
4.0 COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT

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4.1 PURPOSE OF THE ELEMENT

The Community Design Element of the General Plan complements all other elements, but most particularly the Land Use and Growth Management Element, by setting forth a vision of the form, character, and appearance of the community. The element describes policies to be used in the future to guide land use, circulation, and design decisions. The element also recommends further steps and complementary studies to be carried out to enact the policies described herein and to ensure that the intent of the element can be carried forth during the life of the plan.

4.2 COMMUNITY FORM AND CHARACTER ISSUES

Character

St. Helena has a unique and particularly attractive image as a rural, agricultural small town, set amid the vineyards of the Napa Valley. In the older areas of town, the community consists of quiet residential streets, with large trees, garages set at the back of the lot, one and two story homes with gracious setbacks and mature landscaping. Streets are laid out on a grid and the roadway is generally less than forty feet wide. Downtown, Main Street includes historic buildings and furnishings. Despite the high volume of traffic on Main Street, the intimate scale and historic architecture creates an enjoyable pedestrian experience.

The valley floor setting of St. Helena provides special views to the surrounding hillsides and vineyards; small vineyards remain scattered throughout town and add a special visual character. Within town, unique architectural resources, including the 19th century churches, brick and stone commercial buildings, Lyman Park and its Victorian bandstand, the Main Street electroliers, the train depot, as well as other special landscaping provide landmarks to the resident and visitor.

Issues

As noted in the Land Use and Growth Management Element, St. Helena continues to be subjected to pressures for growth and change. In recent years, this pressure has resulted in newer residential areas and in proposals for new commercial developments.

Residents are clearly concerned that the special character of St. Helena is being lost through new development and growth. Although the last ten years have seen little new development, residents perceive a continuing loss of character and values. In part, this perception is the result of the growth of the valley in general as a tourism destination, and the resultant traffic congestion and impact on local serving businesses. However, it is also the result of the design and planning of new development, that is more suburban in nature than the historic pattern in town.

In public workshops participants also expressed concern about the erosion of community character. Wide support was found for promoting a character for the community using the older parts of town as a model for design and layout, and for protecting the vineyard setting and maintaining hillside views as a particularly important feature of the community character.

Community Character Concepts

Based on an assessment of the nature of St. Helena today, the resident survey and public workshops, the following basic concepts are intended to articulate the community design philosophy to guide St. Helena in the future. Necessarily general, these concepts are further refined in the Community Design policies that follow.

- The special nature of St. Helena should be protected and carefully enhanced. This means that the pattern of development and streets, and the design of sites and structures should be sympathetic and complementary to historic and distinctive neighborhoods of the city.
- The existing relationship between city development and the surrounding vineyards and other open space should be maintained and improved wherever possible. The accessibility and permanence of this open space should be ensured.
- Accessibility should be a high priority in planning and design decisions. A compact town layout will encourage pedestrian and bicycle access. Convenient public parking should be provided on and off street to minimize trips; as on Main Street, alleys and parking behind stores can enhance access while retaining a continuous retail facade.
- Views to surrounding vineyards and hillsides from entrances to the city and from various vantage points within the city should be protected. Retention of vineyards and open space and controls on building configuration and site development can ensure this.
- Entrances to the city along major transportation routes should balance the views of hillsides and agricultural plantings with appropriately designed commercial and residential facilities.

Six specific elements of community design are particularly relevant to St. Helena and warrant more detailed consideration. These include:

- Land Use Character
- Street Layouts and Pattern
- Open Space Character
- Edges and Views
- Entrances
- Historic Resources

For each of these community design elements, strong models for appropriate and inappropriate design and planning exist in the town today. By understanding and appreciating the good examples, we can establish guidelines for the future. Following are goals and policies relating to each of these elements.

4.3 LAND USE CHARACTER POLICIES

General Land Use Character

The arrangement and density of land uses in St. Helena play a key role in reinforcing the character of the community. St. Helena, with its small town grain of residential uses, coupled with its vineyard setting and finely scaled downtown commercial area, has a unique character that must be protected and enhanced through future land use decisions.

The General Plan designates areas for the various appropriate land uses based on a desire to retain the pedestrian-friendly scale of town, to minimize spread of the town into vineyard areas, and to protect the special scale and character of the town. The policies associated with the location and density of land uses primarily pertain to commercial and residential land use areas.

Guiding Policies: General

- 4.3.1 Preserve the rural small town quality of St. Helena which includes the compact commercial core of one and two story buildings.
- 4.3.2 Ensure that local serving uses are located within a comfortable walk of the center of town and public parking.
- 4.3.3 Where the core shopping area is extended east of the railroad tracks carefully control the pattern of new development so that it is complementary to the development on Main Street, with continuous street facades and parking located behind. Avoid imposing a suburban pattern on the town that is at odds with its historic character.
- 4.3.4 Strengthen community identity by appropriate building design, size, and site landscaping.
- 4.3.5 Require future residential development to conform to the pattern and density of older, neighboring areas of town in order to complement existing town character and ensure that densities are high enough to protect against unnecessary incursion into vineyard agricultural areas.
- 4.3.6 Preserve historic and cultural resources because of their special contribution to the character and quality of life of St. Helena.

Implementing Policies: General

- 4.3.7 Establish Design Review procedures for implementing General Plan policies, including consideration of the establishment of a design review commission.
- 4.3.8 Require businesses and structures to be of a small scale commensurate with existing older buildings in the CB and SC areas.

Commercial Land Use Character

The Land Use Element of the General Plan establishes limits on the location of various commercial land uses within the City of St. Helena. Two primary areas of commercial uses are identified: south of Sulphur Creek Bridge, at the entry to town, is the main location for service commercial uses. These uses are auto-oriented, and often include large parking areas. By restricting this commercial land use primarily to this one area within the community it will facilitate establishing specific design controls, and will avoid the intrusion of these uses into the historic core of the city.

The CDB, the second commercial area, focuses on the pedestrian-oriented commercial core area north of Sulphur Springs Creek. This area extends north to Pine Street and from Oak Street on the west to beyond Library Lane on the east. The CBD is intended for primarily local-serving retail uses, and any further tourist-related uses are discouraged. Select areas along the fringes of the CBD are designated for Business and Professional Office use as a transitional use to the residential neighborhoods.

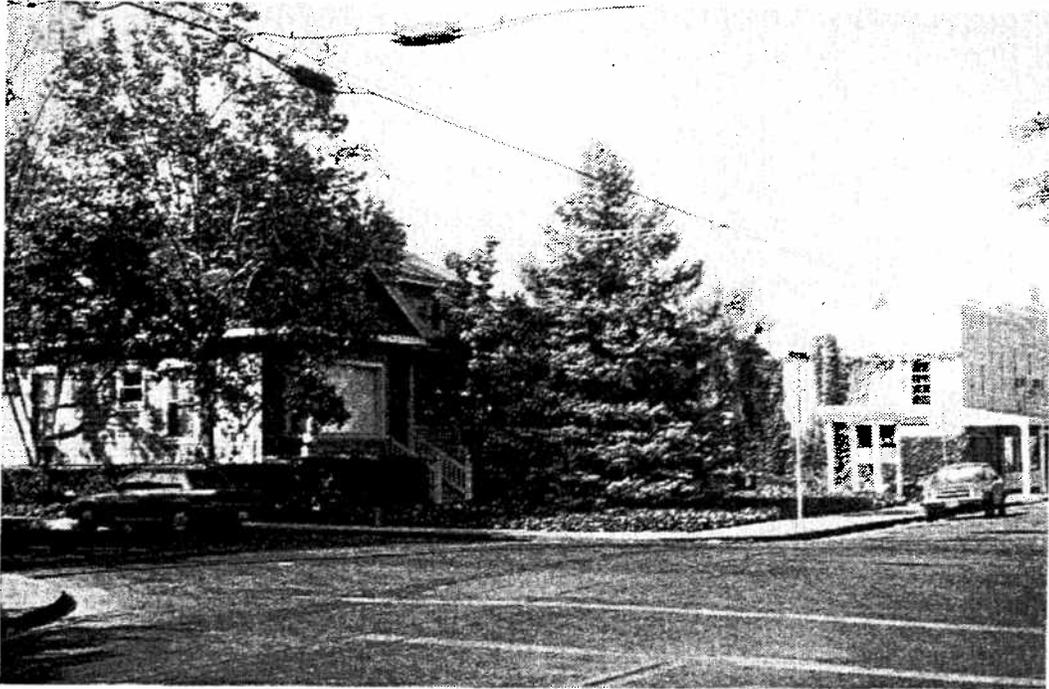
Policies are discussed below for each primary commercial area.

Guiding Policies: Oak Avenue

- 4.3.9 Additional commercial development along Oak Avenue can only occur along the east side of the street (refer to Land Use Policy 2.6.34). Any new commercial structures in this area should be consistent with the scale and detailing of existing commercial structures and compatible with the residential neighborhood.

Guiding Policies: East of Main Street

- 4.3.10 The pattern of commercial development in this area shall be planned to be similar in scale and configuration with the Main Street/Oak Street/Railroad Avenue areas. Although the railroad right-of-way creates an awkward discontinuity in the pattern, areas to the east of the railroad should continue the pattern of road and alleys found around Main Street.
- 4.3.11 Particular efforts shall be made to link the areas east and west of the railroad right-of-way for pedestrians. Continuing the pattern of building to the front property line, and limiting parking to the rear of sites will allow a continuity of building facade and therefore pedestrian interest.



Commercial developments should be compatible with the adjacent residential neighborhood.

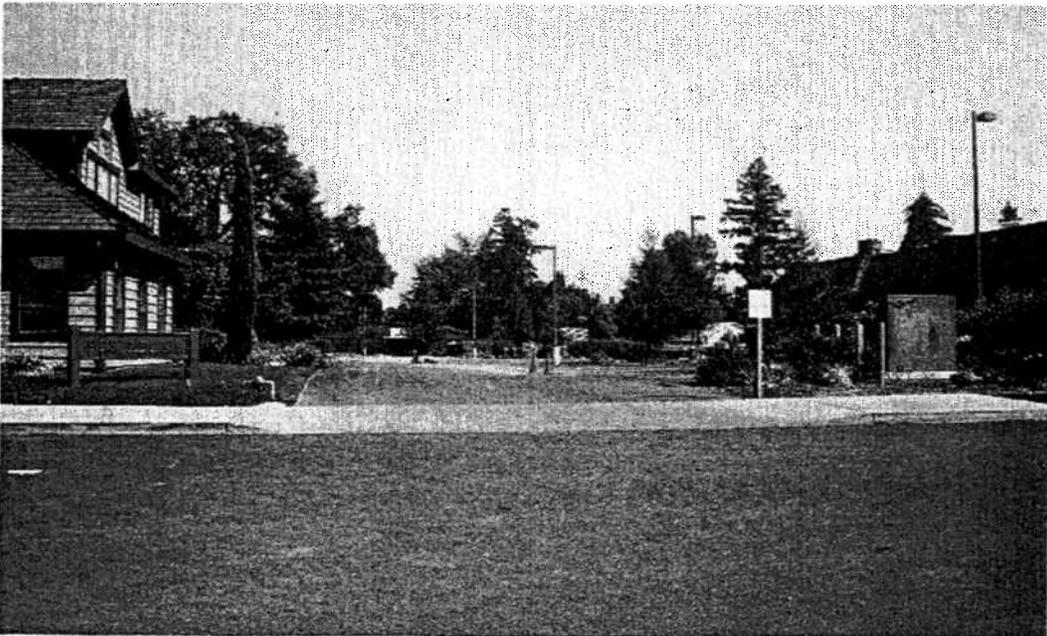


Building facades should be continuous and low scaled for pedestrian interest and comfort.



Window displays, awnings and a fine scale of development create an attractive shopping environment.

- 4.3.11 Avoid large gaps between buildings and parking at the front or side of buildings where it creates a no-man's land for the pedestrian.



Gaps in building facades should be avoided. Parking should be located at the rear of commercial structures.

- 4.3.12 The street tree planting pattern of Main Street shall be continued along the commercial streets east of Main Street to visually link these areas and to create a pleasant pedestrian environment.



Street trees, as planted on Main Street, provide shade and interest for pedestrians in a commercial area.

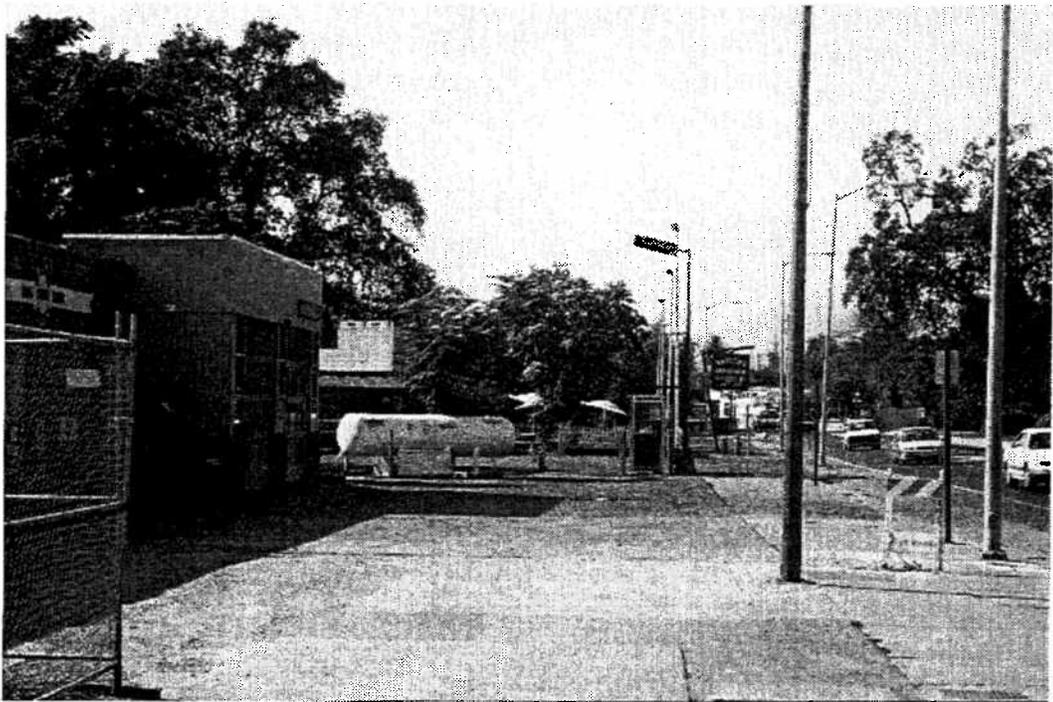
- 4.3.14 Mall-type configurations and large commercial structures shall be avoided. Structures shall be required to be configured with windows and entries along the street, and parking and service away from pedestrian traffic.

Implementing Policies

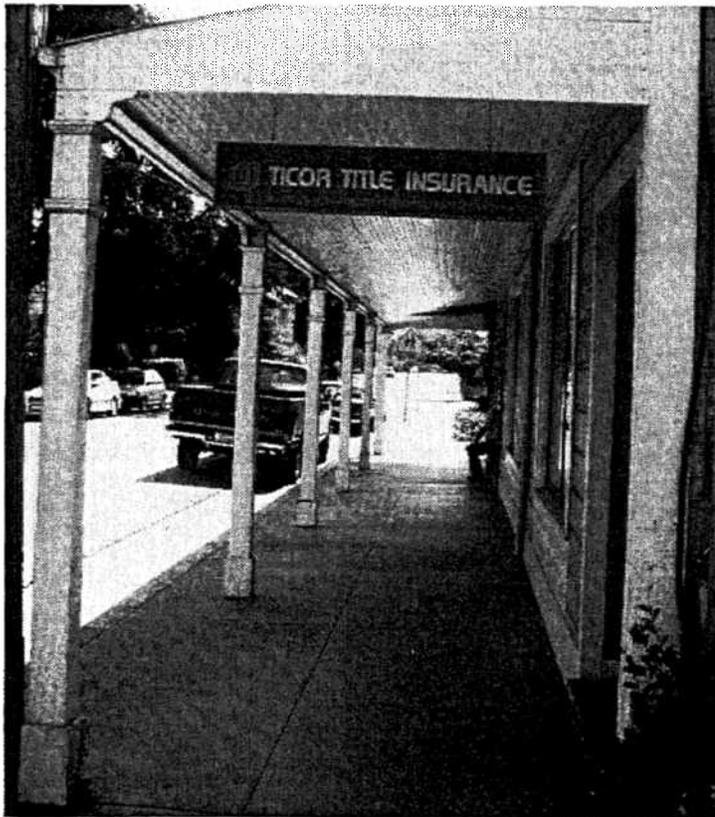
- 4.3.15 The planning and design of the east of Main Street area (see Figure 2-5) shall be governed by preparation of a Specific Plan that will specify road, building, and parking configurations. Particular attention will be paid to developing guidelines that restrict the mass and scale of new commercial development to be consistent with existing city character.

Guiding Policies: South of Sulphur Creek Bridge

- 4.3.15 The configuration of development sites to the west and fronting on Main Street are particularly critical to the entry into the core of the city. This area shall be developed with generous landscaped setbacks and with a scale of development similar to that facing it across Main Street. Most parking should be located at the rear of the site.



While some commercial development on the west side of the highway has charming qualities that enhance the small-town character, the lack of appropriate planning and design on other properties detracts from the overall character of the area.

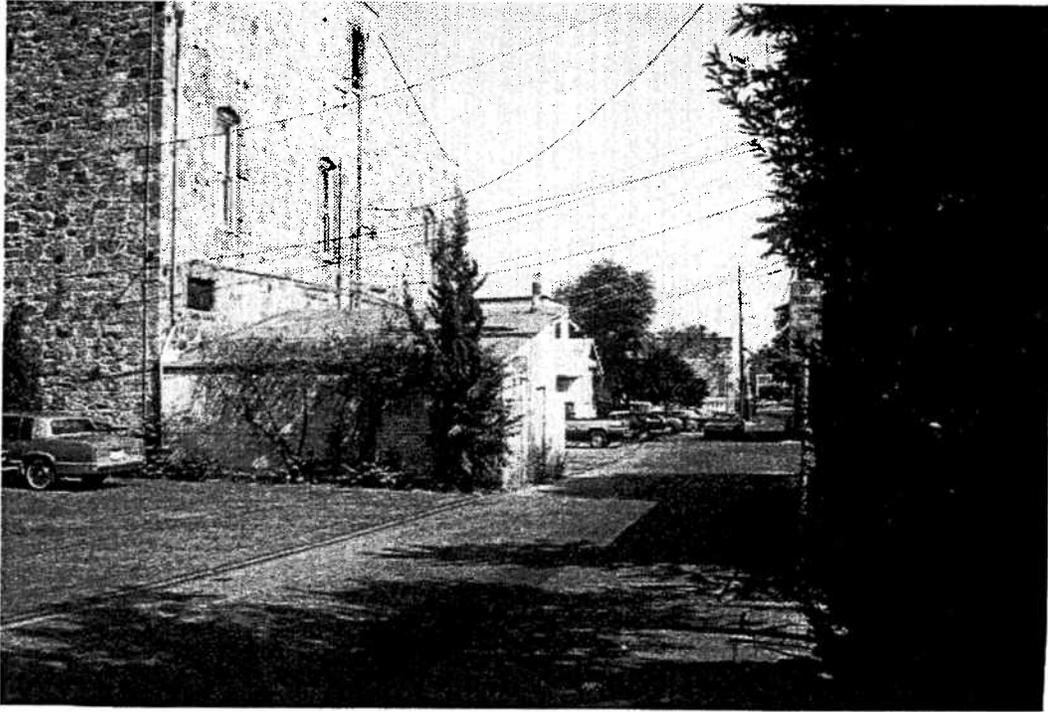


One and two story buildings, pedestrian arcades, special entries, historic forms and materials, and generous landscaping are appropriate characteristics for new west side development.



Development on the east side has an appropriate scale and landscaping for this entry to the downtown shopping areas.

- 4.3.16 Convenient and comfortable pedestrian access shall be assured by providing generous sidewalks from the bridge and by planting of street trees. Demonstration vineyards can also function as a reminder of the agricultural nature of the city.
- 4.3.17 Commercial development perpendicular to and behind Main Street should have a character similar to that found on Oak, Main, and Railroad. Building facades should be located near the front property line with an allowance for landscaping. In addition, building entrances should be oriented to the street frontage to enhance pedestrian access. Alleys and mid-block parking which is effectively screened from view can be used.



Mid-block alleys, such as Money Lane, provide opportunities for parking.

Implementing Policies

- 4.3.20 Development of the area west of Highway 29 between Mitchell Drive and Grayson Avenue shall be governed by the preparation of a specific plan (see Figure 2-5 for specific plan boundaries) to ensure coordinated, high quality development in the area, and to carefully integrate the mix of office, industrial, residential, agriculture, and commercial uses.

Guiding Policies: Service Commercial Area

- 4.3.21 This area serves as part of the entry sequence into the city from the south. For this reason care shall be exercised to ensure that this area is attractive and a positive element of the cityscape.
- 4.3.22 Building design should share characteristics with commercial structures in the Main Street area. Wherever possible parking should be provided to the rear of the structure. Landscaping should be provided along the Highway to soften the appearance of this area and to screen parking. Street tree plantings in this area should complement citywide plantings and be of a scale appropriate to a highway location.

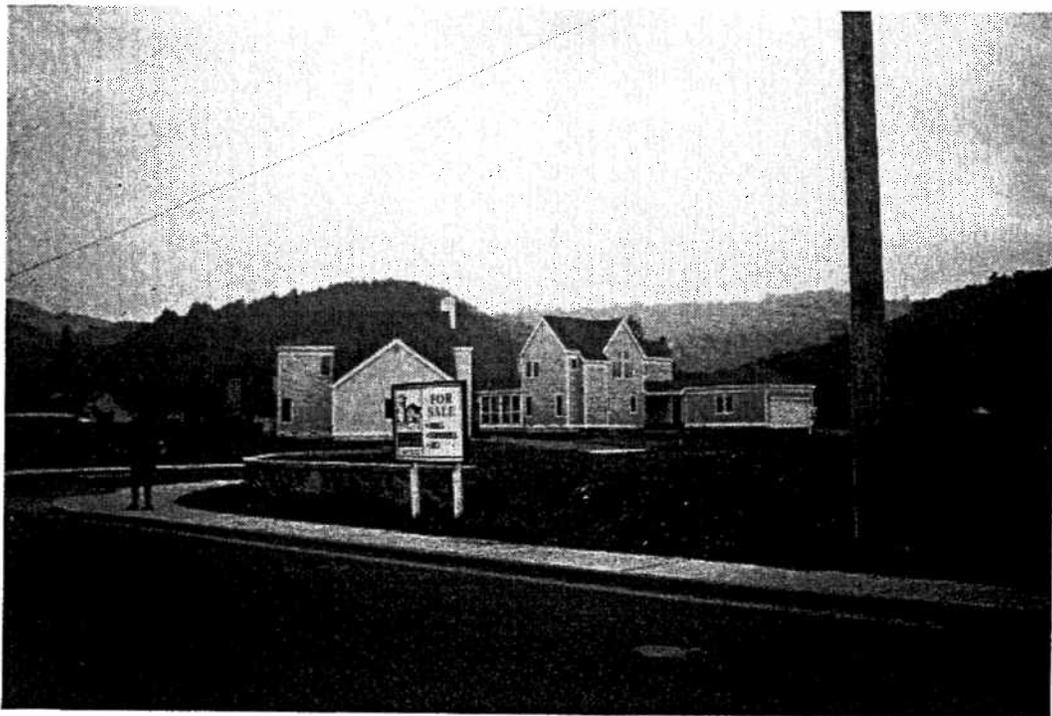
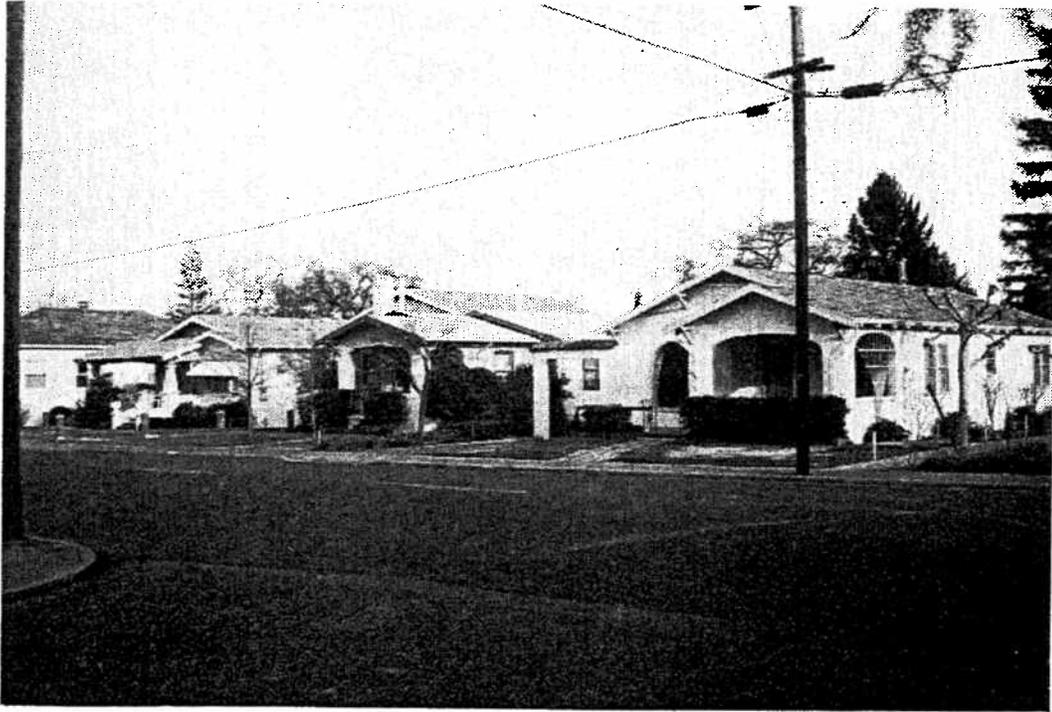
Residential Land Use Character

Residential uses in St. Helena are of several types: single family on very large lots, single family on typical city lots, and limited amounts of multi-family housing. A few second units associated with single family homes also exist. Residential uses surround the core commercial area; in a few instances along Oak Street, and on the northern limits of Main Street residences have been converted to office or retail use. A diversity of densities and lot size and configuration exists within many parts of the city and contribute to the particular character of the town. Incongruous situations have developed, however, where newer subdivisions have been developed with uniform lot configurations, where a few isolated large landholding remain in the center of town, and at the periphery of town where agricultural densities prevail.

In the last twenty to thirty years residential development has generally spread from the center of town outward. In some instances these residential developments are organized around cul-de-sacs which effectively isolate the residences from the rest of the community. In addition, there is a trend toward developing larger homes on larger lots near the periphery of town where they can take advantage of vineyard views. If this pattern of growth continues, there will be an accelerated loss of productive vineyard land and erosion of the unique character of St. Helena as a rural agricultural small town. In addition these larger parcels at the edge of town will make long range expansion of the urbanized area awkward, and may block views of surrounding vineyards.

Guiding Policies

- 4.3.23 Set residential densities throughout St. Helena at levels that will ensure that minimum encroachment on productive vineyard land or open space will occur during the life of the plan.
- 4.3.24 Encourage higher density residential development near the commercial core to provide convenient pedestrian access to shopping and services. Ensure that higher density projects are similar in design and scale to adjacent single family neighborhoods.
- 4.3.25 Within the primary urban area of St. Helena, encourage variety in housing types and density consistent with those found in the older neighborhoods of town. Encourage varying lot widths and configuration, but limit the allowable building envelope by parcel size to avoid overbuilt conditions.
- 4.3.26 Encourage residential building siting and design that is similar to that found in the older neighborhoods in town. In these areas consistent setbacks, porches and generously landscaped front yards add to community enjoyment by all. Restrict location of driveways and garages to minimize their visual impact on the street.
- 4.3.27 Encourage large specimen street trees and generous landscaping to shade homes and the street and to link various neighborhoods.



Neighborhoods in some areas suffer from lack of street trees and suburban siting configurations.



Landscaping in front yards, street trees, and a pleasing scale are the strong positive attributes of some neighborhoods.

- 4.3.28 Limit residential development that backs up to vineyards and thereby blocks views of those vineyards by passersby.

Implementing Policies

- 4.3.29 Revise zoning to better control residential development and to establish clear design guidelines for building configuration, site planning, and landscaping.

4.4 STREET PATTERNS AND LAYOUT

Residential areas of St. Helena range from older areas close in to Main Street, to the newer areas farther from the center of town. The development pattern of the residential areas greatly derives from the layout of its streets. Like many western U.S. communities, St. Helena was laid out in a grid pattern, with anomalies arising from the offsets in the grid, intersection of railroad lines, rivers and streams, and regional roadways. This pattern of development was evident until the middle part of this century, when what could be described as more "suburban" forms were introduced into the evolving pattern of the community, including wider, curvilinear streets with cul-de-sacs. Along with the imposition of this pattern of streets, the nature of residential building likewise shifted toward a similarly suburban pattern of prominent driveways and large garages at the front, wide lots, and few street trees.

Over the life of the plan, future growth provides the opportunity to restore the prominence of the grid and the traditional relationship of the street, sidewalk and pedestrian space, front yard and house to one another. This traditional pattern of development lends itself to variations in lot size to facilitate selectively higher densities, varied housing prototypes (as opposed to the typical single family residence) that can ensure that St. Helena is able to provide choice of lifestyle and economic diversity in the future.

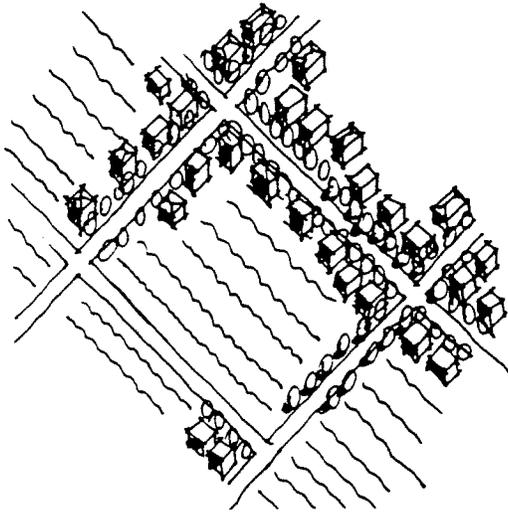
The grid of streets can be applied to St. Helena in newly developing areas and in areas incompletely developed. As in the older areas of town, the grid should be modified with occasional discontinuities to minimize long, straight streets that encourage speeding. The circulation diagram in Figure 5-1 indicates the pattern of street layout that should be used as a guide for the future.

Guiding Policies

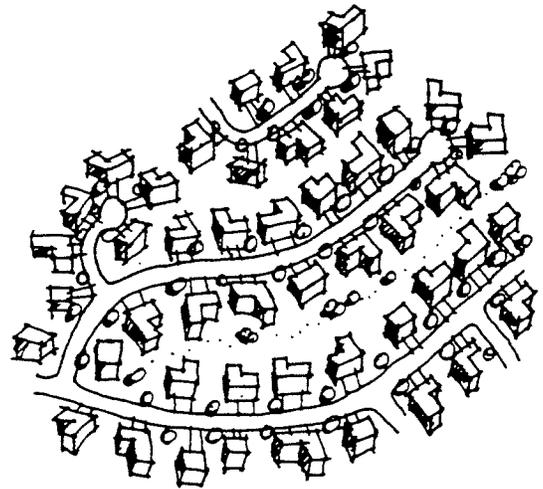
- 4.4.1 Use the grid pattern of street layout as the template for future developing areas. Streets should be straight, should meet at right angles, and cul-de-sacs and a suburban pattern should be avoided.
- 4.4.2 When reviewing development proposals in areas not already served by a system of streets, City staff shall ensure that proposed development is sited in such a manner that it will not obstruct the logical extension of existing streets and infrastructure, or the expansion of the City's grid-like pattern of streets into newly developing areas. As with existing street

patterns, new extensions of the city grid need not be rigid in their dimensions and layout, but should be evaluated on their contribution to the formation of a logical, interconnected system of streets that facilitates the safe and efficient flow of pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular traffic, and establishes an attractive neighborhood environment. Staff can consider variations to the logical extension of existing streets if the project proponent can demonstrate that safety, aesthetics, topography, or other factors make such an extension ineffective or undesirable, or that such an extension would cause the landowner undue hardship.

- 4.4.2 Street widths should be the minimum adequate for two-way traffic and parking. Narrower street widths as found in the older parts of St. Helena contribute to a more intimate small town scale and discourage speeding.
- 4.4.3 Driveways and garages should be as unobtrusive as possible, with garages preferably located at the rear of the lot.
- 4.4.4 Where streets are at the edge of the community, adjacent to vineyards, development should only occur on one side, leaving open views to the agricultural lands and hillsides.



Traditional Grid Pattern



Suburban Pattern



Residential neighborhoods at the edge of the town should allow views out to the vineyards and surrounding hills.

4.5 OPEN SPACE CHARACTER

Open space in St. Helena is of four types: developed parks such as Lyman and Crane Parks, undeveloped open space such as the Sulphur Creek Corridor, street trees and front yard landscaping, and the vineyards surrounding and interspersed throughout the city. While vineyards and front yard landscaping occur on private land, they contribute tremendously to the character of the city and the sense of an agricultural, horticulturally rich environment. The undeveloped open space corridors provide relief from urban development and offer opportunities for future recreation such as bike and pedestrian trails. The city's parks offer varied recreational opportunities to residents. The landscaping which occurs within the street rights-of-way in some areas can be used to link various neighborhoods together and create a shaded pedestrian environment.

A major factor in the quality of life cited by residents of St. Helena is the strong connection to open space. This is a situation that can be solidified in the life of the General Plan through identification of future park sites, guidelines for street tree plantings and site landscaping guidelines, through designation of linear open space corridors along the waterways, and through the protection of agricultural land. Refer to the Parks and Recreation Element and Open Space and Conservation Element for relevant policies.

Guiding Policies

- 4.5.1 The sense of a strong connection to the surrounding agricultural open space and hillsides must be preserved in the future. Views of vineyard, hillsides, creeks and major landscape features should be maintained.
- 4.5.2 Open space should be brought into the community wherever possible as a reminder of the natural setting of the community. Landscaping of residential areas should be generously oriented toward the enjoyment of the passerby. Street tree planting programs shall be pursued throughout the city to provide shade, a special character, and pedestrian comfort. Vineyard plantings within residential and commercial areas is encouraged.



Street tree plantings and small vineyards within residential areas contribute to St. Helena's special agricultural character.

- 4.5.3 Major open space amenities are an important component of the city. The ultimate development of pedestrian and bicycle access and passive recreation areas along the creeks and Napa River can bring these areas into the daily life of the city.

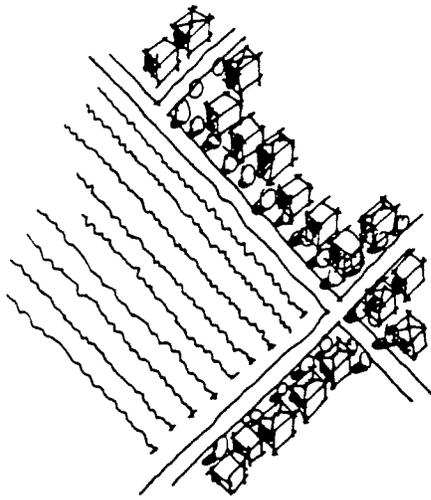
4.6 EDGES AND VIEWS

St. Helena is fortunate to be situated in a beautiful natural setting. The hillsides visually contain the valley and provide orientation, while the vineyards and older agricultural buildings establish the agricultural nature of the town. In some areas, however, these views are threatened or have been blocked by buildings. Without careful control, the views out to vineyards and hills will be lost, and the special nature of St. Helena will erode.

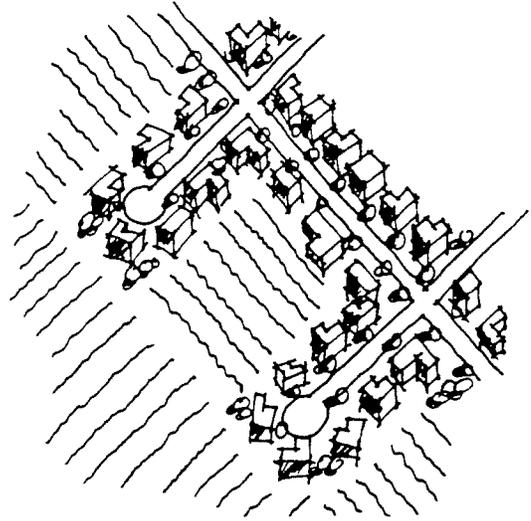
Views are available to residents and visitors from several vantages. Driving along Highway 29 views remain in certain locations to the north and south of town, of vineyards and hills. Several of these sites are identified in the Land Use Element and Map to remain in open space. Within the Main Street area, views are largely blocked, although the low scale of buildings allows occasional vistas. In the residential areas views occur either out the ends of streets where they dead end into vineyards, or where a street forms and edge to the urbanized area with the agricultural land. In some newer parts of the city, these views are blocked by development in cul-de-sac patterns, or where homes back onto agricultural land and effectively block the public's visual access.

Guiding Policies

- 4.6.1 Retain key undeveloped open space areas where views to the vineyard and hills can be maintained. Require that these areas be planted in vines or other low vegetation.
- 4.6.2 Discourage the use of cul-de-sacs. Where cul-de-sacs are necessary, do not allow houses to block views out to the vineyards. View corridors out from the ends of streets should be preserved.



Vineyard views from Roads and Homes



Vineyard Views Blocked by Housing

- 4.6.3 Use streets to form the edge of the developed community. Maintain the edge fronting the vineyards as permanently undeveloped so that views of vineyards and beyond can be enjoyed by the general populace. Orient lots facing across the street to orient toward this view.



Views of vineyards from roads forming the edge of town.

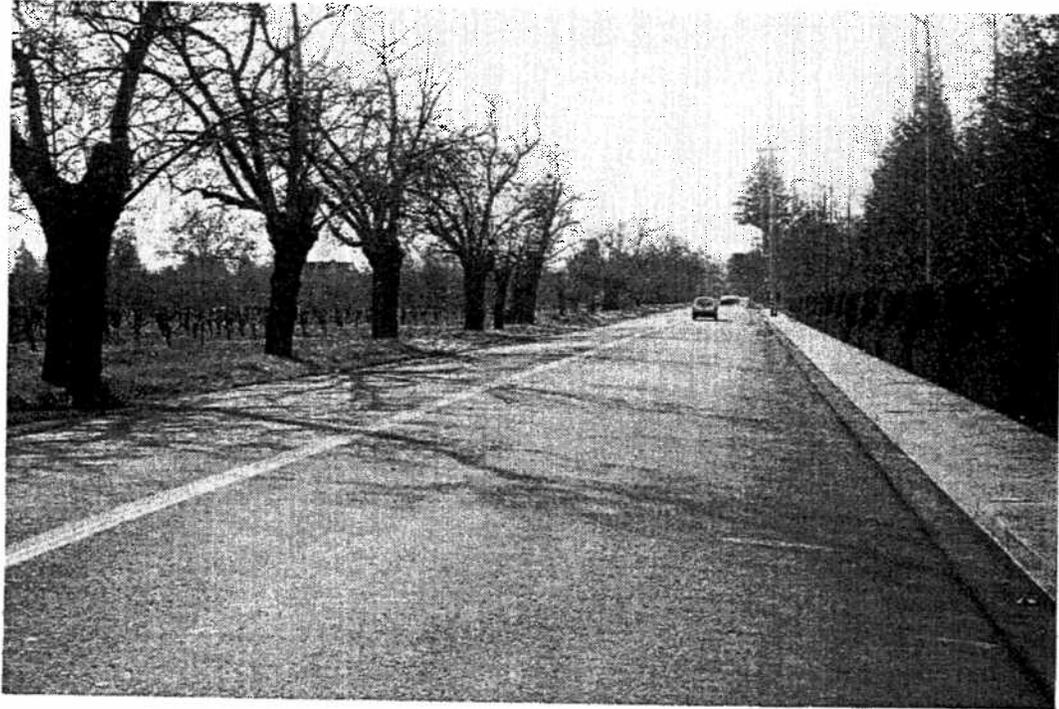
4.7 ENTRANCES

St. Helena has a limited number of entries, thereby making the appearance of each a crucial component of the experience of entering the town for a resident or visitor. Most traffic entering St. Helena does so via Highway 29 from the north or south. The northern entry is extremely attractive, encompassing the tunnel of elms and historic winery structures at the far north, and the attractive older residences and commercial buildings between the tree tunnel and the downtown area. The southern entry is less coherent and has the added disadvantage of including highway oriented commercial uses, with extensive parking and minimal landscaping, and vacant and under-maintained parcels. The southern entry can be improved incrementally over time, as properties are redeveloped, and other improvements can be made now to enhance its appearance. Continued planting of large specimen street trees and added landscaping to screen parking areas will significantly improve the quality of this area. An open space corridor will be provided on the east side between Mills Lane and residential development on the north, and on the west side between Vineyard Inn and the high school to provide an agricultural "gateway" into the city and to clearly separate the auto-oriented fringe area from the pedestrian-oriented core commercial area. Finally, control of the siting and appearance of new commercial developments north of Vidovich will ensure that this area functions as an attractive entry to the downtown.

Entries to the east and west are currently appropriate in appearance. A new entry is planned by extending Adams east to the Silverado Trail. This entry should be treated similarly to the other east and west entry roads.

Guiding Policies

- 4.7.1 The service commercial area near the southern city limits should receive a consistent landscaping treatment to improve its appearance. Screening of parking and continuous street tree plantings can unify the appearance of this area.
- 4.7.2 New commercial development south of the bridge must be carefully designed to provide an appropriate gateway into the downtown area. (See Commercial Land Use)
- 4.7.3 The new eastern entry via the Adams extension should be planned to maximize open space and vineyard views. Where possible, vineyards should be maintained up to the road edge. Residential development should front on the road with sufficient lot depth to allow a generous setback for sound and privacy. Large specimen street trees should be planted in residential areas to mitigate the scale of the street and encourage pedestrian and bicycle movement
- 4.7.4 Existing east and west entries should be maintained in their current appearance, protecting views of vineyards and the surrounding hillsides wherever possible.



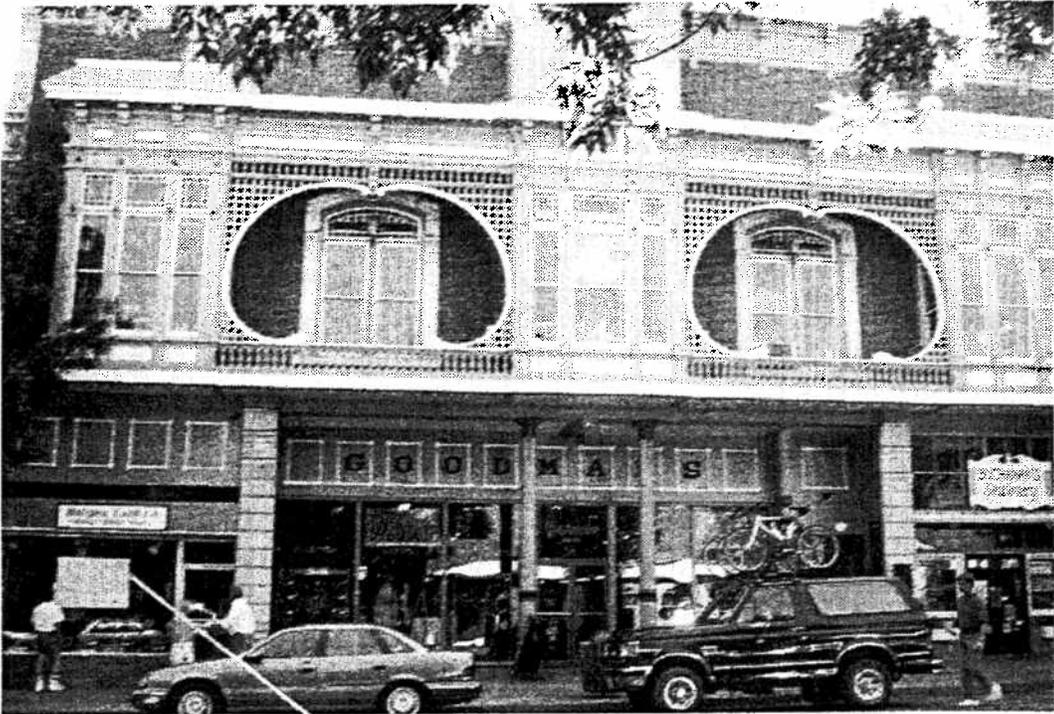
Entries along Pope Street and entering the city from the north on Highway 29 through the tree tunnel provide a special and memorable image of the City.

4.8 HISTORIC RESOURCES

St. Helena gains much of its special character from the varied historic resources located within the city limits. These include commercial buildings, churches, homes, and winery facilities. While a number of these buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, others are simply of great local value as a reminder of the city's gracious past. These resources are discussed in detail in the Historic Resources Element of this General Plan.

Guiding Policies

- 4.8.1 Preserve historic buildings and landscapes throughout the city of St. Helena as an important component of the city's heritage.
- 4.8.2 Where feasible adapt historic structures to modern uses to ensure their economic viability and to protect against possible loss.



Historic Buildings in St. Helena