and areas.

The Specific Design Guidelines may include, but not be limited to standards which:

- a. Reflect the distinctions among and transitions between different areas within *Community Regions*;
- b. Reflect and retain the historic character of the area by requiring designs consistent with historic buildings, areas and sites related to a project;
- c. Reflect and retain the rural and small-town character of the County;
- d. Address building height and bulk at locations of visual sensitivity;
- e. Encourage consistent thematic use of building materials and design elements appropriate to the visual and scenic qualities of specific areas;
- f. Encourage cluster-type development of office, commercial uses, and residential uses to enhance open space;
- g. Encourage office and commercial development provide safe, functional and attractive pedestrian connections and, where appropriate, social places (e.g. seating, landscaped patio areas, etc.);
- h. Locate parking areas out of view from road traffic where conditions permit and provide measures to reduce the impacts of large paved areas;
- i. Encourage building designs which provide customer entrance from pedestrian and parking areas, with customer-friendly store fronts facing pedestrian areas; and
- j. Provide uniform criteria for project design review.
- k. Encourage landscape treatment to enhance the built environment, including the preservation, long-term maintenance, and use of drought-tolerant native species.

Specific Design Guidelines shall be implemented through the regulations of the "D" Design Combining District of the County zoning ordinance.

Goal 18.2

Protect and preserve important scenic resources.

Objective 18.2

Develop standards to protect scenic resources and viewsheds.

Action Policies

Policy 18.3

The County shall establish standards for the protection of large-scale views and viewsheds and shall incorporate such standards in the Comprehensive Site Development Standards. The standards shall provide an inventory of sensitive views and viewsheds within Nevada County, and specify protective measures and impact controls applicable through the project site review process.

Policy 18.3A

To provide for scenic stream corridor protection along designated streams, the County shall prepare standards and procedures whereby local groups, associations, or similar organizations can, after first obtaining 66% or more of landowner concurrence, apply for designation of a segment of any stream as a local scenic stream corridor. The applicants sponsoring such designations shall prepare their application consistent with the County prepared standards and procedures and process their application similar to other planning applications.

See: Policy 18.1; Policy 18.2

Policy 18.4

Nevada County shall not permit the use of billboards due to unmitigable, significant adverse effects upon aesthetic values and upon scenic values which contribute to the value of tourism to the local economy. The County shall adopt regulations requiring the removal of existing billboards on an amortized basis, providing for a 5-15 year period to remove such signs, with the time period allowing for consideration of compensation for said removal.

Policy 18.5

Nevada County shall not permit the continued use of non-conforming signs. The County shall adopt regulations requiring the removal of existing non-conforming signs on an amortized basis, providing for a 5-15 year period to remove such signs, with the time period allowing for consideration of compensation for said removal.

Directive Policies

Policy 18.6

Discretionary development in *Rural Regions* and in *Community Regions* near the Community Boundary shall, wherever possible,

preserve natural landmarks and avoid ridge-line placement of structures.

See: Policy 18.1

Policy 18.7 Encourage protection of scenic corridors wherever feasible.

Policy 18.7A The County shall promote a compact development pattern to protect open space buffers between communities and to maintain a geographic distinction between communities.

See: Policy 18.1

Objective 18.3

Promote the conservation of scenic roads and highways.

Action Policies

Policy 18.8 The County shall amend the “SC” Scenic Corridor Combining District Regulations to require design review of all proposed development within the district.

Policy 18.8A The County will designate scenic corridors along the following routes: Interstate 80 and Highways 49, 89, 174, and 267 for their entire length in the County; all of Highway 20, Donner Pass Road (Old Highway 40), from the Interstate 80 intersection at Soda Springs to the town limits of Truckee. These corridors should be placed within the SC "Scenic Corridor" Combining District, with boundaries based upon adopted studies.

Policy 18.9 To encourage a system of scenic County roads, the County shall prepare standards and procedures whereby local groups, associations, or similar organizations can, after first obtaining 66% of owners of land affected by scenic designation, apply for scenic designation of County roadways. The applicants sponsoring such designations shall prepare their application consistent with the County prepared standards and procedures and process their application similar to other planning applications.

Directive Policies

Policy 18.10 New and replacement road system lighting shall utilize fixtures and light sources that minimize night-time light pollution, without compromising traffic safety.

Chapter 18: Aesthetics Element

Policy 18.11

New Commercial, Industrial and Multiple Family development shall utilize fixtures and light sources that minimize night time light pollution.

Also See: Chapter 1: Land Use

Policy 1.18

Chapter 2: Economic Development

Policy 2.19