

Placerville Historic Preservation Standards

Site Plan Review Framework

This document compiles structural standards, architectural guidelines, and historic preservation controls for the city of Placerville, directly referencing California and National historic guidelines as well as ordinances from other California Motherlode municipalities and historical architecture documents. Placerville's historical building style is consistent with 19th-century Gold Rush as defined in *Survey of Building Structures of the San Francisco Bay and Foothill Mining Region* and *Architecture of the Mother Lode Region: Fire Prevention, Stone Masonry, and Commercial Vernacular Structures* [10], [11].

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1: Applicability Note & Regulatory Tiers

The standards, design controls, and structural alteration guidelines applied to residential properties within the Placerville historic districts and outlined below are consistent with nearby, comparable apply exclusively to structures located within designated historic districts or overlay zones in Gold Rush communities [1]. To balance historic preservation with practical property management, regulations are administered under a two-tiered framework [2]:

- **Contributing PropertiesStructures:** *A building, and its immediate environment, which by location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association adds to the district's sense of time and place and historical development.*
Properties constructed during the Gold Rush architectural era (1849–1900) that retain historical integrity [3], or structures officially listed in or eligible for local historic resource inventories, such as the Placerville Historic Resources Inventory, covering structures dating from approximately 1851 to 1940 [4], [5]. These properties are held to the highest standard of historic preservation consistent with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings [2][2], [6].
- **Non-Contributing PropertiesStructures & Exemptions:** *A building, and its immediate environment, which does not add to the district's sense of time and place and historical development, or one where the location, design, setting, materials, workmanship feeling and association have been so altered or have so deteriorated that the overall integrity of the building has been irretrievably lost.*

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Properties located within historic district boundaries that were constructed after December 31, ~~1899+900~~, or pre-1900 structures where original historical integrity has been irretrievably lost through past alterations [2]. For non-contributing structures, ~~strict material replication is not required; instead,~~ review focuses on maintaining overall streetscape scale, massing, and aesthetic compatibility [2], [7]. Structures located entirely outside official historic district boundaries are not governed by this Historical Preservation Standard.

- ~~Structures that have been built within the past 50 years shall not be considered to contribute unless a strong justification concerning their historical or architectural merit is given or the city determines an era of historical significance which occurred during the timeframe.~~

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2: ~~Gold Rush~~ Architectural Era Limits & Historical Cutoffs

2.1 ~~Eras of Historical Significance~~ Historic Preservation Standards

Historic preservation standards for Placerville and its structural alteration guidelines, and downtown aesthetic controls, explicitly reference the classic mining era [1], [3]:

- **Gold Rush Considerations:**

- ~~1850–1900 Cutoff Period:~~ Applied in El Dorado County (covering historic design controls for unincorporated areas like Coloma and Georgetown) [8] and Tuolumne County/Sonora [9] to mandate that new construction, restoration, or exterior alterations retain authentic "Mother Lode type architecture" [8].
- ~~1849–1900 Cutoff Period:~~ Formally codified by Nevada City (Ordinance 338) [1], Grass Valley [3], and ~~Placerville~~ to define protected, authentic Gold Rush-era commercial and residential architecture.
- **Average Historic Baseline:** Structures originating between 1849 and 1860 represent the primary historic inventory baseline for initial settlement architecture, while the broader 1849–1900 span covers the full architectural evolution of 19th-century mining and commercial development [10].

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- **Transportation and Industrial Expansion:**

- ~~1870–1900 Cutoff Period:~~ Applied in Sierra Foothill municipalities influenced by late 19th century railroad expansion, including Auburn [17] and Truckee [18], to capture the major social, economic, and architectural changes, including the rise of freight-dependent industries (like lumber and locally-grown fruit in the greater Placerville region) [19] replacing gold mining as predominant economic drivers.

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- **1884-1898 Cutoff Period:** Recognized in regional histories as the final decades of the Placerville railway after permanent structures were established elsewhere.
- **Average Historic Baseline:** Rail-related structures originating between 1870 and 1890 represent the primary inventory baseline for Sierra foothill railroad architecture. The broader 1870-1900 span captures the complete architectural evolution of rail-adjacent development.
- **Urban Modernization and Civic Transformation**
 - **1900-1920 Cutoff Period:** Applied in Sierra foothill municipalities undergoing early-20th-century modernization to capture the transition from late-Victorian settlement patterns to modern civic infrastructure. This period encompasses the introduction of electricity, early street paving, and the rise of automobile traffic on Main Street. It reflects the shift from Gold Rush-era urban form to a more structured, service-oriented civic landscape.
 - **1910-1926 Cutoff Period:** Used in communities along the historic Lincoln Highway corridor to define the era when automobile travel reshaped commercial districts and transportation networks. The 1910s-1920s correspond to the coexistence of horse-drawn wagons and automobiles [20], the establishment of Placerville as a major stop on the Lincoln Highway, and the 1926 redesignation of the route as U.S. 50. This cutoff is appropriate when emphasizing Placerville's emergence as a regional gateway for tourism, commerce, and trans-Sierra travel.
 - **1920-1940 Cutoff Period:** Reflecting the decades when civic institutions, revival-style architecture, and modern utilities became fully established. This period aligns with the installation of water and sewer systems and the construction of Provincial-style civic buildings (e.g., Placerville Shakespeare Club). It is suitable for contexts emphasizing Placerville's transformation into a modern county seat with early-20th-century architectural coherence.
 - **Average Historic Baseline (Early-20th-Century Urban Development):** Structures originating between 1900 and 1925 represent the primary inventory baseline for Placerville's early-modern residential and civic architecture. The broader 1900-1940 span captures the complete evolution of Placerville's modernization, including the automobile era, U.S. 50 commercial development, and the establishment of revival-era civic identity.
- **Consideration of additional eras of significance:** In the event that the city reviews a structure built outside the historic periods described above, such as expanding the historical districts or assigning historic significance to a non-contributing home within

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the geographic boundaries of the historic districts, the Planning Commission shall consider the following:

- Relevance to community identity and strong community support for the historic designation
- Documented architectural, cultural, economic, and/or historical significance
- Whether at least 50 percent of the neighboring properties are or would be held to a similar standard.
- Whether the existing architecture is consistent with the era of significance (has the aesthetic been altered?)
- Whether the changes have any impact on existing Native structures.

2.2 Definition of ~~19th-Century~~ Mother Lode Architectural Styles (1849–1900)

19th-century Gold Rush architecture consists of utilitarian commercial and residential styles developed following early town fires and the stabilization of the mining economy [10], [11]:

2.2.1 19th-Century Commercial & Masonry Vernacular (Main Street Corridors)

Utilitarian 1850s–1890s commercial structures lining downtown mining corridors [11]. Key character-defining features include:

- **Local Masonry Construction:** Heavy bearing walls constructed of locally quarried slate, fieldstone, or locally fired brick laid with lime mortar [10], [11].
- **Iron Fire Shutters & Vaults:** Heavy wrought-iron or brick fire shutters and iron doors mounted over deep window casings to act as radiant heat firebreaks [10], [11], [12].
- **False-Front Parapets:** Tall, squared wooden upper facades built to conceal gable roofs and present a uniform streetscape presence [10], [11].
- **Covered Wooden Boardwalks & Canopies:** Post-and-beam wooden awnings extending over public sidewalks to protect pedestrians from foothill weather [8], [11].
- **Fenestration:** Tall, narrow door and window openings flanked by multi-pane transom glass [8], [10].

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2.2.2 19th-Century Residential Vernacular & Victorian Styles

Mid-to-late 19th-century residential structures (including Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, and Queen Anne styles) found across Placerville's hHistoric nNeighborhoods [8], [11]. Key character-defining features include:

- **Roof Forms & Trim:** Steeply gabled or hipped roofs with wood-shingle profiles and decorative bargeboards (gingerbread trim) [8], [10].
- **Wood Siding:** Horizontal wood clapboard or board-and-batten siding with flat wood corner boards and window casings [8], [11].
- **Porches & Millwork:** Prominent entry porches featuring turned or square posts, decorative brackets, and wood balustrades [8], [10].
- **Fenestration:** Wood double-hung sash windows in multi-light configurations (e.g., 2-over-2, 4-over-4, or 6-over-6 patterns) [8], [13].

2.2.3 20th-Century Residential

After 1900, residential architecture in Placerville shifted dramatically towards simplified classical detailing, symmetrical facades, and standardized manufactured components [4] [21].

- Roof Forms & Trim: Lower-pitched hipped or gambrel roofs with simplified eave lines, boxed cornices, and minimal ornamental trim.
- Wood Siding: Uniform horizontal clapboard or shingle siding with restrained corner boards and simplified window trim.
- Porches & Millwork: Entry porches shift toward classical columns, square posts, and restrained balustrades.
- Fenestration: Windows become larger, more uniform, and more classically proportioned, often single-light or paired sash.

3: Placerville Historic Preservation Guidelines

3.1 Regulatory Framework & Review Standards

Any property within the historic districts must comply with the City Code of Placerville, California, Ch. 4 Sec. 10-4-10 [22].

- **Mandatory Review:** Any proposed exterior construction, restoration, alteration, material replacement, or demolition for a structure within a designated historic district must

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undergo Site Plan Review and receive approval from Placerville Planning Commission prior to ~~approval~~ permit issuance [1], [3].

- **Adoption of Federal & State Standards:** Review evaluations are guided by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation [2], [6], relevant National Park Service Preservation Briefs [7], [13], and the California Historical Building Code (Title 24, Part 8) [14], which provides alternative life-safety, energy, and accessibility solutions for qualified historic buildings [14].

- **Tiered Review Objectives:**

For Contributing Properties: Preservation and retention of original historic fabric is the primary goal [2], [6], following a strict hierarchy:

- 1) Maintenance & Preservation,
- 2) Repair in-kind,
- 3) Replacement in-kind,
- 4) Substitute materials (only when in-kind replacement is demonstrably infeasible) [2], [6], [7].

For Non-Contributing Properties: Review focuses primarily on ensuring that proposed alterations do not negatively impact the surrounding streetscape and remain compatible in height, massing, rhythm, and scale [2], [3].

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3.2 Demolition Restrictions

- **Protection of Historic Fabric:** Demolition, partial demolition, or relocation of designated ~~pre-1900 historic~~ structures ~~or features within the historic districts or inventory-listed features exemplifying 19th-century Mother Lode architectural~~ is prohibited unless proven structurally irreparable or certified as an immediate public health and safety hazard by a licensed engineer [1], [3].

3.3 Openings, Doors, and Windows

- **Fenestration Patterns:** Replacement windows and doors on contributing ~~properties~~~~pre-1900 structures~~ must maintain the historic ~~attributes described in section 2.2~~ tall, narrow proportions, wood-framed sash designs, and light configurations typical of 19th-century foothill architecture, guided by NPS ITS Number 23 [8], [13].
- **Preservation of Wall Openings:** Modifying, expanding, or creating new window or door openings on primary street-facing facades is restricted unless necessary to restore documented original historical configurations [3].

3.4 Materials, Finishes, and Wildfire/WUI Adaptations

- **In-Kind Material Standards:** Physical repairs and restorations on contributing structures must prioritize exact in-kind matching of historic materials (e.g., solid wood clapboard siding, locally quarried stone/slate, lime mortar, or historic roofing profiles) [3], [6].
- **Substitute Materials in High Fire Hazard Zones:** Where modern fire safety standards, such as Cal-Fire/WUI Title 24 Chapter 7A mandates for High or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones [7], [15], energy efficiency goals [6], or material unavailability render in-kind replacement infeasible [7], substitute materials (e.g., Class A composition roofing, ignition-resistant fiber-cement siding) may be approved pursuant to NPS Preservation Brief No. 16 [7].
- **Objective Criteria for Substitute Approval:** Substitute materials must match the exact physical dimensions, board thickness, profile depth, reveal, texture, shadow lines, finish, and light reflectivity of the original 19th-century fabric [7].

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4: Comparative Regional Summary & Completeness Evaluation

Similarity Across Mother Lode Districts

This historical preservation standard would align Placerville with all primary mining communities across the Sierra Nevada foothills (including Nevada City [1], Grass Valley [3], Sonora [9], Auburn [16], and unincorporated El Dorado [8] / Calaveras [11] counties) maintaining a uniform architectural definitions for 19th-century commercial and residential vernacular styles [10], [11]. Mandatory site plan review, demolition prohibitions, and narrow fenestration controls are standard across all jurisdictions [1], [3], [8], [9].

Jurisdictional Differences

This historic preservation standards improves upon the motherlode regional standard by defining the absolute time period, referencing an official dataset and direct incorporation of fire and historical conservation concerns as detailed in the chart below.

Guideline Feature	Standard Regional Baseline	Placerville / Modernized Mother Lode Standards
Property Categorization	Binary (Pre-1900 vs. Post-1900) [1], [3].	Explicit Contributing vs. Non-Contributing dual-tiered review framework [2].
Inventory Linkage	Local landmark lists or general surveys [1].	Direct statutory linkage to official municipal datasets (City Historic Resources Inventory) [4], [5].
Federal/State Alignment	General aesthetic design review [8], [9].	Formal incorporation of SOI Rehabilitation Standards [6], NPS Brief 16 [7], and California Historical Building Code (Title 24, Part 8) [14].
Wildfire & Insurance Adaptations	Strict in-kind wooden material mandates [8].	Explicit allowance for Class A / Fire-Safe substitute materials matching historic reveals and shadow lines in High Fire Hazard Severity Zones [7].

References

[1] City of Nevada City, *An Ordinance of the City of Nevada City Establishing an Historical District and Providing Regulations for the Protection, Enhancement and Perpetuation of Buildings Therein*, Ordinance No. 338, Nevada City, CA: City Council of the City of Nevada City, 1968.

[2] National Park Service, "Eligibility of properties for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places," Code of Federal Regulations, title 36, part 67, sec. 67.5, 2026.

[3] City of Grass Valley, "Historical Building Preservation and Overlay Standards," in Grass Valley Development Code, Ch. 17.30, Grass Valley, CA: City of Grass Valley, 2020.

[4] City of Placerville Development Services Department, *Placerville Historic Resources Inventory*, Placerville, CA: City of Placerville, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://evogov.s3.amazonaws.com/media/17/media/114402.pdf>

[5] City of Placerville, "City Historic Resources," *Municipal Resource Register*, Placerville, CA, 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cityofplacerville.org/city-historic-resources>

[6] National Park Service, The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Technical Preservation Services, 2011.
<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/sustainability-guidelines.pdf>

[7] National Park Service, The Use of Substitute Materials on Historic Building Exteriors, Preservation Brief No. 16, Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Technical Preservation Services, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/preservation-brief-16-substitute-materials-2023.pdf>

[8] El Dorado County Planning Commission, *El Dorado County Historic Design Guidelines for Historic District Overlays (Coloma and Georgetown)*, Placerville, CA: El Dorado County Community Development Agency, 2016.

[9] City of Sonora, "Historic Preservation Zone," in *Sonora Municipal Code*, Ch. 17.32, Sonora, CA: City of Sonora, 2021.

[10] R. F. Heizer and F. Fenenga, Survey of Building Structures of the San Francisco Bay and Foothill Mining Region, Bulletin 141, San Francisco, CA: California Division of Mines and Geology, 1948.

[11] Calaveras County Historical Society, Architecture of the Mother Lode Region: Fire Prevention, Stone Masonry, and Commercial Vernacular Structures, San Andreas, CA: Calaveras Heritage Council, 2018.

[12] California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Architecture and Historic Masonry Firebreaks in Northern California Mining Districts, Sacramento, CA: CAL FIRE Technical Report, 2022.

[13] National Park Service, Selecting New Windows to Replace Non-Historic Windows, Interpreting the Standards (ITS) Bulletin No. 23, Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Technical Preservation Services, 2001.

[14] California Building Standards Commission, California Historical Building Code, California Code of Regulations, Title 24, Part 8, Sacramento, CA: CBSC, 2022.

[15] California Building Standards Commission, Materials and Construction Methods for Exterior Wildfire Exposure, California Building Code, Title 24, Part 2, Ch. 7A, Sacramento, CA: CBSC, 2022.

[16] Placer County Planning Division, *Placer County Design Guidelines: Historic Design Guide for Design Review Districts*, Auburn, CA: Placer County Community Development Resource Agency, 2016.

[17] City of Auburn, *Final Report: City of Auburn Historic Resources Survey, Auburn, CA*, 1986. <https://www.auburn.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4496/Historic-Resource-Inventory-Final-Report>

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[18] Town of Truckee, California, *Truckee Downtown Specific Plan, Volume 3: Historic Design Guidelines (Chapter 3: Architectural Styles)*, 2003, https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.townoftruckee.gov/336/Historic-Design-Guidelines%23docaccess-4024e3f213ee00f25a01a51efdcf986111d15663fc32dcae7f4b5792ccc0d5d9&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1790144632477470&usg=AOvVaw259viM7S95TQh1A58L_FXs

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[19] Placerville & Sacramento Valley Railroad, *The Historic Placerville Branch*, <https://www.psvrr.org/about/southern-pacific-placerville-branch/>

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[20] Alarcon, Chris, *Placerville Main Street in the 1920s: When Horse Wagons Met Automobiles on America's First Transcontinental Highway*: Placerville NewsWire, 2026. <https://inedc.com/26/culture/history/placerville-main-street-in-the-1920s-when-horse-wagons-met-automobiles-on-americas-first-transcontinental-highway/>

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