

HISTORIC ELEMENT
City of Sutter Creek General Plan

SUTTER CREEK GENERAL PLAN
Historic Element

INTRODUCTION

**Statutory
Requirement**

There is no State requirement that mandates the City to have a Historic Element in its General Plan. The Historic Element is an optional element that the State enables the City to include in its General Plan. The State Office of Historic Preservation reported that as of 1986, over 80 communities in the State had some type of historic preservation program anchored by a historic preservation ordinance and/or general plan element.

**City's
Purposes**

The City's purposes for including a Historic Element in its General Plan include the following:

1. To safeguard the City's unique cultural heritage as embodied and reflected in the City's architectural history and patterns of cultural development;
2. To encourage and facilitate public knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the City's historic past and unique sense of place;
3. To foster civic and neighborhood pride and a sense of identity based on the recognition and use of cultural resources;
4. To promote the enjoyment, celebration, and use of cultural resources appropriate for the education and recreation of the people of the City;
5. To preserve diverse architectural styles, patterns of development, and design preferences reflecting phases of the City's history and to encourage complementary contemporary design and construction and inspire a more livable urban environment;
6. To enhance property values and to increase economic and financial benefits to the City and its inhabitants through the exploration of creative financial incentives for preservation;
7. To protect and enhance the City's attraction to tourists and visitors thereby stimulating business and industry;
8. To identify as early as possible and resolve conflicts between the preservation of cultural resources and alternative land uses;
9. To integrate the preservation (and enhancement) of cultural resources into public and private land use management and development processes;
10. To conserve valuable material and energy resources by ongoing use and maintenance of the existing built environment;
11. To stabilize neighborhoods through the preservation of cultural resources and establishment of historic districts.; and
12. To encourage public participation in identifying and preserving historical and architectural resources thereby increasing community pride in the City's cultural heritage."

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(The foregoing list was borrowed from the State Office of Historic Preservation's model historic preservation ordinance.)

Format The Historic Element addresses the City's prehistory or archaeology as well as its history. Discussion of the City's archaeology and history is brief because the main purpose of the element is to set up policies and programs to preserve or enhance the City's historic and cultural value(s) as growth and development take place. The bulk of the following text discusses the opportunities, options and justification for establishing such programs and policies. The text is followed by a list of goals, policies, objectives and implementation measures most of which were recommendations by the City's General Plan Task Force #1.

ARCHAEOLOGY

**The Northern
Miwoks** The Sutter Creek planning area is part of the territory occupied by the Northern Sierra Miwok Indians. The Northern Sierra Miwok made intense use of the Mokelumne River and its major tributaries. These people were hunter-gatherers who made their primary settlements in the lower altitudes of the foothills. At various times of the year, they would journey to the higher elevations in order to gather food not found in the vicinity of their settlements. Food processing was accomplished by using grinding implements and ovens. Hunting and butchering was accomplished with projectile points, knives, scrapers, blinds, and deadfalls.

**Moderate
Cultural
Resource
Sensitivity** The Sutter Creek area is generally a moderately sensitive cultural resource zone. It was most likely used for resource collection, but site density was much lower than on the river and major tributaries. Although sites may occur in the area, they will be comparatively rare and village sites would be few.

**Site
Specific
Investiga-
tions** Historical growth and development within the City of Sutter Creek has virtually destroyed any prehistorical sites that may have existed there. An exhaustive search for such sites was not conducted within the planning area. It may be possible that such sites do exist, particularly within riparian areas. It should be said that even though no prehistoric sites are known to exist within the planning area, future planning and project development should take into account any such resources discovered. Site specific archaeological investigations should be required of large new developments, especially those near riparian and wetland areas.

HISTORY

The whole City of Sutter Creek has been designated by the State of California as an historical landmark. The following summary of the City's unique history is derived from "Early Sutter Creek Annals" and a personal correspondence from local historian and Amador County Archivist Larry Cenotto. ("Early Sutter Creek Annals" is published by the Sutter Creek Business and Professional Association and funded by a grant from the City of Sutter Creek.)

The city is named after John A. Sutter. It is the same John Sutter whose mill, near Sacramento, was the site where gold was discovered in 1848 starting the famous California gold rush. Sutter reportedly sent work crews to collect and saw wood in the hills above what is now Sutter Creek before the gold rush in 1844. Sutter, himself, mined the Sutter Creek area when the gold rush started in 1848. The name "Sutter Creek" dates from that period.

Sutter Creek may not have outlasted the gold rush or become the community it is today if quartz gold had not been discovered nearby in 1851. Cenotto reports that "Early in its history Sutter Creek not only hitched its future to gold mining but also to the casting of wheels, pestles and machinery parts this new industry would require". Cenotto has advised that it is significant to note that Sutter Creek is the only foundry city in the county. "No other city or community had a foundry whereas, at one time or another, Sutter Creek had three." One of these, the Knight's Foundry, (est. 1873) located on Eureka Street, is still standing and operating in 1994.

Most buildings fronting along Main Street (Highway 49) in the downtown historical district date from the 1850's and 1860's. Many, however, have been partly or totally rebuilt after fires in 1862, 1865 and 1888. There are many other historic buildings that were constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries concentrated along Spanish Street or scattered at other locations in or around the downtown historic district. The "Walking Tour of Historical Places of Interest" published by the Sutter Creek Business and Professional Association is one commonly available source of summary information about these buildings.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT

What Is Historically Significant?

The California Office of Historic Preservation in Historic Preservation in California: Handbook for Local Communities suggests that the "Goal of every community should be to preserve that special sense of time and place created by the historic buildings in that community. Historic buildings do not merely exist as individual isolated structures, but remain in cohesive

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neighborhoods whose integrity and character should be protected (p. 6)". The handbook goes on to say "Buildings that have local significance are those that have retained their historic appearance and are associated with people, events, trends, architecture, and places significant to the general history of the community (p. 11)." In Sutter Creek "significance" can be relative to history of mining or the history of early California settlement or old buildings not associated with either but valuable due to their beauty and/or their uniqueness.

The City's Historic Preservation Program

The City's General Plan Task Force #1 in outlining a historic preservation program for the Historic Element recommended the formation of two historic districts as well as a Citywide approach to preserving historic structures and encouraging designs based on local historic architecture.

The City's
Historic
Districts

The two historic districts identified by Task Force #1 are the Downtown Historic District and the Historic Corridor. Both are shown on the Land Use Overlap Map (Map LU-3) in the General Plan's Land Use Element. The Office of Historic Preservation defines a historic district as "A contiguous geographic concentration of buildings with a common history (OHP, 1986, p. 13)." The Downtown Historic District is one which meets this definition. Table LU-4 in the Land Use Element describes Task Force recommended policies that are intended to protect the District's historic character by applying design standards to new construction, rehabilitation and/or remodeling projects.

The Downtown
Historic
District

The Historic
Corridor

The Historic Corridor is not nearly so contiguous or representative of the City's history. It is more of an area that is to be upgraded so that its building designs complement the neighboring historic district and improve the City's overall historic character. The Historic Corridor does overlap the Downtown Historic District, but in addition it extends from the Downtown Historic District to the City's northerly City limit. The corridor includes all properties fronting on Highway 49 in this area, but it is not limited to Highway 49 frontage as shown on Land Use Map Overlay (Map LU-3).

Task Force #1 has recommended specific standards for the corridor which are shown on Table LU-4 in the Land Use Element. These are intended to protect and upgrade areas in the old Highway 49 corridor so that they continue to provide a pleasurable and unique cultural experience for residents and visitors as growth and development takes place.

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Economics
and
Preservation

The State Office of Historic Preservation reports that an integrated approach combining economics and preservation is needed to accomplish the goal of preserving and/or enhancing a historic district or corridor. "Building rehabilitation programs coupled with economic revitalization programs are necessary to turn around an aging historic core." The OHP suggests that it takes time and patience to achieve such a turn around and "become an area of active investment (OHP, 1986, p. 5)". There are many examples in the State where this has happened or is happening. Downtown Sutter Creek may have a "good leg up" because so much of the historic core area is presently intact and has been restored.

Historic
Preservation
Citywide

Task Force #1's recommendations concerning historic preservation and enhancement extend beyond the Downtown Historic District and Historic Corridor. Task Force #1 recommended the establishment of the Historic Design Review Committee which would oversee, guide, assist, and give approval or disapproval to construction or remodeling of all residential and/or commercial historic buildings Citywide as well as those located within the Historic District and Corridor. Task Force #1's Citywide recommendations extend beyond buildings and add possible local significance to structures such as rock walls, mining sites, archaeological sites, etc. Outside of the Historic District and Corridor, building design controls for non-historic buildings and structures are encouraged but not required.

Preserving Existing Historic Buildings and Sites

Federally
Designated
Historic
Places

Historic buildings and sites can be protected and enhanced by applying federal, state, or local historic designations to them. The most frequently used federal designation is that of being listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Such properties usually have high local, state and/or national significance. In Sutter Creek, properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places include the Knight's Foundry (and shops) and the Sutter Creek Grammar School.

There may be other properties in the planning area that could qualify for the National Register. The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) must nominate said properties. Nomination forms and criteria are such that the State usually recommends that an experienced professional be hired to prepare a nomination. The State Office of Historic Preservation points out that "Designating of buildings serves more as a mechanism for providing prestige than it does as an actual means of protection. Listing on the National Register, for instance, does not preclude demolition or alteration (unless federal funds are involved). Only local ordinances which include provisions for stay or demolition and design review of proposed modifications to a historic building can serve this purpose (OHP, 1986, p. 20)."

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State
Designated
Historic
Properties

The State of California has three types of historic designation, the State Historical Landmarks Program, the Point of Historical Interest Program and the California Register of Historic Resources. The City of Sutter Creek is, itself, a State historic landmark. The Knight's Foundry is a State Historic Point of Interest. There are other candidate properties for State registration in the City.

State Historic designation of a property provides two opportunities for protection. One is that under the California Environmental Quality Act any project that would impact the property must mitigate the impact. The other is that the State's historical building code can be found to apply to the property. The Historical Building Code is discussed further under the subsection titled "Other Tools and Benefits".

Locally
Designated
Historic
Buildings
and Sites

Historic designations can be made locally as well as at the State and federal level. As mentioned above, the local government with its power to control land use through zoning and the General Plan has the greatest opportunity for a successful historic preservation program. The California Office of Historic Preservation offers a model historic preservation ordinance which shows how local communities can use this local authority to designate, then protect local historic resources. The City presently has a historic district in Chapter 15.6 of its Municipal Codes. This district applies only for the purpose of controlling signs at this time, however.

The General Plan Task Force #1 has recommended that through this Historic Element a historic design review committee should be established which would approve or disapprove the alteration of all historic buildings. The first task of such a committee could be to analyze existing resources and determine which buildings and structures in the City are considered locally significant. These, then, would be the structures to be preserved or enhanced. These structures could then also be used as examples to be borrowed or assessed to design complementary architecture in new buildings either in the established Historic District, Corridor, and/or Citywide.

Other Tools and Benefits

Economics

As suggested above, the key to preservation of historic buildings, neighborhoods, and districts is economics. In recent years the pervasive values in America are shifting from one of demolishing older buildings in favor of new structures to reconsidering the value of older buildings and preserving them for the cultural richness they provide to the community. Their preservation can also lead to direct economic benefits such as improved tourism and land values.

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**State
Historic
Building
Code (SHBC)** The State Historic Building Code (SHBC) can apply to locally designated historic properties as well as state or federally designated properties. The SHBC supplants the Uniform Building Code (UBC) and is particularly useful in code issues related to requirements for plumbing, electrical, structural, seismic, fire safety, energy requirements, and disabled access. The SHBC allows greater flexibility in enforcement of code requirements. All older buildings, because they were built before present day code requirements, are out of conformance with the latest UBC. The most important aspect of the Historical Building Code is that it allows the building official to make a determination that a building's internal systems are reasonably safe (if in fact they are) without automatically imposing the requirements of the modern UBC.

**Grant and
Public
Financing
Opportunities** Other possible opportunities to finance preservation of historic properties and/or districts include redevelopment financing (forming a redevelopment agency and using special redevelopment laws) and economic development programs (although grants are few and the City may not qualify as economically disadvantaged for the few that exist). State Park and Recreation Facilities Bond Act grants can, when approved by State voters, be used. The 1984 Bond Act provided \$10 million for historic renovations statewide.

The Mills Act (172, amended 1984) enables the owners of historic properties to enter into a contract with the County that freezes the base value of the property and keeps the property tax low in exchange for the preservation and maintenance of said historic property. The Marks Historical Rehabilitation Act provides authority for cities, counties and redevelopment agencies to issue tax exempt revenue bonds for the purpose of financing historical rehabilitation of buildings which have local, state or nation significance. Conservation easements or "facade easements" are private property agreements donated to and held by a qualified non-profit corporation (which could include the City) wherein the property owner agrees to preserve the historic building in perpetuity. As with the Mills Act, this restriction upon the property limits the increased assessed valuation which in turn limits the amount of property tax that can be levied.

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GOAL, POLICIES, OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

Goal The goal of the Sutter Creek General Plan Historic Element is to preserve the overall late-nineteenth and early twentieth century historic character of the City.

The overall program for accomplishing this goal is set forth in the following list of policies, objectives, and implementation measures. The program is intended to facilitate the preservation of existing significant historic and any significant prehistoric sites, buildings and structures. It is also intended to establish and/or maintain a Downtown Historic District and Corridor wherein building designs will be required to complement and not detract from the historic architecture that presently exists.

Policies **POLICY 8.1:** Historic structures which give Sutter Creek its character should be preserved and maintained to the greatest degree possible. The City shall actively encourage the restoration and maintenance of historic buildings or sites.

POLICY 8.2: All stone walls and other structures or sites related to Sutter Creek's history including rock walls should be preserved wherever possible. Said structures may be relocated and may be incorporated into new buildings if said design maintains the historic value of the structure per approval of the historic design review committee.

POLICY 8.3: The North Central Information Center at Sacramento State University and/or qualified local historians knowledgeable about the City's history shall be offered adequate information and time to review and comment upon any major development proposal that has a potential to affect known or unknown cultural or historical resources. (The North Central Information Center is a regional clearinghouse regarding archaeological information and requirements.)

POLICY 8.4: All discretionary development project approvals shall contain the condition that any sign of historic or prehistoric occupancy or use of the site that is discovered during grading or building activities will cause an immediate halt to such activities and the prompt notification of the Chairperson, Jackson Rancheria and the North Central Information Center at Sacramento State university or the State Historic Preservation Center.

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**Objectives
and
Implementa-
tion
Measures**

OBJECTIVE 8.1: Establish a "Historic Design Review Committee" which will inventory, oversee, guide, assist, and give approval or disapproval to all historic buildings (residential and/or commercial) which may be constructed as well as remodeled in the City or located within the Downtown Historic District or Historic Corridor. The committee shall also advise the City Council and Planning Commission regarding available state and federal historic preservation assistance and grant programs. Target date: before 2000

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURE 8.1a: The committee should review the "Walking Tour of Historical Places of Interest" and consult other reliable sources to determine which buildings or structures are historically significant.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURE 8.1b: The committee should develop and provide an inventory of architectural features and styles to assist applicants and developers in constructing or remodeling residential and commercial structures that clearly enhance building features that evoke or display desirable late 19th and early 20th century styles of architecture.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURE 8.1c: The committee should recommend other policies and procedures for the Citywide maintenance and enhancement of historic values including, possibly, a historic preservation ordinance, designation of the downtown area as a nationally registered historic place, participation in the National Historic Preservation program as a certified local government, and participation in the California Main Street program.

OBJECTIVE 8.2: Maintain, improve or expand the Downtown Historic District and overlapping Historic Corridor as an attractive and unique cultural and historical business and residential district which will attract and please travelers to and/or through the City. Target date: before 2000

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURE 8.2a: Enforce and improve the historic overlay land use designations contained in the General Plan Land Use Element.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURE 8.2b: Consistent with previously listed implementation measure 1b, the Historic Design Review Committee should establish design standards that describe and show how new development can meet historic corridor values and enhance or complement the historic and rural features of the historic district and corridor.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURE 8.2c: The Historic Design Review Committee should recommend to the City Council and Planning Commission a list of land uses deemed compatible with the intent of the Downtown Historic District.

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IMPLEMENTATION MEASURE 8.2d: Consistent with previously listed Objective #1, the Historic Design Review Committee, should be given authority to review and approve or disapprove new construction or remodel projects in the historic district and corridor based upon conformance to established standards and policies.