

CHAPTER 15: COLUMBIA COMMUNITY PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Dramatic landscapes dotted by worn and weathered limestone outcrops provide outstanding examples of the hydraulic mining operations of the 1800s; this is the foundation from which the community of Columbia arose.

In the early 1850s, Columbia, "The Gem of the Southern Mines," was established as a "tent and shanty" town. What started as home to a handful of miners, grew into a community of several thousand with more than 500 buildings and over 150 businesses serving Columbia and nearby mining camps. Columbia missed becoming the state capital by only two legislative votes.

Water was the life blood of Columbia's population. When water was abundant, mining occurred and Columbia was prosperous. When water was scarce, miners were forced to wait or go elsewhere. Between 1854 and 1857, the community installed an underground water system for domestic and fire fighting use¹. Between 1854 and 1866, six major fires ravaged the townsite of Columbia. By that time, the community's spirit of rebuilding was lost, Columbia's gold fields were depleted, and her population dwindled from over 10,000 to less than 500.

In 1945, the town of Columbia was brought into the California State Park System with the distinguishing fact of having the largest single collection of existing Gold Rush-era (1850-1860) structures. Recognized as a historic resource of state and national significance, Columbia is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and noted as California Historical Landmark No. 123.

Today, in addition to being the home of Columbia State Historic Park, the community of Columbia is also home to Tuolumne County's Columbia general aviation airport, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's Air Tanker Base; Columbia College; Columbia Elementary School; many permanent residents and businesses; and hosts over 500,000 annual visitors. There are no large scale commercial centers within the boundaries of the community plan. The City of Sonora provides the closest general commercial services. Ranching activities are prevalent in the western portions of the community while viticulture is beginning to prosper in the eastern portions of the community. The mining of gold and Columbia Marble, once a prized commodity and used in the construction of the State Capitol, have been replaced by the extraction of limestone and dolomite.

The Community Plan's boundaries begin at the North Fork of the Stanislaus River canyon, extend to Big Hill on the east, State Route 49 on the south, and almost reaches the South Fork of the Stanislaus River to the north. Considerable territory, considerable resources and considerable visitors, were all taken to heart and given their due in the preparation of the Columbia Community Plan to ensure the economic viability and natural beauty of the Community of Columbia for the years to come.

¹ This system remained in existence and operation until 1950, when a modern system with a main reservoir was installed; the original system is still in place today.



Figure 15-1
COLUMBIA COMMUNITY PLAN BOUNDARY

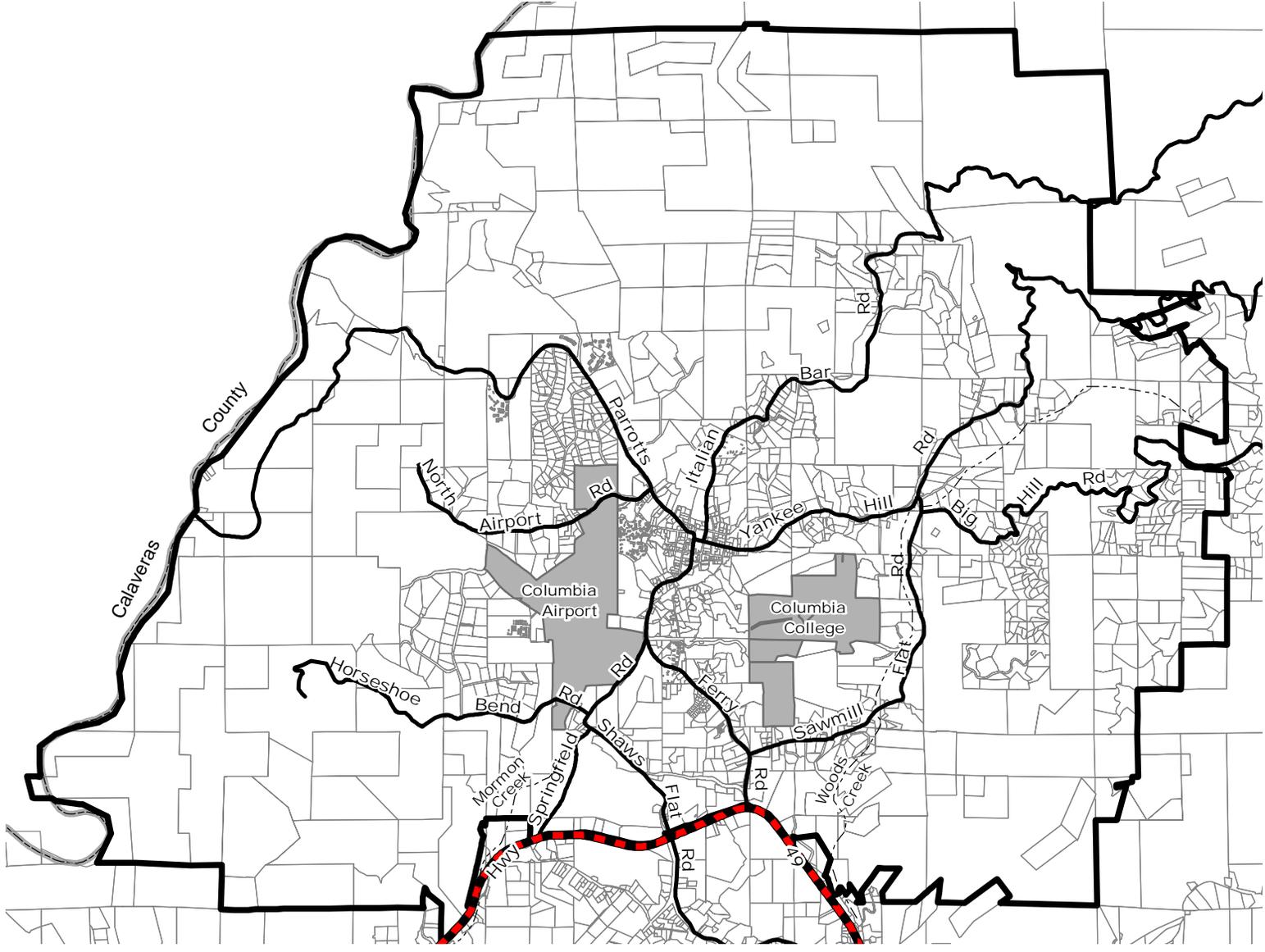
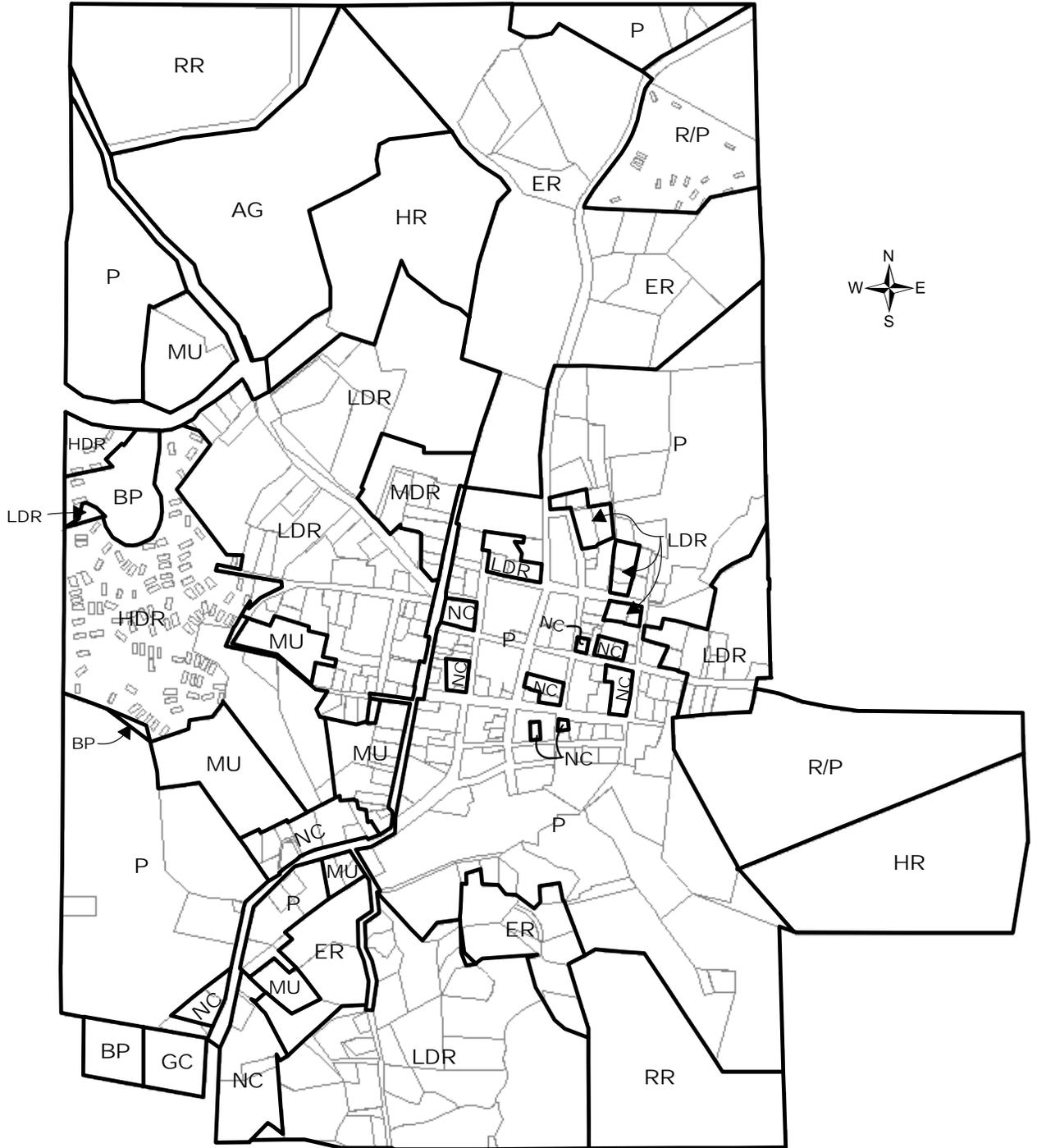


FIGURE 15-3
COLUMBIA LAND USE DIAGRAM ENLARGEMENT
[Resolutions 25-99; 138-00; 198-01; 88-02]



Special Planning Issues

Columbia State Historic Park

The townsite of Columbia is an outstanding historic resource that provides economic benefits to the County by encouraging tourism in a manner that does not conflict with the existing quality of life. The significance of Columbia State Historic Park is that it is a living Gold Rush town; one that is able to demonstrate its own importance in the history of the California Gold Rush. As noted in the Resource Management Plan for the Park, State ownership of the land does not mean fencing off or isolating the land from its surroundings. The Park continues to be one with the community and as such, it is important for the community to work towards creating an environment that is compatible with the Park.

The Columbia Community Plan seeks to aid in the preservation and vitality of the State Historic Park through the conservation of both the natural and cultural environments that surround the park. The Community Plan seeks to facilitate not only commercial and residential needs but also to balance those needs by providing for uses and designs compatible with the State Park.

Columbia Airport

Dedicated in 1935 as Ralph Field, Columbia Airport is one of the oldest operating airports in the State. The airport is an integral part of Columbia, and an essential component in Tuolumne County's transportation system as a general aviation facility. In addition, the airport provides a base of operations for local pilots as well as a popular flying destination. Since the early 1960s, the airport has served as a fire attack base responsible for initial aerial attack on wildland fires.

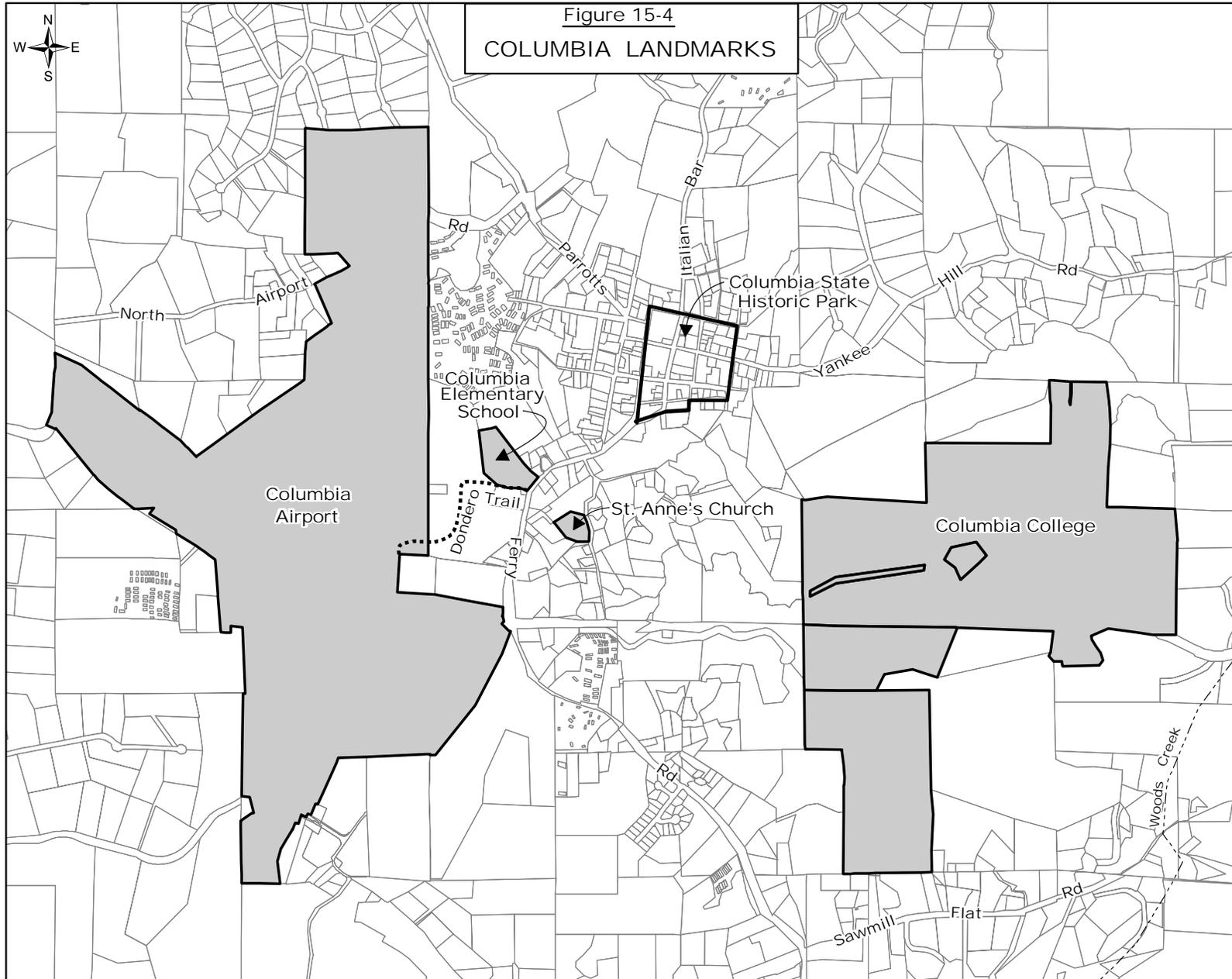
Columbia Airport attracts visitors to Columbia in part because it allows pilots and passengers to camp on-site within walking distance of the State Park. The key to maintaining the airport's longevity is through the regulation of compatible land uses as defined by the Airport Land Use Commission's boundaries.

Columbia College

Columbia College provides education and recreational opportunities for a variety of ages and interests within Tuolumne County. The Community Plan seeks to maintain the unique setting that surrounds the College, providing safe access for those attending the College.

Parrotts Ferry Road Bypass

Parrotts Ferry Road is the main traffic route to the township of Columbia and also serves as a connection between State Route 49 in Tuolumne County and Route 4 in Calaveras County. As a result, commercial and industrial traffic patterns mix with local residential and recreational traffic often times resulting in conflict with pedestrian traffic in and around the Columbia State Historic Park and Columbia Elementary School. Since the adoption of the 1978 Columbia State Historic Park Resource Management Plan, a Parrotts Ferry Road Bypass has been discussed. The goal of the Bypass would be to reroute through traffic away from the park and reduce the impact of motor vehicles on the park. The Community Plan encourages creating a Bypass route to provide for the safety of visitors and residents of the Columbia community.



What is the Columbia Community Plan?

The Columbia Community Plan is a part of the Tuolumne County General Plan. The Columbia Community Plan allows for greater local input into the planning, growth and development of the community of Columbia. This plan has been formulated to be consistent with the Tuolumne County General Plan but contains certain polices and implementation programs to meet specific needs of the Columbia Community. The Columbia Community Plan works to complement the General Plan and, as such, the policies and implementation programs contained herein are to be implemented in addition to those contained in all of the elements of the General Plan. The long-range growth and development policies were framed to guide the Columbia Community through orderly growth over the next 25 years.

What is the Columbia Area Planning Commission?

The Columbia Area Planning Commission was created by the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors on June 5th, 1990, through the adoption of Ordinance 1771. The Commission consists of residents within the boundaries of the Columbia Community Plan who are charged with overseeing the implementation of this plan and guiding the community of Columbia in meeting the goals for its future.

Updating and Amending the Community Plan

Due to increases in growth rates, increases in demands for services and changes in planning philosophy, there will always be a need to update and amend the Columbia Community Plan.

Amendments to the Community Plan may include changes to the diagrams as well as to the textual content. These amendments must be reviewed by the Columbia Area Planning Commission and adopted by the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors.

Periodically, the Columbia Area Planning Commission will conduct a review of the Community Plan during a public hearing to assess the needs of the community and determine if amendments to the Community Plan should be initiated to direct the growth of Columbia in order to meet those needs.

Implementation of the Community Plan

Implementation of the Columbia Community Plan shall be in accordance with the programs described herein and with County ordinances and resolutions establishing standards for growth and development. New County regulations adopted after the effective date of the Columbia Community Plan, which are more restrictive than said plan, shall be incorporated herein without formal amendment to this Community Plan. The implementation of this will well serve the Columbia Community in the 25 year planning horizon.

GOALS, POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS

GOAL 15.A Preserve and enhance the community identity of the Columbia area.

Policies

- 15.A.1 Retain the historic Gold Rush character of the Columbia community.
- 15.A.2 Maintain the rural, small-town atmosphere of the Columbia area by preserving a mixture of urban and non-urban land uses found in the area.
- 15.A.3 Support mixed use development within the Columbia Community Plan boundaries to promote infill by providing for flexibility and innovation in such development.
- 15.A.4 Require commercial signs to be compatible with the historic character of Columbia.
- 15.A.5 Encourage new development to be designed in a manner that is compatible with Columbia's historic architectural heritage.
- 15.A.6 Require new development within the Design Review area to comply with the Columbia Design Guide to preserve the historic character of Columbia.
- 15.A.7 Require new development within the Design Review area to utilize landscaping for aesthetic and functional purposes and preserve native vegetation where possible.
- 15.A.8 Protect and improve the scenic quality along the Parrotts Ferry Road corridor as the gateway to Columbia State Historic Park.

Implementation Programs

- 15.A.a Design Guide

Continue to maintain a design guide for new development that reflects the historic charm of Columbia and require all new development within the Design Review area to be consistent with the Columbia Design Guide.
- 15.A.b Design Review Area

Continue to maintain areas surrounding the State Historic Park and within the Columbia Community Plan boundaries as a Design Review area in order to encourage the design of new development in a manner that complements the character of the State Park.
- 15.A.c Historic Design Preservation (HDP) District

Consider establishment of a Historic Design Preservation (HDP) District to recognize the historical importance of the privately owned parcels within the Historic State Park boundaries through the zoning of the portion of Columbia encompassing and immediately surrounding Main Street.
- 15.A.d Historic (H) Combining District Zoning

Consider the zoning of parcels which have significant historic structures or features to Historic (H) combining.

15.A.e Historic Structure Rehabilitation Projects

Encourage rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic properties within the Columbia community. Consider developing a supplement to the Historic Design Guide for Columbia that would provide "how to" guidelines for the rehabilitation of historic properties and the use of the State Historical Building Code.

15.A.f Tax Incentives for Historic Preservation

Encourage the owners of property featuring historic structures to investigate tax incentive opportunities, such as the Mills Act, when designing, remodeling or renovating projects for those structures.

15.A.g Signage

Require signs within the Columbia Community plan boundaries to comply with the specifications of the County's zoning ordinance, Title 17 of the County Ordinance Code except as follows:

1. Detached signs exceeding 32 square feet in size shall be prohibited except for commercial or industrial center signs located on the site of the commercial or industrial use.
2. The maximum height of any detached or freestanding sign shall be 16 feet as measured from the highest elevation at centerline of roads as they front the site.
3. Design and appearance of signs shall conform to the Columbia Design Guidelines.
4. Plastic and neon signs are prohibited within the (:H) Historic Zoning District and discouraged within the (:D) Design Review Combining District .
5. All signs within the Design Review Combining District shall be reviewed by the Columbia Area Planning Commission.

15.A.h Landscaping Requirements

Require new development within the Columbia Community Plan boundaries to comply with the County's landscape ordinances and guidelines except as provided as follows:

1. Existing limestone outcroppings should be incorporated into new development.
2. Limestone outcroppings proposed for removal or fill within areas designated Design Review shall be delineated on site plans to be reviewed and approved by the Columbia Area Planning Commission.
3. Ponderosa Pine and native oaks are species of local character for the Columbia Community; inclusion of these species in landscape plans shall be encouraged.
4. All trees which are a minimum of 12 inches in diameter at breast height (4.5' above the ground level on the uphill side) and are proposed for removal within areas designated Design Review shall be delineated on a landscape plan to be reviewed and approved by the Columbia Area Planning Commission. Tree removal for the purpose of health and safety are exempt from this requirement.

15.A.i New Development within Community Plan Boundaries

Review new development within the Design Control Combining District and Parrotts Ferry Road corridor for its compatibility with and its impact on the historic structures within the State Park.

15.A.j Mixed Use Development

Designate areas on the Columbia Community Plan land use maps as Mixed Use (MU) to provide for flexibility and innovation in developing infill areas.

15.A.k Design Control Combining and Parrotts Ferry Road

Consider designating all properties fronting Parrotts Ferry Road as Design Control Combining in order to encourage the design of new development in a manner that enhances the "gateway" entrance into the townsite of Columbia.

15.A.l Strip Commercial Development

Discourage the expansion of the strip commercial development along Parrotts Ferry Road and Highway 49 west of Shaw's Flat Road.

GOAL 15.B Provide a mechanism for growth in an orderly manner that balances the needs and interests of the Columbia community.

Policies

15.B.1 Coordinate development in the Columbia area that meets the needs of the community beginning with the provision of necessary infrastructure and services.

15.B.2 Require urban development to occur in an orderly, contiguous manner around the Columbia townsite in order to maintain a compact development pattern and to avoid premature extension of public facilities and structures.

15.B.3 Encourage the development of industrial, commercial, residential and recreational development which provide economic opportunities to the Community while preserving and enhancing the quality of life in Columbia.

15.B.4 Encourage the use of cluster design techniques in the layout of new residential, commercial and industrial developments.

Implementation Programs

15.B.a Infrastructure

Work with the Columbia State Historic Park, the Community of Columbia, Tuolumne Utilities District, the Tuolumne County Department of Public Works and Columbia College to develop an infrastructure improvement plan for the Community of Columbia. Said improvement plan should outline areas of service deficiencies, provide formulas for fair share proportionality rates and/or improvement programs. Compilation of said information would be used in assessing new development projects to provide for new development to aid in the provision of public services at the existing or higher level of service for residents of the Columbia Community.

15.B.b Urban and Non-urban Development Patterns

Adopt concentrated urban growth boundaries for the Columbia Community. Consider

areas for urban growth which have the fewest environmental constraints, are adjacent to existing compatible land uses and have available infrastructure to meet the needs of the growth within that area. This effort should reduce construction costs, speed environmental review process, and preserve the rural, historic and small-town community character of Columbia.

15.B.c Provision of Residential Amenities

Require, where appropriate, new residential development with a density of three (3) dwelling units per acre or greater to provide the following:

1. Pedestrian walkways along one side of all on-site access roads.
2. Street lights in all areas where pedestrian walkways are required and in additional areas as required for safety and crime deterrent.
3. Shade trees along all street frontages with a maximum spacing of 25 feet on center and minimum of 2 trees per parcel. Said trees shall be of a minimum 1" caliper in size as measured 4 1/2 feet above ground level at the time of planting.

15.B.d Provision of Commercial Amenities

Require new commercial development to provide the following:

1. Pedestrian walkways along one side of on-site access roads or access roads as they front on the site.
2. Street lights or other types of exterior lighting in all areas where pedestrian walkways are provided and in additional areas as required for safety and crime deterrent.
3. Parking lots should be encouraged to be constructed compatible with the natural lay of the land; should be located behind central buildings or should be screened along lot lines.

15.B.e Community Landscape Program

Consider the establishment of a community wide landscape program in and around the townsite of Columbia and along Parrotts Ferry Road. Seek local business participation in creating landscaped focal points within existing commercial and industrial centers that lend themselves to employee and visitor use. Promote the planting of street trees along transportation routes and at entrances to commercial centers. Encourage the incorporation of native vegetation in all landscape endeavors. The plan should identify a maintenance entity.

15.B.f Shared Ingress/Egress

Work with the Department of Public Works to develop criteria which would allow for routine consolidation of ingress/egress points along Parrotts Ferry Road.

15.B.g Consider Flexibility in Development Standards

Consider providing flexibility in development standards to facilitate the clustering of new development in order to encourage the retention of scenic resources, landmarks and the natural landscape.

15.B.h Mixed Use Development

Encourage compact, pedestrian-oriented mixed use development to promote a more efficient use of infrastructure, social interaction and complement our historic town patterns.

GOAL 15.C Promote the development of commercial and industrial businesses to meet the present and future needs of Columbia's residents and visitors.

Policies:

15.C.1 Support and protect expansion opportunities of the Columbia Airport through regulation of compatible land uses within the Airport Land Use Commission's boundaries.

15.C.2 Promote the development of new industrial or business parks at Columbia Airport.

15.C.3 Support and protect expansion opportunities of Blue Mountain Minerals through regulation of compatible land uses on surrounding properties.

15.C.4 Encourage new commercial development to be located at the Pedro Wye and within the immediate area of the Columbia townsite to utilize existing historic structures and to construct on vacant parcels to infill between buildings.

15.C.5 Promote the development of tourism support industries in and around Columbia State Historic Park.

15.C.6 Recognize and support Columbia College as a community resource providing educational and recreational opportunities to Tuolumne County and the surrounding region.

15.C.7 Preserve existing commercial zoning within the Columbia Planning Area.

Implementation Programs

15.C.a Airport Land Use Commission

Continue to recognize and support the policies and standards of the Airport Land Use Commission in reviewing new development proposals within the boundaries of the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan.

15.C.b Columbia Airport Influence Area Boundary

Designate those properties which are located within the airport influence area boundary of the Columbia Airport to be consistent with the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan to support the future operations of the Columbia Airport.

15.C.c Industrial Development and Business Parks

Designate areas on the Columbia Community Plan land use diagrams for new industrial complexes or business parks, including lands within Columbia Airport, to provide employment opportunities for Columbia's residents and to promote diversity in the local economy.

15.C.d Pedro Wye

Promote commercial development at the Pedro Wye including a shopping center for the Columbia area.

15.C.e Tourism Support

Support the Columbia business community in their efforts to promote tourist industries in and around Columbia State Historic Park.

15.C.f Retention of Commercial Zoning

Encourage small scale, pedestrian friendly commercial development on existing commercially zoned lands to provide basic services and thereby increase convenience and independence of movement for community members.

GOAL 15.D Minimize the potential conflict between pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular transportation routes by creating a safe, efficient and economically feasible circulation system for the Columbia community.

Policies

15.D.1 Provide a circulation system that is designed to be safe and efficient and meets the travel needs of Columbia residents, businesses and visitors.

15.D.2 Provide mechanisms for new development to share in the cost of transportation facilities, both motorized and non-motorized, which will facilitate the future growth needs of the Columbia community.

15.D.3 Encourage the development of bicycle and pedestrian circulation systems.

Implementation Programs

15.D.a Location of Transportation Facilities

Develop transportation facilities in the Columbia area that are compatible with the location of industry, Columbia State Historic Park, commercial centers, residential areas and community facilities.

15.D.b Parrotts Ferry Road Bypass

Promote the development of a Parrotts Ferry Road bypass to alleviate through and industrial traffic in the historic district and school zone to provide for safe crossing by pedestrians and cyclists.

15.D.c Funding for the Bypass

Seek funding for the development of a Parrotts Ferry Road bypass.

15.D.d Providing Transportation Improvements

Require each developer of new, or expanded, commercial, residential, recreational or educational projects to provide improvements to the transportation facilities impacted by the project. This includes transportation facilities in and immediately adjacent to the project and a fair share of those facilities handling traffic to and from the project.

15.D.e Funding Sources for Maintenance

Support funding sources for road maintenance such as assessment districts, grants, County Service Areas, or Permanent Road Divisions (PRDs) when deemed appropriate.

15.D.f Comprehensive Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Plan

Encourage the development of a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian facility plan for the Columbia community which includes the bicycle and pedestrian projects listed in Table 15.1. The construction standards for such facilities shall be the same as those contained in the Circulation Element of this General Plan.

Table 15.1

Proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian Projects

Proposed Combination Bicycle/Pedestrian Projects
Sawmill Flat Road to Columbia College via Melones Water Line
Parrotts Ferry Road from Marble Quarry Road to Jackson Street
Parrotts Ferry Road from the Dondero Trail to Jackson Street
Columbia College to Sonora via Sawmill Flat Road, Parrotts Ferry Road and Highway 49
Columbia to Sonora via Parrotts Ferry Road and Highway 49
Stage Coach Trail from Columbia State Historic Park to Columbia College
Squabbletown Trail from Sawmill Flat Road to Browns Flat
Columbia Airport Trail from Horseshoe Bend Road to North Airport Road
Proposed Pedestrian Projects
Dondero Trail
Bell Hill Trail from Columbia State Historic Park to Columbia College Par Course

15.D.f Funding for Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Seek grants and other funding mechanisms to construct bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities in accordance with the comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian facility plan.

15.D.g Easements for Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Encourage the provision of easements to provide for bicycle and pedestrian paths. Notify each agency involved in road and highway maintenance that it is the intent of the Columbia Area Planning Commission to promote development of these paths as street and road developments and improvements occur. The future provision of easements and trails shall not in any manner, authorize trespass upon private property, or increase the right of public agencies to gain access to private property unless expressly authorized by the property owner.

15.D.h Road Standards to Accommodate Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Utilize existing Title 11 road standards within the Columbia Community Plan boundaries, when feasible and appropriate, that include the provision of shoulders wide enough to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Require the construction of pedestrian facilities along Parrotts Ferry Road from the Pedro Wye to the Columbia State Historic Park. Transit facilities should be provided in key locations, as appropriate.

15.D.i Pedestrian Facilities in New Residential and Commercial Development

Require new residential development with a density of three (3) dwelling units per acre or greater and new commercial development to provide pedestrian walkways along one side of on-site access roads and portions of access roads on which the project site fronts.

GOAL 15.E Conserve the natural and cultural resources of the Columbia community.

Policies

15.E.1 Preserve the natural scenic quality of hillsides and hilltops within the Columbia community.

15.E.2 Protect outstanding scenic and historic resources which contribute to the visual quality and rural character of the Columbia community.

15.E.3 Minimize conflict between development and wildlife habitat by encouraging future development to locate in less sensitive, or lower priority habitat areas or on sites adjacent to previously developed and disturbed areas.

15.E.4 Encourage and support efforts to protect and enhance Woods Creek, Mormon Creek and the Dondero Trail for scenic and recreational values.

15.E.5 Plan new development so as to not preclude the utilization of designated mineral lands.

15.E.6 Evaluate all historic buildings, significant archaeological sites and other community landmarks that provide a tie with the past and, where appropriate, preserve, and/or monument the significance of these cultural resources.

15.E.7 Encourage the rehabilitation, restoration and adaptive reuse of existing historic buildings and structures.

15.E.8 Encourage protection of vegetation noteworthy within the Columbia area, such as stands of mature ponderosa and sugar pine trees.

15.E.9 Encourage protection of historic geological resources and the historic mining landscape along thoroughfares through Columbia.

15.E.10 Encourage the use and retention of historic names.

Implementation Programs

15.E.a Hillside Conservation

Encourage hillside development to be designed and located to be compatible with, rather than imposed on, the landscape and environment by minimizing the amount of grading and topographical alteration. Require developers to utilize the Tuolumne County Hillside

and Hilltop Development Guidelines when designing projects on hillsides and hilltops.

15.E.b Heritage Corridors

Consider developing guidelines to address the development of properties along the following corridors which exhibit outstanding historic resources, scenic beauty or recreational value within the Columbia community: Parrotts Ferry Road, Sawmill Flat Road, Yankee Hill Road, Italian Bar Road and Highway 49.

15.E.c Woods Creek and Mormon Creek

Require appropriate mitigation for impacts to biological resources from new development along Woods and Mormon Creeks and encourage the design of such development to accommodate the provision of non-motorized trails along the creeks for recreational opportunities. Encourage the dedication of public access easements to capitalize on the recreational opportunities of Mormon and Woods Creeks.

15.E.d Community Landmarks Survey

Consider surveying the community to establish significant historic, biologic and other landmarks that provide a community "sense of place" that should be preserved. This would supplement the existing inventory of the Columbia State Historic Park by surveying areas not addressed within the document.

15.E.e Encourage New Development to Blend with Existing Landscape

Encourage the design of new development to blend with the natural contour of the land and the natural vegetation.

15.E.f Water Quality and Quantity of Runoff

Require as a condition of approval of discretionary entitlements for new development that surface runoff from that development be filtered through sedimentation basins, or similar devices, as needed, prior to discharge into downstream drainages to minimize degradation, related to the water quality and quantity of downstream waterbodies.

Responsibility for Programs: Administration of the Implementation Programs listed in this community plan is the shared responsibility of the Board of Supervisors, Columbia Area Planning Commission, County Administrative Office, Tuolumne County Community Development Department, Department of Public Works, Fire Department, Recreation Department, Division of Environmental Health, Division of Building and Safety, and the Airport Land Use Commission with the Community Development Department serving as the primary administrator.

Funding Sources: Administration of the Implementation Programs listed herein will be funded through the County's General Fund and grants.

Time Frame for Implementation: The target date for implementation of the programs listed in this community plan related to the Columbia Design Guide is FY 08-09 and Community Survey, if implemented, is FY 09-10; all other programs are ongoing.

[Resolution 78-09 adopted June 16, 2009]