



## **Truckee Historic Preservation Program**

**April 2003**

### **What is the Historic Preservation Program?**

The Historic Preservation Program is the Town's comprehensive effort to update the Downtown's historic preservation programs, standards, and guidelines. The Community Development Department and Downtown property owners and business owners are working from an historic resources inventory that was completed in 1981, historic design guidelines adopted by Nevada County in 1987, and interim historic preservation standards adopted as part of the Downtown Specific Plan in 1997. Accordingly the Town Council has made the Historic Preservation Program an "A+" priority for the community, but more importantly, the Council has said we have to fundamentally change the way we approach historic preservation in Truckee.

#### ***The Past***

Since 1983, there have been special historic preservation standards and guidelines in the Downtown area which regulated how a person could build in the Downtown area and established special protections for historic buildings. However, that was it, and there were no other programs in place in Truckee upon Town incorporation to promote historic preservation. The Downtown Specific Plan in its Historic Resources Element declares that the burden of historic preservation cannot be placed entirely on the shoulders of Downtown residents, property owners, and business owners, and that the community must become a partner with these residents, property owners, and business owners in advancing historic preservation in the Downtown area.

How will we go about doing this? Historic preservation regulations and guidelines will still be necessary, however, these regulations and guidelines must be updated to ensure they reflect present conditions and they are easy to understand and implement. From the homeowner building a single family home to a commercial developer, nothing frustrates a builder more than vague or imprecise regulations and guidelines which add time and costs to any project. For Downtown property owners and business owners, the Town can facilitate the processing of building permit applications by expediting historic preservation applications (thereby reducing processing time) and providing technical assistance and grants. Lastly, financial assistance can be found for property owners and business owners to aid them in rehabilitating historic buildings. There is already a sizeable amount of money out there available for historic preservation, from Federal tax credits for 20% of the rehabilitation costs to State grant (free)

monies to property tax reductions. To be eligible for these funds, the Town must put into place the necessary mechanisms to qualify for these Federal and State program such as creating a National Register District. This is the direction that the Downtown Specific Plan has set and that the Town Council is now following.

### ***The Present***

It will take several steps to fully implement the Historic Preservation Program, and the first step is a BIG one! In this first round of the Historic Preservation Program, the Planning Commission and Town Council in May and June will consider the adoption of:

1. **A new Historic Resources Inventory** that surveyed all buildings and structures in the Downtown area older than 50 years. This inventory establishes several categories for these buildings and structures based on their historic significance.
  - Category A (Essential) – These buildings are the Town’s best examples of representing Truckee history. They are individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and meet strict criteria for exemplifying the history of the state and nation.
  - Category B (Contributory) – These buildings contribute significantly to the historic character of the Downtown area. They are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places if the community wishes to establish a National Register District much like Nevada City’s National Register District.
  - Category C (Supporting) – These buildings do not meet the strict criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. However, they still convey the history of the building and enhance the historic character of Truckee and they remain an important part of our local community.
  - Category D (Non-Essential) – Although these buildings are older than 50 years, they are such in poor condition or so many alterations have been made to the building that they no longer convey their history. These buildings are not considered historic for the purposes of the Historic Preservation Program.

The proposed Historic Resource Inventory and the category classifications are a vast improvement over our existing inventory which is over 20 years old and lumps all historic buildings into one category. Under today’s regulations and guidelines, a Category D building is treated the same way as the C.B. White House (currently the only Truckee building on the National Register of Historic Places).

***(The proposed Historic Resources Inventory consists of the public review draft of the Historic Resources Inventory released in August 2002 and the recommended revisions to the Historic Resources Inventory dated April 2003.)***

2. **New Historic Design Guidelines.** The proposed Historic Design Guidelines are a substantial advancement over the existing guidelines. They are more understandable which will provide clearer direction to parties that have to use the guidelines (builders, Town staff, Historic Preservation Advisory Commission) on what is required in the Historic Preservation District. The existing guidelines are only five pages in length and are silent on many matters. On those matters that are addressed in the existing guidelines, direction given by the guidelines is ordinary at best and at worst ambiguous. The proposed Historic Preservation Design Guidelines will correct these shortcomings by including:

- Clear direction on how the guidelines are to be applied to a project;
- An extensive list of definitions and detailed descriptions of the various historic architectural styles in Downtown;
- Methods to preserve, repair, and replace historic materials and features;
- Guidelines for individual building components (e.g., windows and doors), building materials, and additions;
- Guidelines for site features (e.g., fences, utilities);
- General guidelines for new buildings and construction with special guidelines for each historic neighborhood.

***(The proposed Historic Design Guidelines consist of the public review draft of the Historic Design Guidelines released in August 2002 and the recommended revisions to the Historic Design Guidelines dated April 2003.)***

3. **An update to the Historic Preservation Standards.** The Town currently has historic preservation standards that fully implement the Historic Resources Element and are consistent with the guidelines of the California Office of Historic Preservation (which will allow us to create a National Register District in the future). However, much like our existing historic resources inventory, these standards lump all historic resources into one category and treat all historic buildings the same. And with the proposed Historic Resources Inventory listing historic buildings in several categories of significance, so must too our historic preservation standards address our historic buildings in varying degrees based on their historic significance.

The proposed historic preservation standards, including demolition protection, for historic buildings listed as a Category A or B resource will not change much from today's standards. However, for Category C buildings the proposed standards will be much more flexible than the standards currently applied to these buildings. We can be more flexible with these buildings because they are historic buildings of local significance, and because they do not meet the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the standards and guidelines required by the NRHP do not have to be applied to Category C buildings. Since the proposed Historic Resources Inventory concludes that Category D buildings do not retain any historic significance, they are not considered historic buildings and no special historic preservation standards are proposed for these buildings. Category D buildings will be treated the same as buildings that are less than 50 years old.

***(The proposed Historic Preservation Standards are amendments to the Town Development Code. These amendments are contained in the document titled "Recommended Amendments to Development Code" dated April 2003.)***

As part of their action to adopt these documents, the Planning Commission and Town Council will also consider the certification of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and the acceptance of a report entitled "Economic Analysis and Incentives for Historic Preservation". The EIR addresses the potentially significant environmental impacts that may result from the implementation of the Historic Resources Inventory, Historic Design Guidelines, and Historic Preservation Standards. By certifying an EIR for the Historic Preservation Program, the Town Council will streamline the future review process for development projects in the Downtown area by allowing the use of Negative Declarations and exemptions for these projects to comply with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act. The Economics Analysis and Incentives report discusses potential financial assistance programs that the Town can

implement to aid Downtown property and business owners in preserving and rehabilitating historic buildings. The report also analyzes the economic costs and benefits that a property or business owner could come across when they rehabilitate and/or add-on to an historic building. The Town Council will only accept the report from the consultant; they will take no action on any of the recommendations in the report. The Council will consider the report and its recommendations in the next round of the Historic Preservation Program.

To find out more about how you can learn more and participate in the public review and hearing process before the Town Council takes action on the Historic Preservation Program, please read our information sheet entitled "How Can I Participate?".

### ***The Future***

If the Town Council approves the Historic Resources Inventory, Historic Design Guidelines, and Historic Preservation Standards, we can proceed to the next round of the Historic Preservation Program. The focus of the second round will be to make available to the community and Downtown property and business owners the historic preservation monies offered by the Federal and State agencies and to determine what type of local funds we want to earmark for local preservation. The Council will need to take several actions to accomplish this:

- Apply to the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) to become a Certified Local Government (CLG). CLG's are eligible for State and Federal grants for historic preservation.
- Apply to the United State Department of Interior through the OHP to create a National Register District for Downtown Truckee. In a National Register District, owners of Category A and B buildings qualify for Federal Tax Credits of up to 20% of the cost of rehabilitating an historic building.
- Adopt an ordinance allowing property owners to execute Mills Act contracts. In exchange for 10-year historic façade easement (the easement is similar to restrictions already imposed by the historic preservation standards and guidelines), a property owner could enjoy property tax reductions of 30% to 70%.
- Establish other local assistance programs (e.g., façade renovation grants and loans, technical assistance grants) and provide funding from State and Federal grants and other local sources (e.g., Redevelopment funds).

The Town will initiate this second round immediately after approval of the Historic Preservation Program's first round so that these financial assistance programs can be up and running for property and business owners by the beginning of 2004. The Historic Preservation Program won't end there though. The Town will monitor the implementation of the new inventory, standards, and guidelines to make sure they are working properly and make changes where necessary; apply for State and Federal grant monies each year; and continue to identify other programs that will enhance our historic area.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about historic preservation in Truckee, please come by the Community Development Department during business hours or call Duane Hall, Town Planner or Heidi Scoble, Associate Planner at (530) 582-7820 and we will be glad to talk to you about historic preservation.