

## 1.8.7 Community Design Subelement

### Overview

The Compact identifies the need to ensure equilibrium between the region's natural endowment and its built environments in order to preserve the scenic beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities of the Region. To this end, the Community Design Subelement seeks to minimize contrast between these two environments. It provides policy direction and implements design criteria to ensure harmonious development and achieve TRPA's community design threshold for the built environment.

TRPA's application of community design regulations is guided by the goals and policies in the Regional Plan, the community design threshold, the Code, the Scenic Quality Improvement Program (SQIP), the Community Plans, and the *Regional Plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin: Design Review Guidelines* (Design Review Guidelines). These documents cover site design, density, landscaping, lighting, signage, and building height, bulk, and scale, among other topics.

The two goals of the Community Design Subelement seek to provide public access to scenic views and enhance the quality of the built environment through development that uses earth tone colors and natural materials.

The policies regulate height, bulk, texture, form, material, colors, lighting, signage, and other design elements of new and remodeled structures. The intent of these regulations is to bring existing development into conformance with TRPA's standards. Some aspects of existing development can be brought into total conformance with the standards in the near term; others may require more time or extensive redevelopment or rehabilitation to correct past deficiencies.

The SQIP is part of the Regional Plan. It was adopted in 1989 as part of the Scenic Resources Management Plan and sets forth a comprehensive threshold attainment program to improve the overall visual quality of the built environment while maintaining the scenic quality of the natural environment. In 1998, TRPA incorporated elements of the SQIP into the Environmental Improvement Program (EIP). The EIP includes a broad-ranging list of projects needed to attain and maintain thresholds, including scenic thresholds.

The following specific design standards, which implement the goals and policies of this Subelement, are found in the Code:

- Maximum density standards for various land use types (Chapter 26)
- Maximum height standards for buildings and other structures (Chapter 22)
- Standards for site design, building design, scenic quality, shoreland development, and scenic corridors (Chapter 30)

Current development standards establish maximum building heights based on roof-pitch and building site terrain. Projects on sites with steeper slopes and buildings with steeper

roof-pitch allow greater height. Allowable heights for buildings range from 24 to 40 feet. Any proposed building greater than 26 feet in height requires that special findings be made prior to project approval. Some of the considerations in looking at building height relate to whether the building would project above the forest canopy, whether the building would block public views, and whether the height of the building is consistent with neighboring structures. Special height districts have been established for specific areas of the Region where existing land uses may require additional height. Examples include redevelopment districts and tourist areas where gaming is an allowable use.

Community design standards are further regulated by Community Plans (CP). A CP supersedes the underlying Plan Area Statement (PAS) and replaces certain standards adopted in the Code. It also provides specific direction for land use planning and design standards tailored to community character. A CP area designation has been provided for 22 plan areas in the region. Community Plans have been adopted for 16 of these 22 areas.

The Design Review Guidelines is a manual of practical design solutions that equal to or superior to the design standards found in Chapter 30 of the Code. These guidelines provide general and specific directions for site design, building height, bulk and scale, landscaping, lighting, and signage. TRPA has also adopted the visual magnitude/contrast rating system as an appendix to the Guidelines. This rating system is a methodology for evaluating a structure's visual impact on the natural landscape and is applicable to all development within the shoreland of Lake Tahoe.

Community Design goals and policies are further achieved through implementation of scenic quality regulations and programs discussed in greater detail in the conservation element.

## **Alternative 1— Continuation of Existing Regional Plan**

### **Summary**

Alternative 1, the “No Action” Alternative, assumes the continuation of the goals, policies, regulations, and programs of the 1987 Regional Plan, including those in place for community design. For this subelement, however, some modifications are proposed to this alternative within the regulatory framework to further achieve the goals of the existing plan. This is because new technologies (i.e., telecommunication towers, and changeable message signs) and public health and safety requirements (i.e., defensible space) necessitate their inclusion.

### **Goals and Policies**

No changes are proposed for Goals for this Subelement under Alternative 1. However, two new policies are proposed under this alternative to address defensible space and telecommunication towers. A new policy would require towers to be sited to avoid detracting from the scenic and natural viewsheds, blocking ridgeline views, or protruding unnecessarily above the tree canopy. Their design would have to include materials and colors that mimic the natural environment; in appropriate cases, they would be constructed as mono-poles that mimic the trees in our predominately coniferous landscape. A second policy would require that landscape plans be consistent with

defensible-space criteria established by the local fire protection district, state, or national standards.

The following existing policies relating to site design and landscaping would be amended under Alternative 2:

- Landscape plans would be required to be consistent with defensible-space criteria established by the local fire protection district, state, or national standards.

### **Implementation Measures**

Alternative 1 would include the following measures:

- Landscaping standards in Chapter 30 of the Code would be amended to require that landscaping plans be consistent with defensible-space standards of local and state jurisdictions;
- New location and design standards in Chapter 30 of the Code would be added for telecommunication towers to ensure consistency with TRPA's community design and scenic thresholds; and
- Sign standards in Chapter 26 of the Code would be updated to permit the use of changeable message signs by State DOTs along the designated scenic highway corridors.

## ***Alternative 2***

### **Summary**

Alternative 2 is designed to promote excellence in community design through a combination of regulation and incentives. Under this alternative, the goals of the 1987 Regional Plan would be reorganized as recommended through the Pathway process, adding a desired condition for community design. Existing goals and policies would be amended for clarity and intent – still focusing on bringing the built environment into harmony with nature. New policies would be added to promote enhanced protection and maintenance of the natural and built environments.

### **Goals and Policies**

Two new goals and associated policies developed through the Pathway process would be added in Alternative 2. The first addresses the desired condition expressed in the Place-Based Planning process: aesthetically planned and designed communities that are appropriate in scale and style for the Tahoe Region and that provide a sense of place. This new goal would focus on achieving the built environment threshold for scenic resources, and it would promote continued protection of scenic quality and development that is subordinate to and harmonious with the dominant natural landscape. One new policy proposed under this goal would achieve desired community character through requiring aesthetic compatibility of land uses and through implementation of design standards. The other would require that design elements be compatible with the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the Region.

The second new goal addresses the expressed need to preserve views of the night sky. It would encourage the preservation of dark skies and nighttime views conducive to stargazing, with the amount of light emitted from the built environment limited to the minimum necessary for public health and safety. Newly proposed design policies supporting this goal emphasize the use of cutoff shields and encourage light levels appropriate to land use type. (Existing policies already prohibit the use of lights that blink, flash, or change intensity.)

Under Alternative 2, two newly proposed policies under existing goals would require the implementation of scenic quality improvements recommended in the SQIP and the environmental targets established in the adopted CPs.

New policies under this alternative would also establish several requirements for telecommunication towers, such as cellular towers and utility towers. Towers would have to be sited to avoid detracting from the scenic and natural viewsheds, blocking ridgeline views, or protruding unnecessarily above the tree canopy. Their design would have to include materials and colors that mimic the natural environment; in appropriate cases, they would be constructed as mono-poles that mimic the trees in our predominately coniferous landscape.

The following policies relating to site design and landscaping would be amended under Alternative 2:

- Rock outcrops, sand dunes, cliffs, and unique land forms would be added to the list of scenic resource features that are afforded scenic protection.
- The two-story limitation policy for single-family residential structures would be removed, and incentives would be offered that provide additional height for multifamily and other structures located within special height districts or PTOD districts to promote compact development.
- Landscape plans would be required to be consistent with defensible-space criteria established by the local fire protection district, state, or national standards.
- Incorporation of landscaping into all free-standing signs would be encouraged.

### **Implementation Measures**

Alternative 2 would include several new measures to implement the proposed changes to the Goals and Policies.

- Additional height and density would be permitted with special findings within districts designated as Town Center, Tourist Center, and Neighborhood General to facilitate development at a concentrated level that supports walkability and creates opportunities to implement environmental improvement projects (*Chapter 22, Height, Section 22.4; see also Land Use Subelement*);
- Amend Chapter 22, Height, to redefine how height is measured on steep slopes to promote the stair-stepping of structures;

- Sign standards in Chapter 26 of the Code would be updated to permit the use of changeable message signs by State DOTs along the designated scenic highway corridors; and in districts designated as T5-Tourist Core (Section 26.6 General Sign Standards);
- For purposes of the design standards, rock outcrops, sand dunes, cliffs, and unique land forms would be added as protected scenic resources (Section 30.5 Site Design Standards);
- Landscaping plans would be required to be consistent with defensible-space standards (Section 30.7 Landscaping Standards);
- Design standards for telecommunication towers would be added (new Code section); and
- Cutoff shields for exterior lighting would be required to achieve dark sky desired conditions (Section 30.8 Exterior Lighting Standards).

## **Alternative 3**

### **Summary**

Alternative 3 is designed, in large part, to continue the implementation of the current system of regulations in the Tahoe Basin. It will allow additional allocations and other commodities to be provided for development. In this case, it will also include new regulations. This is because new technologies (telecommunication towers and changeable message signs) and public health and safety measures (defensible space) necessitate their inclusion.

### **Goals and Policies**

Proposed goals and policies changes under Alternative 3 would be the same as in Alternative 1, and would amend the following existing policy relating to site design and landscaping:

- Rock outcrops, sand dunes, cliffs, and unique land forms would be added to the list of scenic resource features that are afforded scenic protection.

### **Implementation Measures**

The implementation measures included under Alternative 3 would be the same as in Alternative 1, except that the following implementation strategy would be added:

- For purposes of the design standards, rock outcrops, sand dunes, cliffs, and unique land forms would be added as protected scenic resources (Section 30.5 Site Design Standards).

## Alternative 4

### Summary

Alternative 4 is designed to be the most protective of the Region's scenic resources. While both Alternatives 2 and 4 allow for additional height and density, they do so in very different ways. Alternative 2 allows extra mass as a bonus for providing walkability in any Town Center, Tourist Center, or Neighborhood General Districts; Alternative 4 requires that the extra mass be paid for with transferred development rights.

### Goals and Policies

The changes proposed for this Subelement under Alternative 4 are the same as Alternative 2.

### Implementation Measures

Alternative 4 would include the following new measures:

- Additional height and density would be permitted with special findings within districts designated as Town Center and Tourist Center to facilitate development at a concentrated level that supports walkability and reduced auto travel. Additional height would only be provided as an incentive in these districts when combined with a transfer of existing development at a 1:1 ratio (Chapter 22, Height, Section 22.4; see also Land Use Subelement);
- For purposes of the design standards, rock outcrops, sand dunes, cliffs, and unique land forms would be added as protected scenic resources (Section 30.5 Site Design Standards);
- Landscaping plans would be required to be consistent with defensible-space standards (Section 30.7 Landscaping Standards);
- Design standards for telecommunication towers would be added (new Code section);
- Cutoff shields for exterior lighting would be required to achieve dark sky desired conditions (Section 30.8 Exterior Lighting Standards);
- Amend Chapter 20, Coverage standards to prohibit the conversion of soft coverage to hard coverage for the purpose of constructing a structure; and
- Update the Code to permit conversion of uses based on floor area to address concerns related to the potential impacts resulting from converting small units to larger residential houses and larger tourist units. The system would establish maximum floor area caps per unit type. The caps can only be exceeded through a transfer of existing development. This system would allow easier conversions of use when consistent with the appropriate building forms. The allocation systems would establish a maximum amount of floor area for residential and tourist units (see maximums listed in Table CD-1).

Table CD-1\_\_\_ Conversion Ratios for Building Types by Floor Area

**Example**

Floor Area*
20,000

 Existing Building (Special Ratio for Industrial)

20,000
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 New Building/Use

Residential			Tourist			Commercial		
Max Size Unit Floor Area Ratio	Type Use	Conversion Allow Units	Max Size Unit Floor Area Ratio	Type Use	Conversion Allow Units	Max Size Unit Floor Area Ratio	Type Use	Conversion Allow Units
3,600	SFD Detach/Unit	6	400	WO Kitchen	50	1	Retail/Service	20,000
1,200	Multi-Res/Unit	17	1,200	W Kitchen	17	0.5	Industrial	40,000
500	Multi-Per/2.5P/U	40						

\* Use TRPA Definition for CFA

1. Includes accessory and common areas
2. Conversions allowed for Nonconforming to Conforming, Sensitive Transfers, & PTOD-Redevelopment
3. Provisions to increase unit floor area or common area through transfer and allocations

