

This Memo went
before the Town
Council at their March
12 meeting



Memo

To: Town Council
From: Julia Puester, AICP, Planning Manager
Date: February 21 for March 12, 2019
Subject: Work Session: Handbook of Design Standards in the Historic and Conservation Districts

Background

Breckenridge's National Register Historic District was formed in 1980. In 1992, the Town adopted the ["Handbook of Design Standards for the Historic and Conservation Districts"](#), based on the Secretary of Interior Standards (SOI), to establish design standards for all new construction and for preservation of existing structures.

In order to further protect the historic character of the District, the Town also adopted one of the most important standards for the District, and that is a limit of 9 units per acre (UPA) of above-ground density in much of the Historic District. We have also been designated a Certified Local Government (CLG) by the State of Colorado. Being a CLG means that the Town has been endorsed by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO, a division of History Colorado) and the National Park Service to participate in the national preservation program while maintaining standards consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Archaeology and Historic Preservation. As a CLG, we periodically have cultural resource surveys conducted that are funded by grants from the State, done on structures located in the District.

The most recent survey work completed in 2018, resulted in a number of downgrades from contributing to non-contributing structures from the SHPO because of some of the additions done in the last ten plus years, but also identified some new qualifying properties that are now 50 years old and were constructed after the Town's period of significance (1860-1942). The primary issues of concern resulting in the downgrades were size, proportion, form, orientation and height and width of connectors and additions; proximity of additions to the historic structure; amount of lot coverage (buildings and paved areas); and parking and access.

In an effort to bring our standards more into alignment with the recent interpretations of the SOI standards by the SHPO, we hired Winter & Company, who were also the authors of our original Handbook of Design Standards in the Conservation and Historic Districts. Their charge then was to review the recent SHPO's interpretations of the SOI that resulted in the downgrades, in relation to the Town's Handbook. Winter & Company presented several recommendations after meeting with SHPO.

In preparation, the Planning Commission attended a field trip on November 9 in which staff and Commission walked through the historic district looking at development throughout and discussing some of the issues of concern to the state. Staff and the Commission also attended the State Historic Preservation conference in February, and the Commission has held 2 work sessions on the topic, one on January 2nd and another on February 19th.

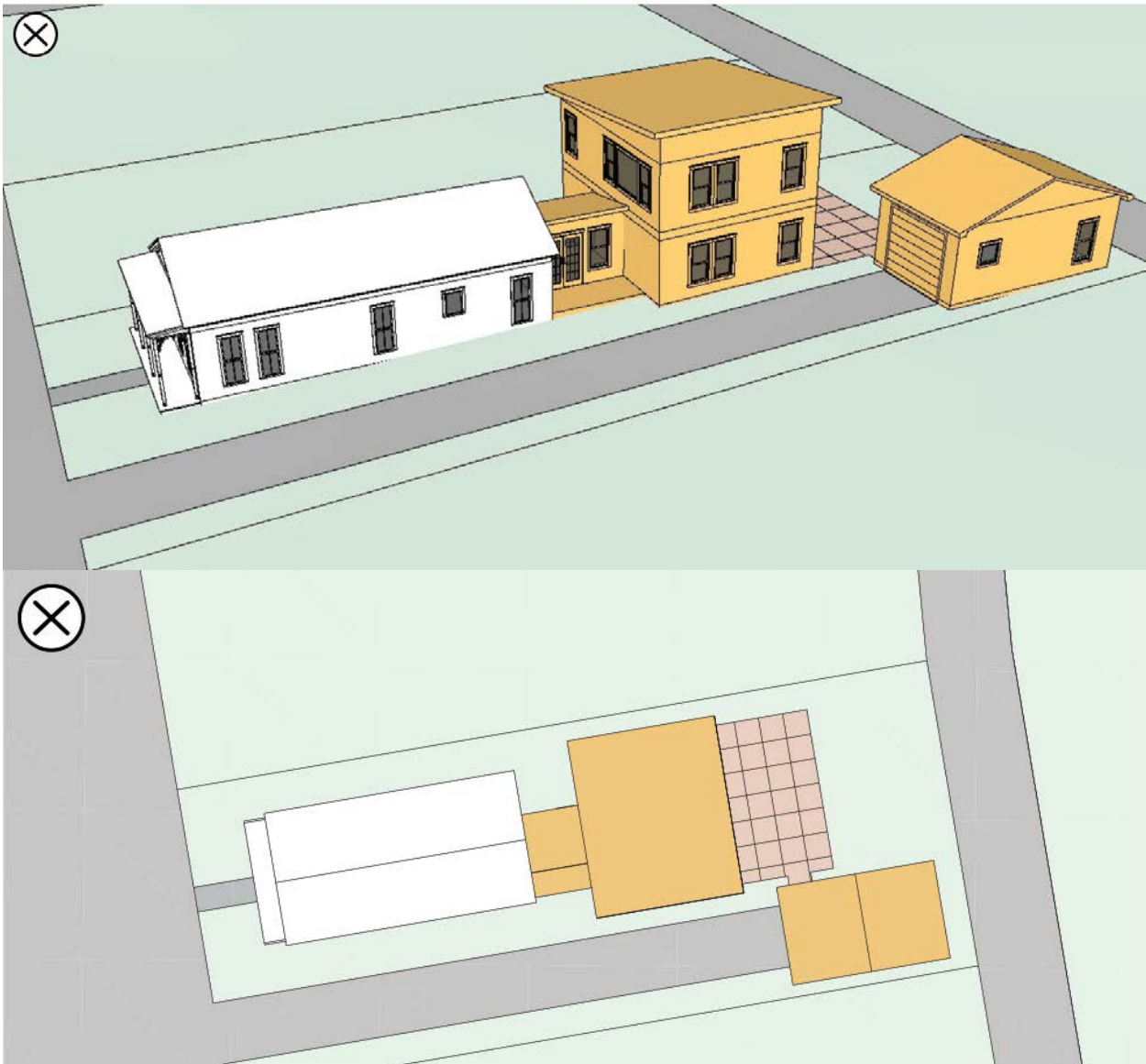
The Commission focused on several issues with Winter & Co. and staff that are found in the recommendations summarized below.

1. Density & Mass

Concerns from SHPO are that the density and massing on recent additions exceed a reasonable scale and are impacting the all important context of historic properties and buildings. While above ground density and massing is currently limited in our standards, it is not limited enough to result in subordinate additions to the historic structure.

To address this, Winter & Co as well as the Planning Commission recommend eliminating massing bonuses within the Historic District as well as eliminating the ability to go up to 12 UPA with negative points. However, it is recommended as a compromise, that we increase the standard 9 UPA above grade density allowed currently, to 10 UPA which would give applicants the flexibility to use all 10 UPA as density or use some for mass (e.g. for garages). The remaining density allowed on the site overall per the Land Use Guidelines would not change, but as is allowed today, it could be built below grade. Another change recommended by staff, Planning Commission, and the consultant would limit any new above ground building or addition to not exceed 100% of the square footage of the above grade square footage of the surviving primary historic structure.

Overall Inappropriate Addition & Connector



2. Additions to Historic Buildings and Connectors – Proposed New Policies

New standards are proposed to limit the impacts of connectors and additions. These include Standards for additions:

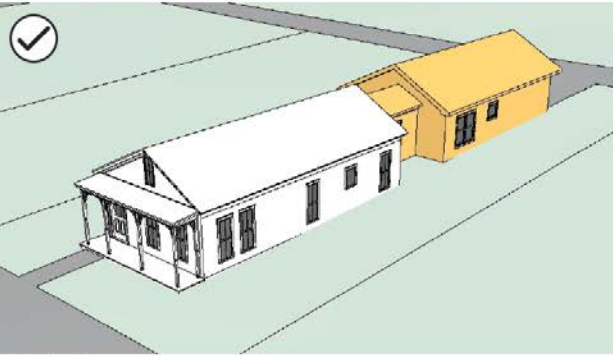
- The proportion of the addition should respect the proportions of the historic building.
- Limit any new above ground building or addition to not exceed 100% of the square footage of the above grade square footage of the surviving primary historic structure.
- Additions and new secondary structures' building heights should be limited to no more than ½ story taller than the surviving historic structure.
- The position of the addition- especially regarding the alignment of the sidewalls-should be compared to the sidewalls of the historic building.
- Define when it is appropriate to incorporate an addition that is wider than the historic building. It is good practice to maintain at least one of the sidewalls of the historic building. Maintaining the plane of both sidewalls is preferred.
- Only one connector is permitted, and it must project from the rear of the historic building.
- Roof forms should be simple and their orientation on the new structure or addition are encouraged to be perpendicular to the historic structure.
- Designs that appear as two separate buildings (which may incorporate an underground connector between the structures) would receive positive points.
- Designs that maintain the general ratio, or perception, of building to open space on the lot are preferred.

The problems with inappropriate connectors as identified by the SHPO are that they contribute to the feel of these appearing as one large building on the site that historically had only one or more modestly sized structures. Our goal with these proposed standards then is to limit connectors in size and function to that which is needed to efficiently connect the historic home to the addition but leave enough separation between the two structures to make them appear as two separate modules. This will allocate more of the above ground density to the new addition, and reduce the use of connectors as living space.

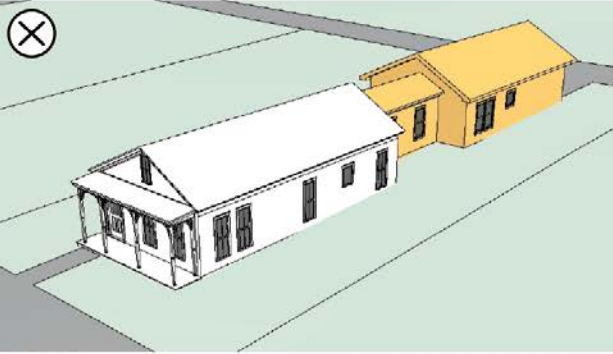
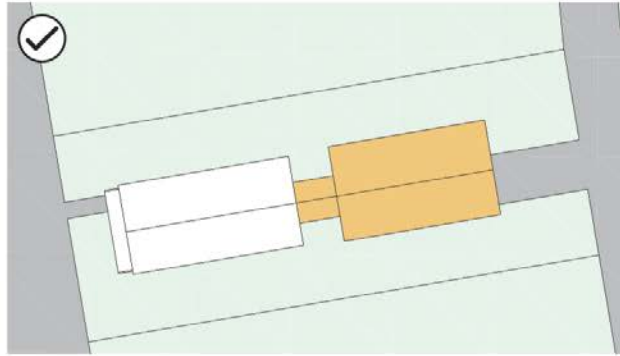
Standards for connectors:

- Require designs that include clearly subordinate connector additions.
- Rooflines should step down to follow the topography and remain lower than the historic structure.
- A maximum of 12 feet in length for the connector.
- A maximum width of 8 feet for the connector to preserve as much historic fabric as possible.

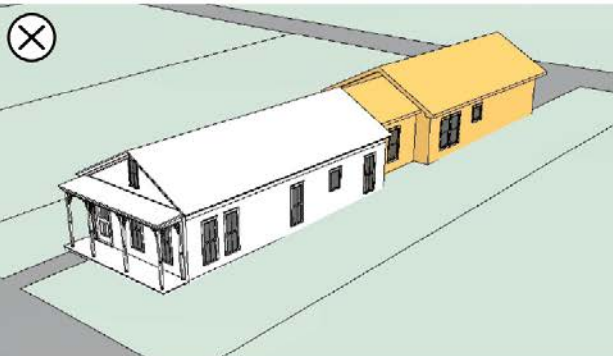
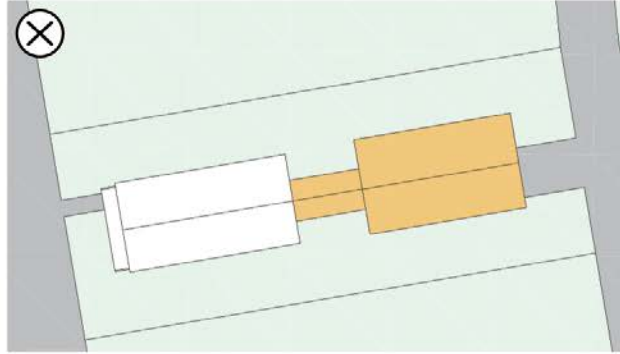
Connector Size Model



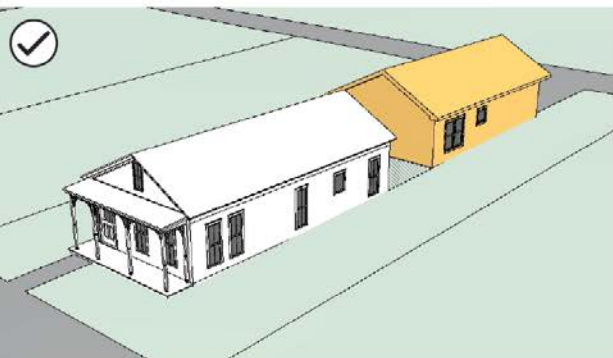
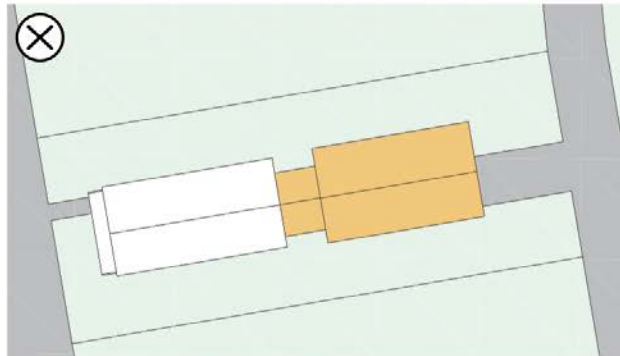
8x12 Connector



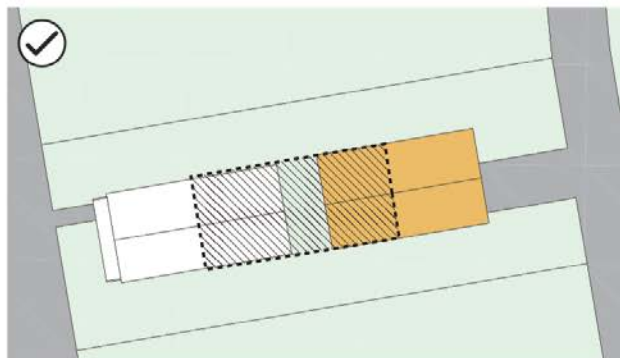
8x19 Long Connector



14x12 Wide Connector



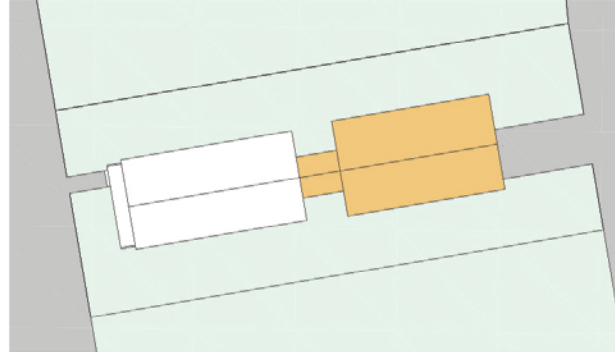
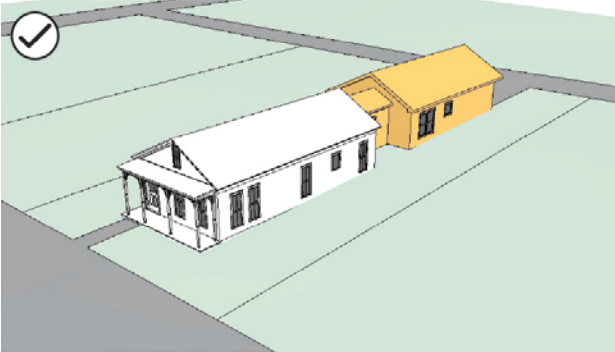
8x12 Under-Ground Connector



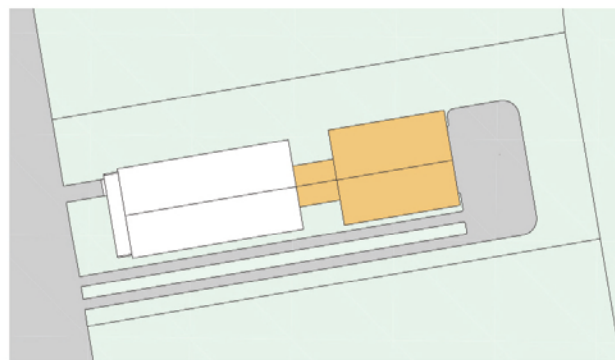
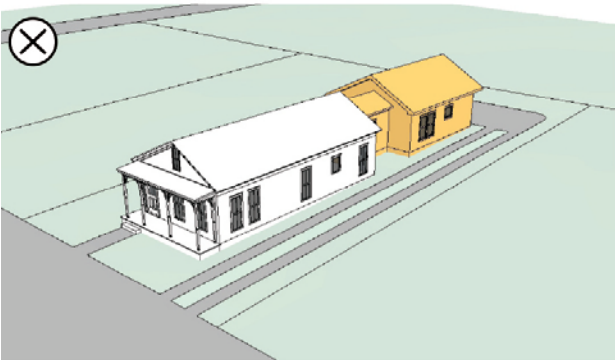
3. Loss of Planted Area on Site Due to Paving Materials

- Require paving strips for vehicular access as opposed to full width paving of driveways.
- Encourage vehicular access from the rear of properties if possible and further discourage parking in the front yards.
- If non-porous paving material is to be allowed, disincentivize this in the Standards with negative points.

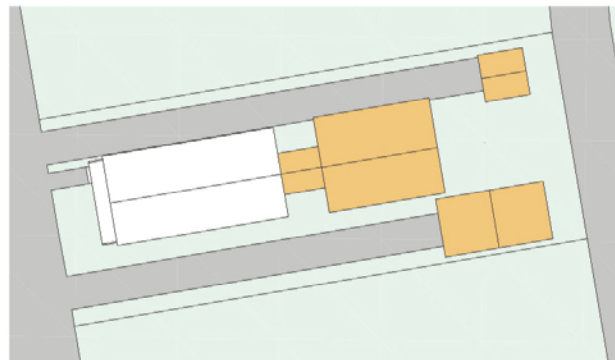
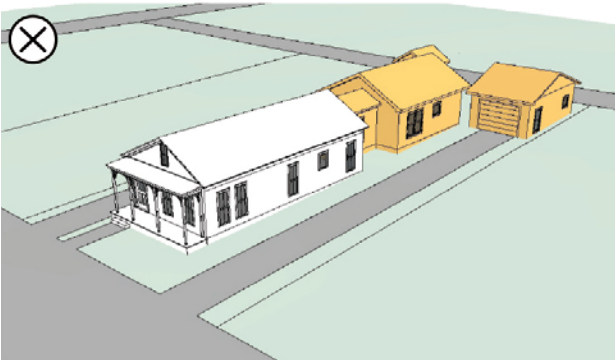
Surface Paving Model



Alley Access Paving



Side Drive Access with Ribbon Paving



Side Drive Access with 2 Full Pave Driveways

4. Moving Historic Buildings

The SHPO cited the moving of historic buildings as a strong contributor to the down grading of several of our previously “contributing” rated properties. Therefore, the Staff, the consultant, and the Commission are recommending to:

- Prohibit moving primary historic buildings from their historic locations.
- Create a variance process and criteria which would allow for the moving of historic buildings only under special extenuating circumstances, such as an encroachment or hazardous condition affecting the structure.

5. Parking in Front Yards

Design Standard 116 discourages parking spaces in the front yards. Policy 116 states,

“Minimize the visual impact of parking as seen from the street.

- *Avoid parking in front yards. Locate parking in rear yards where feasible.*
- *If parking must be sited in the front, use paving designs that will help to retain a yard character and visually separate parking from the street edge.”*

In the most recent cultural resource survey work and follow up discussions, the SHPO commented negatively on the loss of the open space character in the District. This does not only refer to the size of additions and connectors but also to paved surfaces and historic character. Staff received direction from the Planning Commission to reduce the size of additions, encourage below grade connectors and density, and reduce paving with the use of paver strips.

Staff has seen recent applications for parking spaces in front yards (rather than in the rear or side yards) which received negative three (-3) points under the existing Handbook Standards. The applicants relatively easily made up those negative points with positive points under 22R Landscaping and for a HERS rating. Staff believes that the impact on the character of the area is greater than the negative three (-3) points that have been awarded and, the current policy is easy to overcome with positive points. To address this disproportionate balance, staff recommended to further disincentivize parking in front yards with additional negative points or by making it a violation of a priority policy. The Planning Commission generally supported assigning more negative points for parking in front yards, although a couple commissioners were interested in not allowing altogether, except through a variance process. Notwithstanding the Planning Commission’s recommendation, staff has had further discussion since then on this issue. We are now recommending that we move to a Priority Policy, which would prohibit parking in front yards except through a variance process where it can be demonstrated that the property has unique characteristics that justify an exception.

6. Priority Design Standard 20 / Rating System

This Design Standard is part of our protection against demolition of historic buildings. The Design Standard states, *“Respect the historic design character of the building. Any alteration that would cause a reduction in a building’s rating is not allowed.”* Below are the four existing categories from pages 5 and 6 of the Handbook. (Note that the current Period of Significance is from 1860-1942).

Contributing building category; Contributing with qualifications category; Supporting category; Non-contributing building category

To make implementation of this policy a more simple and straight forward process that is consistent with the Secretary of Interior Standards (SOI), which only has two categories, the majority of the Commission supported consolidating the *landmark*, *contributing* and *contributing with qualifications* categories into one “Contributing” classification and the *supporting* and *noncontributing* into another “Noncontributing” classification for the purpose of Design Standard 20.

The descriptions below provide an explanation of the two categories proposed to be retained:

Contributing building category

These buildings date from the period of historic significance in Breckenridge and also retain substantial portions of their historic design character such that they have a high level of historic integrity. Some minor alterations exist, but the overall historic quality is easily discerned. The rehabilitation strategy that is generally most appropriate for such buildings is to preserve original features intact and remove the minor non-contributing alterations that have occurred.

Non-contributing building category

These are buildings that have features that deviate from the character of the historic district and may impede our ability to interpret the history of the area. They are typically newer structures that introduce stylistic elements foreign to early years of Breckenridge. Some of these buildings may be fine examples of individual building design, if considered outside the context of the historic district, but they do not contribute to the historic interpretation of the area or to its visual character. The detracting visual character can negatively affect the nature of the historic district and therefore such buildings are to be avoided.

Staff recommends keeping the descriptions of the five existing categories in the Handbook of Design Standards for the purpose of assisting in the understanding and categorization of preservation activities. However, we would utilize the contributing and non-contributing categories to determine if proposed development applications would cause the property to drop a rating similar to the way the cultural resource surveys are conducted and accepted by the State. Winter & Co. have prepared an attachment (Exhibit A) that would illustrate some of the rating drop situations that staff would be able to utilize in making our determinations to applicants and the Planning Commission when a proposed addition or alteration to a historic building would drop a rating category (e.g. demolishing a historic structure or removing excessive amounts of historic fabric). Additional written descriptions would be included in the Handbook as well.

With Town Council input and concurrence on the previous six topics, Staff would convert these into ordinance form for yours' and Planning Commission's consideration. Regarding the next two topics, we anticipate a longer time frame for the development of new policies should you so direct.

**(Note: Period of Early Ski Area Focus below will be a future discussion with the Town Council and are not part of the Open House recommendations.)*

7. Period of Significance/Period of Early Ski Area Focus*

With the latest round of cultural resource survey work, we were informed by the consultant and the SHPO that several structures within the Conservation District, had turned 50 years of age, and are now rated as contributing structures to the Town's Historic District. As time goes by, this is going to continue to occur, and at an accelerating rate. The SOI criteria for designation is rather easy for many of them to meet, as they need only be 50 years old and not have been significantly altered or added onto since they were originally constructed.

In response, Winter & Co. has recommended that the Town adopt a new "Period of Early Ski Area Focus" to address the importance of early ski town history. The result, if implemented, would be two categories of historical importance – the existing Period of Significance (1860-1942) and a newly created Period of Early Ski Area Focus. The interpretation of a Town's history is largely dependent on the preservation of buildings that tell the story of the Town through its different periods of economic growth. The existing Period of Significance is good at interpreting the Town's mining history but it is also important to interpret our skiing history.

Regarding the new period of focus, Staff recommends that only structures 50 years or more in age that have specific character defining features would be eligible to be a local contributing structure and in some cases, eligible for local landmarking. This would protect structures with characteristics of early ski area development that held significance in Town history such as chalet homes, A-frames and possibly some mid-century modern structures.

For the purpose of this discussion, staff has separated this new area of focus into two categories, those structures that are located inside the Conservation District and those which lie outside of it.

For those structures inside of the Conservation District, the Planning Commission recommends providing a new policy in the Handbook of Design Standards that would 1) define both a Period of Early Ski Area Focus and the original Period of Significance (mining era Victorians), 2) identify the character defining elements of the early ski era architecture (possibly on a building by building basis), 3) specify a process for review of such structures and 4) create flexible architectural design standards for such structures as they differ in character from the existing design standards for Victorian homes.

For structures outside of the Conservation District, the idea would be to landmark buildings that meet the 50 year criteria, and have character defining elements that are representative of early ski area development. This would likely be a voluntary, incentive based program that would be looser in terms of design policies that we have in the existing Conservation District. Does the Town Council desire to move forward with this new policy direction? If so, the Staff will return at a later date with a conceptual program to move in that direction.

*(Note: Landmarking Discussion below will be a future discussion with the Town Council and are not part of the Open House recommendations.)

8. Landmarking*

Our current historic structure landmarking ordinance has qualifying criteria that are rather easy to comply with for achieving Local Landmark status. In return we award free basement density for that area under the surviving historic structure. In recent years we have seen a steady stream of development proposed in the Historic District that takes advantage of placing density underground. At this time we feel that historic preservation and building additions would occur with or without the incentive. Meanwhile, the incentive is enabling even more program on these already crowded building sites. As a result, we feel that the incentive could be put to better use, and would like to return to the Council at a later date with some ideas on how to achieve closer compliance to the SOI standards in return for the free basement density.

Town Council Action

Council feedback is requested regarding the following items:

- Does Council support further limiting mass and density of additions in the Historic District?
- Does Council support developing new policies regarding additions and connectors to historic structures?
- Does Council agree with limiting paving on historic properties?
- Does Council support only allowing moving of a primary historic structure through a variance process?
- Does Council agree with not allowing parking in the front yards of historic properties, except through a variance process (or more negative points)?
- Does Council agree with simplifying the five category rating system down to two categories?
- Is Council agreeable to staff further exploring the idea of a Period of Early Ski Area Focus and coming back to Planning Commission and Council with some ideas of how this could be implemented?

Once we receive Council input, Staff will seek more public input by holding a public open house along with the Planning Commission, that is currently scheduled for March 19. Staff will return with more detailed proposals at a future Council meeting.