

5. COMMUNITY DESIGN



VISION

Chico retains its distinct small-town charm in the year 2030, attractive to longtime and new residents as well as the dynamic student population at California State University Chico, all of who continue to replenish Chico's multi-generational vitality and culture. Rich agricultural lands, west to the Sacramento River, and scenic foothills of the Sierra Nevada have been preserved. The City's historic Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods continue to serve as model neighborhoods that convey a unique pedestrian-oriented character. Eclectic architectural styles, both old and new, continue to define the built environment. Visitors easily recognize the community's cultural pride exhibited by timeless architecture, the beauty of the natural environment, public art, gathering places, and neighborhood landmarks that establish Chico's identifiable sense of place.

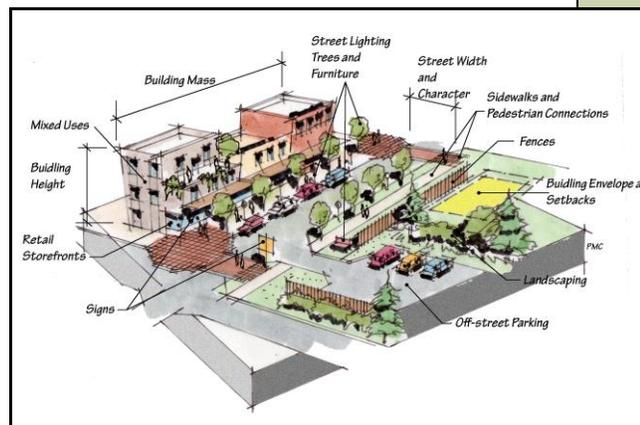
INTRODUCTION

The Community Design Element focuses on the visual quality of the physical elements and spaces that shape Chico.

The City's natural attributes such as agriculture, foothills, trees, and creeks have contributed to the shape and urban form of the City. These physical elements, as well as the City's development patterns, landmark buildings, and streets, contribute to Chico's overall character and identity.

Quality, compatible design is highly valued by the community. The differences between development patterns in newer and older areas of the City are obvious. The original grid pattern of the City streets and the architectural identity in the Downtown core and surrounding older neighborhoods provide a sharp contrast to the post-World War II development with arterial streets, curvilinear street patterns, and diverse architectural styles and forms.

In terms of the built community, the distinctive qualities of Chico are best reflected in the older areas of the City, which are generally located to the west of State Route 99. Downtown Chico and its surrounding neighborhoods, including the South of Campus Neighborhood, the Avenues Neighborhood, and the Southwest Chico Neighborhood, are characterized by a grid street pattern, well-defined borders, tree-lined streets, a diversity of lot sizes and housing types, and a clear neighborhood identity that sets them apart from other parts of the City.



Urban Design Concepts and Elements



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The Community Design Element is an optional element of the General Plan that is related to several other General Plan elements. Specifically, this element prioritizes the importance of a compact urban form and of creating, preserving and enhancing the distinct neighborhoods of Chico. In addition to the community design policies established by this element, the City of Chico Design Guidelines Manual provides more specific architectural design guidance and solutions for a wide spectrum of project types. The Manual is intended to guide the aesthetic qualities of development in Chico and maintain its dignified visual character by integrating timeless architectural and landscape design with the natural beauty of its surrounding environment. References to the Manual are made in this element where appropriate.

ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

This section of the element identifies and addresses primary community design issues raised during the outreach efforts for the General Plan Update. Policy guidance is found in the goals, policies, and actions section of this element. An explanation of specialized terms can be found in the General Plan Glossary (**Appendix A**).

INFILL DESIGN COMPATIBILITY

Chico is committed to a more sustainable development pattern by focusing new growth into infill areas. Creating a more compact urban form strengthens communities by placing



residences, jobs, services and facilities in close proximity to one another. While the goal of compact urban form and encouraging infill is not new, infill projects remain some of the most controversial projects in Chico. Directing new development into already developed areas raises the critical issues of how new infill will relate to the existing context of an area in terms of design and density. The Community Design Element establishes policies and actions to guide the design of infill development to be compatible with its neighborhood.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

As described in the Land Use Element, this General Plan focuses on establishing a balanced plan for the mix and distribution of land uses. In terms of land use components, many Chico residents identify most with their local neighborhoods and want to be involved in setting priorities for their neighborhoods. In recent years, the City created the Housing and Neighborhood Services Department which supports community efforts to develop and adopt neighborhood plans. The Community Design Element recognizes the character of Chico's diverse neighborhoods and supports the development of neighborhood plans. This element also establishes policies that guide the creation, maintenance, and enhancement of Chico's neighborhoods.

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SENSE OF PLACE

Chico residents place a high value on maintaining the community's sense of place. However, this requires a common understanding of the characteristics which define that sense. This element explains the defining qualities of existing development in Chico that are essential to maintaining its sense of place in both developed and growing areas of the City. Emulating desirable features of Chico's older neighborhoods and commercial districts in new development can lend continuity that reinforces the City's sense of place and unique identity. The Community Design Element includes goals, policies, and actions to (1) address community-wide investment for improved urban design, (2) ensure appropriate design continuity between existing and future development and (3) celebrate cultural and historic resources in Chico. New development and redevelopment guided by this element will exhibit quality design that is context sensitive and contributes positively to the character of the community. The City of Chico Design Guidelines Manual relies on the sense of place concept in its implementation.



COMPLETE STREETS AND SCENIC ROADS

The intent of the complete streets concept is to ensure that streets accommodate vehicle, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian travel. The 2030 Vision Book, explained in the Introduction chapter, states that in 2030, the City's bicycle-friendly streets will continue to thrive, tree-lined streets and boulevards will be a defining characteristic, and streets will be safe, friendly, and multimodal with dedicated bike lanes. The Community Design Element strives for more than complete streets; it also calls for enhancing the City's unique scenic corridors that are celebrated by Chico residents and visitors as vibrant and attractive public spaces.

WAYFINDING AS DESIGN OPPORTUNITY

Wayfinding is the ability of a person to navigate his or her way to a given destination by various means including historic landmarks, public art, unique architectural or design elements, signage, natural features, roads or paths. Chico has many natural and manmade landmarks to help residents and visitors orient themselves in the community, such as creeks and open space, foothills, and major transportation corridors. However, over the past 20 years as the community grew, it became more difficult to find one's way around Chico. There are significant opportunities to improve wayfinding throughout the community and to improve the sense of arrival to Chico and its neighborhoods. This element establishes policies and actions to create a comprehensive wayfinding system in the community.





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DESIGN REVIEW – PRINCIPLE AND PROCESS

Chico has an established process for design review of development projects. This element builds on that foundation by introducing policies and actions that clarify design expectations with a focus on quality design and development of projects that reinforce a sense of place within the community. The 1994 General Plan Community Design Element was the unifying element of the 1994 General Plan, and for that reason community design took a key position in the community planning process. The City adopted a Design Guidelines Manual in 2009 that consolidated the language and themes from the 1994 Community Design Element, as



well as other policy, code, and guidelines from different City documents. The Design Guidelines Manual refines the City's design review process by lending greater predictability to the public and City decision-makers in the architectural review of development projects. The Design Guidelines Manual is intended to be an evolving document which is updated to meet the City's needs. For example, this Element directs an addition to the Manual of context sensitive design solutions for residential infill projects to help address the ongoing issue of community disagreement associated with infill projects.

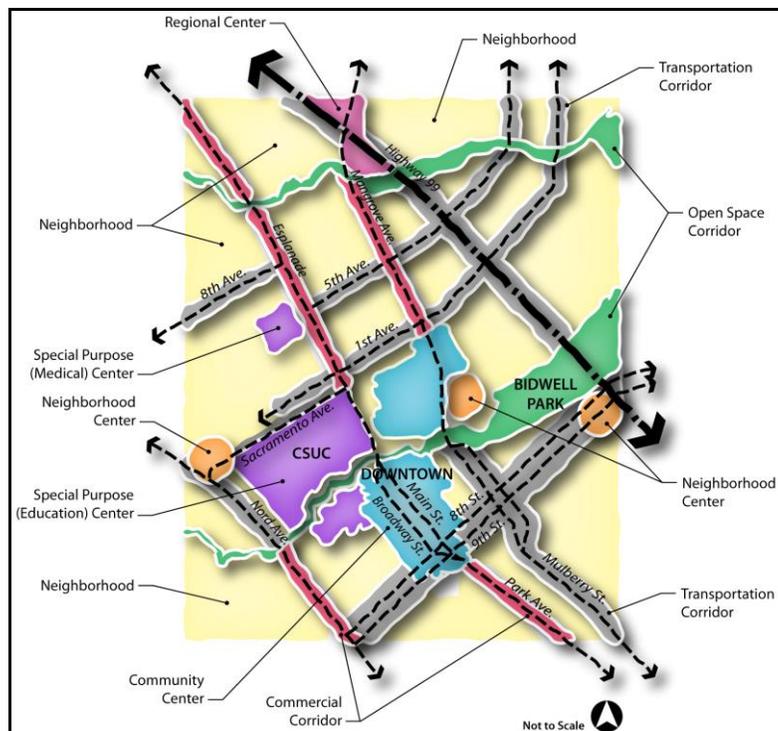
COMMUNITY DESIGN CONCEPTS

This section of the element describes several specialized terms and important concepts that relate to community design issues facing Chico and the goals, policies, and actions in this element.

MAJOR LAND USE COMPONENTS

Chico's primary land use components include neighborhoods, corridors, and centers. The following graphic illustrates the conceptual relationship between these land use components in the City's core area. In general, neighborhoods are where people live, corridors are the channels for mobility and connectivity, and centers are concentrations of activity which serve as a focus for commerce and other non-residential activities. This section describes important design considerations for Chico's neighborhoods, corridors, and centers, as well as the community edges.

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Conceptual Illustration of Neighborhoods, Corridors, and Centers

Neighborhood Design

From a community design perspective, the diverse neighborhoods that form the fabric of Chico are among the community's greatest assets. Neighborhoods are places where people live and share a sense of identity. Neighborhoods vary widely in size, composition and configuration, but they share certain common traits. Neighborhoods are predominantly residential, generally include community gathering places, and share supporting service areas with other surrounding neighborhoods. Consistent with the policies in the Land Use Element, new neighborhoods will be designed and developed as complete neighborhoods. Additionally, infill and redevelopment within existing neighborhoods should enhance developed areas consistent with the complete neighborhood concept explained in the Land Use Element.

Key neighborhood design considerations include:

- **Mix of Uses and Housing.** Neighborhoods provide a variety of housing types, and include non-residential uses that address the daily needs of residents.
- **Transitions.** Neighborhoods have transitions in scale, form and character between different land uses such as between residential and non-residential or between the natural and built environment.
- **Walkability.** Neighborhoods are pedestrian-friendly with design features such as short block lengths, buildings of human scale and orientation, traffic calming features, safe roadway crossings, and wide, well-lit sidewalks that are separated from roadways by landscaped parkways.



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- **Linkages.** Neighborhoods include convenient connections for all modes of travel to key destinations such as schools, neighborhood centers, and adjoining neighborhoods.



- **Public Gathering Places.** Neighborhoods have desirable places for residents, customers, and employees to socialize, such as plazas, community centers, and parks.
- **Connections to Open Space.** Neighborhoods are well-integrated with their natural surroundings and are connected to open space and recreational amenities by trails and bikeways.

- **Urban Forest.** Neighborhoods have street trees and landscaped parkways to enhance neighborhood character and identity.

Corridor Design

Corridors, both natural and man-made, form boundaries, but also provide connections between neighborhoods and centers. They are prominent places that reflect community identity and character. Corridors in Chico include transportation corridors, commercial corridors, and open space corridors.

- **Transportation Corridors.** Transportation corridors are roadways within the community that primarily serve to move people from one area of the City to another. They are typically multimodal arterial roadways connecting residents and employees to destinations, such as shopping, jobs, recreation, and schools. Examples of transportation corridors are Manzanita Avenue, Eaton Road, and East Avenue.



- **Commercial Corridors.** Commercial corridors are significant roadways that are lined with businesses. Traffic speeds are generally slower due to the volume and frequency of turning movements. Examples of commercial corridors include Mangrove Avenue and 20th Street.
- **Open Space Corridors.** Open space corridors are natural areas providing visual and physical linkages and habitat along creeks and designated open spaces and parks. Open space corridors include creekside greenways such as Lindo Channel and linear parks such as Bidwell Park.

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Key corridor design considerations include:

- **Creekside Considerations.** Creeks are a benefit to the built environment and the community. Development and infrastructure improvements need to consider public access, views, and the protection of biological resources as fundamental design elements.
- **Streetscape Design.** Well-designed streets accommodate multiple modes of transportation and exhibit identifiable design elements that complement the character of adjoining properties.
- **Wayfinding System.** Corridors guide movement and as such they are ideal locations for incorporating wayfinding elements that help with orientation and direction.

Center Design

Centers are destinations with a wide variety of form and function. Centers can be areas where residents and visitors shop, work, dine, and seek services and entertainment. There are four distinct types of centers in Chico:

- **Neighborhood Centers.** Neighborhood centers meet the daily shopping and service needs of residents in the surrounding neighborhoods. They include smaller commercial buildings and mixed-use neighborhood cores. Examples include the Longfellow Center on E. 1st Avenue and the 5th and Ivy center in the South Campus Neighborhood.

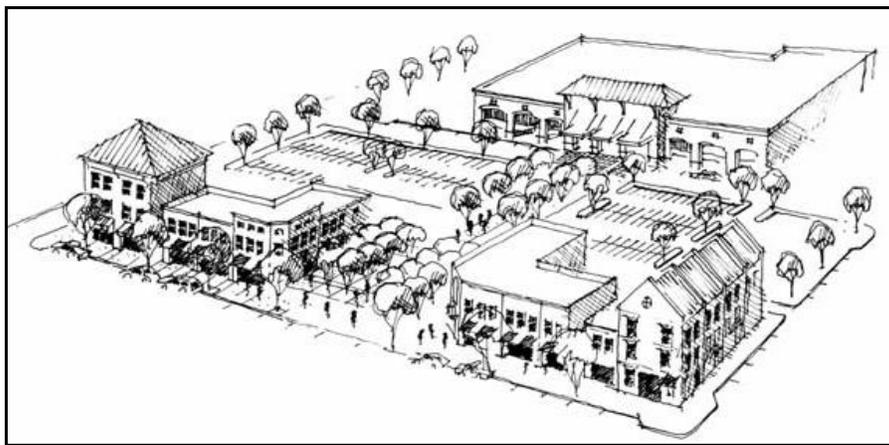


Illustration of a Neighborhood Center



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- **Community Centers.** Community centers provide a broad range of services for residents Citywide. Community centers include commercial clusters, specialty retailers, civic uses and community services. Examples include Downtown and the Safeway Center on East Avenue.
- **Regional Centers.** Regional centers include a wide range of uses that serve both the City and the greater region. Typical uses include large retailers, regional shopping centers, theaters and entertainment centers. Examples include the Chico Mall and North Valley Plaza.
- **Special Purpose Centers.** Special purpose centers are unique destinations that serve local and regional needs. Typical uses include job centers, schools, and hospitals. Examples include Hegan Lane Business Park, CSU Chico, and Enloe Medical Center.

Key center design considerations include:

- **Sense of Place.** Centers reflect their relationship to the community as focal points for gathering. Design elements emphasize functional, cultural or historical references, distinct architectural styling, the natural setting, public art, and landmarks.
- **Pedestrian Design.** Centers have architectural form and massing designed at a pedestrian-level scale; facilities that accommodate pedestrian access and circulation; and plazas, parks, and courtyards for social gathering.
- **Site Landscaping and Art.** Centers have appropriate landscaping and integrate art that enhances architectural concepts, creates pedestrian scale, and reinforces a sense of place.

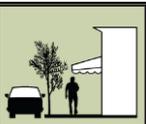


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Edges

Chico is defined by its edges. The edge of a city can be “hard,” where there is an abrupt or clearly defined transition between urban and rural or undeveloped uses, or “soft,” where the transition between urban and rural is more gradual. Chico seeks to transition the density and intensity of uses from an urban to rural character while maintaining a clear City edge and establishing a sense of entry and arrival to the City.



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GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

- Goal CD-1: Strengthen Chico's image and sense of place by reinforcing the desired form and character of the community.**
- Goal CD-2: Enhance edges and corridors that represent physical boundaries, transitions and connections throughout the community.**
- Goal CD-3: Ensure project design that reinforces a sense of place with context sensitive elements and a human scale.**
- Goal CD-4: Maintain and enhance the character of Chico's diverse neighborhoods.**
- Goal CD-5: Support infill and redevelopment compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.**
- Goal CD-6: Enhance gateways and wayfinding systems for an improved sense of arrival and orientation for residents and visitors throughout Chico.**
- Goal CD-7: Celebrate public art and expand the significant role the arts play in the quality of life and economic vitality of Chico.**

- **Goal CD-1: Strengthen Chico's image and sense of place by reinforcing the desired form and character of the community.**
 - **Policy CD-1.1 (Natural Features and Cultural Resources) – Reinforce the City's positive and distinctive image by recognizing and enhancing the natural features of the City and protecting cultural and historic resources.**
 - ▲ **Action CD-1.1.1 (Highlight Features and Resources)** – Incorporate and highlight natural features such as scenic vistas, creeks, and trees, as well as cultural resources such as rock walls, into project design.
 - ▲ **Action CD-1.1.2 (Landscape Improvement)** – Emphasize landscaping as a fundamental design component, retaining mature landscaping when appropriate, to reinforce a sense of the natural environment and to maintain an established appearance.
 - **Policy CD-1.2 (Reinforce Attributes) – Strengthen the positive qualities of the City's neighborhoods, corridors, and centers.**
 - ▲ **Action CD-1.2.1 (Design Considerations)** – Review the Community Design Concepts for neighborhoods, corridors, and centers from this element during project review.

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- ▲ **Action CD 1.2.2 (Pride of Ownership)** – Create a program to recognize property owners for exemplary property care and maintenance along key streets, gateways, and neighborhoods such as the Eastwood Park Subdivision along E. 8th and 9th Streets, the south Esplanade, Mansion Park, and along Woodland Avenue.

Cross
reference
LU-3.4.2

- **Goal CD-2: Enhance edges and corridors that represent physical boundaries, transitions and connections throughout the community.**

- **Policy CD-2.1 (Walkable Grid and Creek Access) – Reinforce a walkable grid street layout and provide linkages to creeks and other open spaces.**

Cross
reference
CIRC-4.2
and OS 2.1

- ▲ **Action CD-2.1.1 (Circulation and Access)** – As part of project review, integrate a predominately grid-based street pattern into new development to enhance walkability and public health.

Cross-
reference
DT-6.1,
CIRC-2.2.1
and SUS 1.6

- ▲ **Action CD-2.1.2 (Bike Trails, Paths and Medians)** – Establish linkages and an improved sense of place through enhanced bike trails, pedestrian paths, landscaped medians and parkways.

Cross
reference
CIRC-3.3

- ▲ **Action CD-2.1.3 (Greenways)** – Continue the City’s existing program to expand creekside corridors by acquiring properties along creek edges for creekside greenways.

Cross
reference
OS-2.2.1 and
PPFS-2.1.1

- ▲ **Action CD-2.1.4 (Creek Views and Access)** – As part of the design review of development and capital projects, improve visual and recreational public access to creeks.

Cross
reference
DT-6.2.4 and
PPFS 2.1.2

- **Policy CD-2.2 (City Edge) – Maintain a clear City edge and establish a sense of entry and arrival to the City.**

Cross
reference
LU-1.2

- ▲ ~~**Action CD-2.2.1 (Update Design Guidelines)** – Update the City Design Guidelines Manual to incorporate desired edge treatment solutions for a variety of conditions.~~

- **Policy CD-2.3 (Corridor Improvements) – Improve corridors traversing the City to enhance their aesthetics and accessibility.**

- ▲ **Action CD-2.3.1 (Screen State Route 99)** – Minimize the visual impact of State Route 99 to new adjacent development through screening and buffering.



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Cross
reference
CIRC-2.3.1

▲ **Action CD-2.3.2 (Specialized Treatment for Scenic Roads)** – Incorporate context sensitive roadway improvements on Chico’s scenic roads, including Vallombrosa Avenue, E. 8th Street, the Esplanade, Chico Canyon Road, Centennial Avenue, Manzanita Avenue, Humboldt Road, and Bidwell Avenue.

Cross
reference
LU-5.1.4

▲ **Action CD-2.3.3 (Commercial Corridor Improvements)** – Update the Design Guidelines Manual to incorporate concepts from the Park Avenue Visioning Study to apply to future roadway improvements along the City’s commercial corridors.

Cross
reference
OS-2.4 and
LU-1.2.2

● **Policy CD-2.4 (Context Sensitive Foothill Development)** – **Protect viewsheds from foothill development, through the careful location and design of roads, buildings, lighting, landscaping, and other infrastructure.**

Cross
reference
OS-2.4.1 and
LU 6.2.4

▲ **Action CD-2.4.1 (Protection of Foothill Viewshed)** – Design and blend foothill development with the surrounding landscape and topography to diminish its visual prominence from the valley floor.

▲ **Action CD-2.4.2 (Foothill Light Levels)** – Design low light levels in foothill settings to optimize views of dark skies and minimize light pollution.

▲ **Action CD-2.4.3 (Foothill Streets)** – In order to minimize cut and fill grading operations in foothill areas, design new streets at the minimum dimension necessary for access and parking.

▲ **Action CD-2.4.4 (Block Lengths)** – Minimize the length of street blocks in foothill development.

▲ **Action CD-2.4.5 (Contours of Natural Slope)** – Limit the extent and amount of grading in foothill areas, and where grading occurs, emulate the contours of the natural slope.

■ **Goal CD-3: Ensure project design that reinforces a sense of place with context sensitive elements and a human scale.**

● **Policy CD-3.1 (Lasting Design and Materials)** – **Promote architectural design that exhibits timeless character and is constructed with high quality materials.**

Cross
reference
LU-2.4.4 and
DT-3.1.1

▲ **Action CD-3.1.1 (Design Guidelines)** – Utilize the City Design Guidelines Manual for architectural review of discretionary projects.

▲ **Action CD-3.1.2 (Update Design Guidelines)** – Update the City Design Guidelines Manual as necessary to maintain consistency with the General Plan,

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the City's Land Use and Development Regulations, and current architectural solutions.

- **Policy CD-3.2 (Bicycles and Pedestrians) – Maintain and enhance the pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environment of Chico.**

- ▲ **Action CD-3.2.1 (Pedestrian-Scale Site Planning)** – Utilize design techniques provided in the City's Design Guidelines Manual that support pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly site planning.

- **Policy CD-3.3 (Pedestrian Environment and Amenities) – Locate parking areas and design public spaces within commercial and mixed-use projects in a manner that promotes pedestrian activity.**

- ▲ **Action CD-3.3.1 (Public Spaces)** – Amend the Municipal Code to establish a required minimum outdoor area dedicated to public (employee and customer) gathering as part of new non-residential development.

- **Policy CD-3.4 (Public Safety) – Include public safety considerations in community design.**

- ▲ **Action CD-3.4.1 (Crime Prevention Design)** – Incorporate appropriate crime prevention principles in new development projects to enhance community safety. Consider Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles when amending development standards.

- ▲ **Action CD-3.4.2 (Public Safety Project Review)** – During design review, consult with the Police Department to avoid physical conditions such as dark parking lots or alleys, enclosed stairwells, and dark entrances that are susceptible to criminal activity.

- ▲ **Action CD-3.4.3 (Safe Parking Lot Design)** – Require that commercial parking lots be designed with adequate opportunities for surveillance by police.

- **Goal CD-4: Maintain and enhance the character of Chico's diverse neighborhoods.**

- **Policy CD-4.1 (Distinctive Character) – Reinforce the distinctive character of neighborhoods with design elements reflected in the streetscape, landmarks, public art, and natural amenities.**

Cross
reference
CIRC-4.3
and DT-3.1

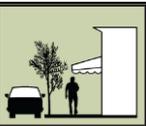
Cross
reference
CIRC-9.3

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reference
DT-3.1.2

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reference
S-5.5 and
DT-3.4

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S-5.5.1

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LU-3.4



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Cross
reference
LU-3.3.1

Cross
reference
OS-6.1 and
SUS-6.4

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reference
LU-4.2 and
LU-5.1.1

Cross
reference
LU-4.2.1 and
DT-4.2.1

Cross
reference
DT-4.2.1

Cross
reference
CRHP-2.2.1
and DT-8.1

Cross
reference
LU-6.2.6

- ▲ **Action CD-4.1.1 (Neighborhood Design Details)** – Develop and implement neighborhood plans that identify neighborhood design qualities and characteristics.
 - ▲ **Action CD-4.1.2 (Urban Forest)** – Protect and enhance the urban forest that characterizes the community and particularly its older neighborhoods.
 - ▲ **Action CD-4.1.3 (Sense of Place)** – As part of the design review of development and capital projects, encourage the integration of civic, cultural, natural, art, and other themes that create a sense of place for each neighborhood and contribute to the overall character of the community.
- **Goal CD-5: Support infill and redevelopment compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.**
- **Policy CD-5.1 (Compatible Infill Development)** – Ensure that new development and redevelopment reinforces the desirable elements of its neighborhood including architectural scale, style, and setback patterns.
 - ▲ **Action CD-5.1.1 (Residential Infill Design Guidelines)** – Update the City’s Design Guidelines Manual to specifically address residential infill design in terms of building scale, height and setbacks, parking and access, transitions, and landscaping.
 - **Policy CD-5.2 (Context Sensitive Transitions)** – Encourage context sensitive transitions in architectural scale and character between new and existing residential development.
 - **Policy CD-5.3 (Context Sensitive Design)** – For infill development, incorporate context sensitive design elements that maintain compatibility and raise the quality of the area’s architectural character.
 - ▲ **Action CD-5.3.1 (Adaptive Reuse)** – Continue the City’s Façade Improvement Program to support redevelopment and adaptive reuse of transitioning or aging commercial developments.
- **Goal CD-6: Enhance gateways and wayfinding elements for an improved sense of arrival and orientation for residents and visitors throughout Chico.**
- **Policy CD-6.1 (Gateways at Landmarks)** – Create a sense of arrival to Chico and develop prominent community focal points at key locations within the City.

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▲ **Action CD-6.1.1 (Gateway Integration)** – As part of roadway improvement projects, integrate artistic gateway features at the following locations:

- State Route 99 near Southgate and Entler Avenues
- Park Avenue near 20th Street
- East 8th and 9th Streets between State Route 99 and Main Street
- State Route 99 near Garner Lane
- Highway 32 between ~~WE~~. East Avenue and Lindo Channel
- Highway 32 near Yosemite Drive.

▲ **Action CD-6.1.2 (Landmarks)** – Construct landmarks to support wayfinding at key locations throughout the City such as entries to historic neighborhoods, points of interest, significant buildings, and natural features.

● **Policy CD-6.2 (No Gated Subdivisions)** – **Do not allow new gated subdivisions because they isolate parts of the community from others, create an unfriendly appearance, and do not support social equity.**

■ **Goal CD-7: Celebrate public art and expand the significant role the arts play in the quality of life and economic vitality of Chico.**

● **Policy CD-7.1 (Public Art)** – **Include art in public projects.**

▲ **Action CD-7.1.1 (Art in Public Places)** – Include art in public projects and in all private development projects that use public funding by continuing implementation of the City’s Art in Public Places Program Policy and Procedures Manual.

▲ **Action CD-7.1.2 (Funding for Public Art)** – Continue the City’s program of allocating a percentage of capital improvement project budgets to fund the development and installation of public art projects.

● **Policy CD-7.2 (Community and Art)** – **Foster civic pride with the use of public art that highlights Chico’s natural resources, cultural heritage, and community character.**

▲ **Action CD-7.2.1 (Public Art Plan)** – Develop and maintain a Public Art Strategic Plan to guide comprehensive integration of public art throughout the community.

● **Policy CD-7.3 (City Art Programs)** – **Provide City programs that foster the arts in Chico.**

Cross reference
DT-6.2

Cross reference
DT-6.2.1 and
DT-6.3.1

Cross reference
SUS-1.1

Cross reference
PPFS-7.1.2

Cross reference
PPFS-7.1

Cross reference
DT-1.5.3



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- ▲ **Action CD-7.3.1 (Update Arts Master Plan)** – Update, as necessary, the Arts Master Plan which guides the design and development of the City's cultural and arts programs.