

# 9

## THE NEW GIRDWOOD TOWNSITE

The New Girdwood Townsite was born in the aftermath of the 1964 earthquake, which left a large part of the original townsite unusable. After the quake, platting of lots and reconstruction of a new townsite began almost immediately on a site up the Glacier Creek Valley, about two and a half miles from the original site at Turnagain Arm. Several structures, including the Crow Creek Mercantile and the old school/library, were moved from the old townsite. The New Townsite plat provided for an interior town square park surrounded by small lots, and it set aside public corridors on each side to connect the park to surrounding streets.

Contrary to initial expectations, the New Townsite has experienced only minimal development activity since the plat was done over thirty years ago. In the townsite area, the Merc remains the only source of everyday supplies for locals and has been joined by the Chair 5 Restaurant and the post office as the only effective generators of significant activity in what was intended to be the heart of town. At least in part, this reflects the small size of Girdwood's year-round population, which totaled just under 600 people at the end of the 1970's and is estimated today at about 1,500 people.

While it is true that a population of this size cannot by itself support a major investment in local commercial enterprises, it is also probable that potential commercial development has been discouraged by the Municipality's development standards. In particular, on-site parking requirements, combined with the narrow dimensions of a typical lot in the townsite (some are as narrow as 50 feet), make it virtually impossible to construct a building large enough to assure a positive economic return.

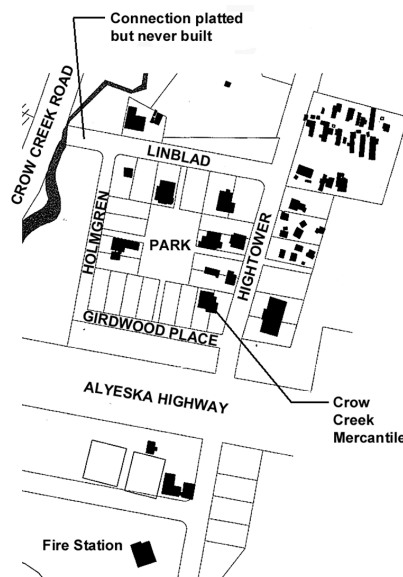


Fig. 9-1  
The post-quake plat for  
the New Girdwood  
Townsite

The parking issue may be the predominant hindrance, but there are still other contributing factors. Not the least of these may be the flood hazard to which much of the townsite is exposed (see Map 13, Existing Conditions). Other disincentives include the tendency of locals to do their shopping in Anchorage, where many of them work, the lack of municipal water service to the New Townsite, the short days and heavy snow

Fig. 9-2  
Crow Creek Mercantile



accumulation in a typical Alaskan winter, and the paucity of attractions that can generate visitor traffic. Development potential also suffers from the lack of sidewalks, lighting and other pedestrian amenities that help to unify and animate the core areas of successful small towns. In a classic chicken-and-egg spiral of cause and effect, the lack of development activity has made it hard to justify or finance the investment in public infrastructure.

There are a number of players on the horizon that could prompt new investment and enable this situation to change for the better. One is Alyeska Resort, which is anxious to achieve an increase in overnight guests in the valley. Another is the Alaska Railroad, which has been openly interested in the possibility of a rail spur from its main line into Girdwood. A third is Glacier Valley Development Corp., a real estate development group which has been awarded a lease to construct a golf course, with associated commercial and residential development. And finally, there are the public sector agencies (Heritage Land Bank and Mental Health Trust) that depend on revenue from land management and that have large tracts of land in the Girdwood Valley. Their mandates will inevitably lead them to pursue some development strategy for the disposition of the lands they control. For them, inaction is not an option.

The coalescence of all these variables makes this an opportune time to clarify the community's goals for the New Townsite and to formulate a plan that will guide its future development.

## OVERALL COMMUNITY GOALS FOR THE NEW TOWNSITE

In the first public workshop, in late March 1999, participants were asked to describe what role the New Townsite plays (or should play) in the community at large and how they would like to see it evolve in the future. Consistent with their vision for Girdwood as a whole, the following goals comprise their hopes for the New Townsite:

- *Make the New Townsite the true heart and center of the Girdwood community.* This goal has become a keystone of the Commercial Areas Master Plan. Most residents consistently expressed the view that the existing New Townsite is the best place to reinforce the sense of community, although this view is not universally held. (A few participants have suggested that the town center should be shifted to another, less flood-prone site.) The Master Plan recommends the New Townsite as the best alternative for the community core for several reasons. First and foremost is its central location within the larger community. Second, there are no other available sites large enough, dry enough, and with gentle enough topography. And third, multiple private property owners are already invested in the existing New Townsite and could lend energy and resources to its improvement.
- Encourage the development of a diverse mix of commercial and retail services that appeal to *both* locals and visitors.
- Encourage commercial development in the area south of Alyeska that is *complementary* to, rather than directly competitive with, that on the north side in the platted New Townsite. Acknowledging that the configuration of north side lots will not work for all desired types of commercial, do not allow development on the south side of the highway to drain off potential energy from the existing town square area.
- Include close-in housing in development plans wherever possible to support year-round commercial activity.
- Concentrate civic and community uses in the core. Keep the post office downtown.
- Improve year-round pedestrian connections throughout the core as well as linkages between it and the adjacent neighborhoods and school.

- *Let the natural environment remain the dominant character-giving element in the core.* Strengthen the connections to natural open space from the core. As one participant said, “Girdwood is a village carved out of the woods.” Emphasize its sense of containment in a powerful natural landscape.

## FACTORS THAT WILL INFLUENCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE NEW TOWNSITE AREA

Map 13 depicts existing environmental constraints and development considerations that are particular to the greater New Townsite area. While it is clear from the map that there are some significant environmental and physical issues (mainly flooding and the highway), it is equally clear from the list below that political, legal and economic issues may be even more influential in shaping the future of the area.

- *Flood hazard.* The New Townsite was platted in the 100-year floodplains of both California Creek and Glacier Creek. Although floodplain maps indicate that flood flows generally spread out at a shallow depth (1-2 feet) across the townsite area, an impromptu flood control levee constructed during the flood in 1995 is testimony to the power of these events to cause damage. *The Master Plan recommends that, as a first priority, a comprehensive flood management plan be prepared for the New Townsite to identify ecologically based flood control measures.*
- *Alyeska Highway.* This roadway was designed to rural highway standards at a time when there was minimal residential or community development in the Girdwood area. Its configuration and dimensions encourage vehicle speeds that are inconsistent with the effort to make the heart of town more pedestrian friendly. DOT is open to concepts

that would “calm” the road’s intrusive tendencies as long as its capacity is maintained, and efforts to do so will be essential to the linkage between the north and south halves of the town core.



Fig. 9-3  
Alyeska Highway  
section through the  
New Townsite

- *Ownership patterns and small lot size.* In the town square area, individual lots are too small and ownership too fragmented to allow for the development of larger retail or restaurant uses. This situation has also made it somewhat more difficult to forge a coordinated approach to public improvements. There are, however, a few larger, privately owned parcels north and east of the square on which larger facilities, such as lodging, could be developed. The “squirrel cages” on the south side of Alyeska Highway were never sold and will be replatted as part of the golf course master plan, making possible the creation of larger parcels, and therefore larger building footprints than are possible on the north side.
- *Draft Title 22 Land Use Regulations.* The draft regulations that pertain to the New Townsite propose a mix of

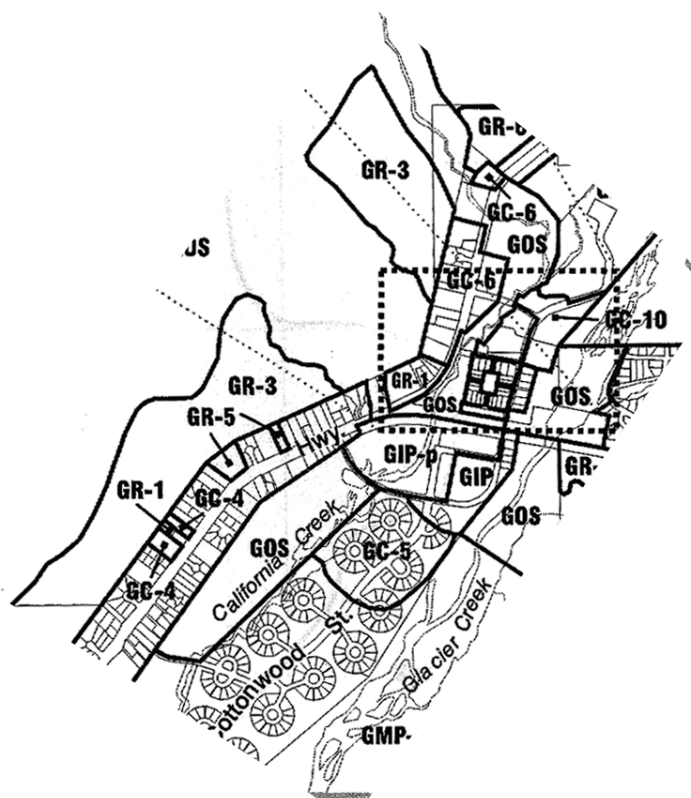


Fig. 9-4  
Small scale buildings  
in the New Townsite

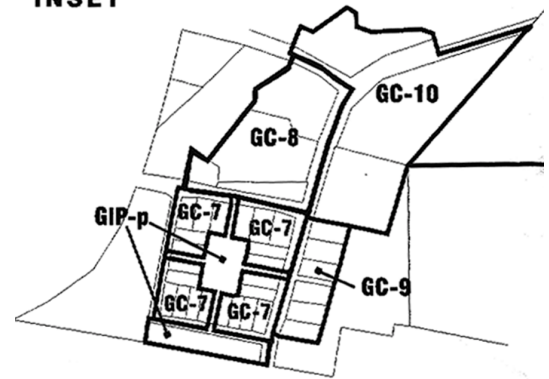
commercial, residential and public uses (including open space and parks). Within these broad categories, there are some important distinctions between commercial and commercial/residential districts that will influence how buildings relate to the street, what uses will occupy the ground floor, and how parking is handled. In the commercially designated districts, only commercial uses may occupy ground floor space, a key factor in the creation of a lively pedestrian environment.

- *Fate of the community center bond issue.* The proposed \$2.9 million community center will be an important link in the connection between the north and south portions of the New Townsite and an equally important center for community activity. Anchorage voters defeated it last year, but the measure will again be on the ballot for Girdwood voters in April 2000. Funds for the project will not be assured until Anchorage voters approve an area-wide bond issue for the library, scheduled in April of 2001. (The state must also approve matching funds.)

Fig. 9-5  
Use districts proposed  
in the draft Title 22 Land  
use Regulations. (See  
Inset for enlargement of  
town square area.)



#### INSET



- *Private developers' contribution to public infrastructure.* The ability to achieve needed improvements in public infrastructure will depend heavily on the willingness of property owners in the New Townsite area to consider forms of funding that will require their financial participation, such as a special district to pay for public parking. It will also depend on attracting developers of sufficient financial strength that they are able to absorb the up-front costs of their share of public improvements (such as sidewalks) in their plans. And it may require the continued support of Alyeska Resort, particularly with respect to improving community transit services.
- *Outcome of the lawsuit relating to the golf course lease and the evolution of development plans by Glacier Valley Development Corp., the leaseholder.* Much of the momentum for new development (and the potential for funding of public improvements) in the area south of Alyeska Highway depends on GVDC's ability to enlist development partners in commercial projects, such as a grocery store, and to create value through the synergy with high-quality recreational amenities.

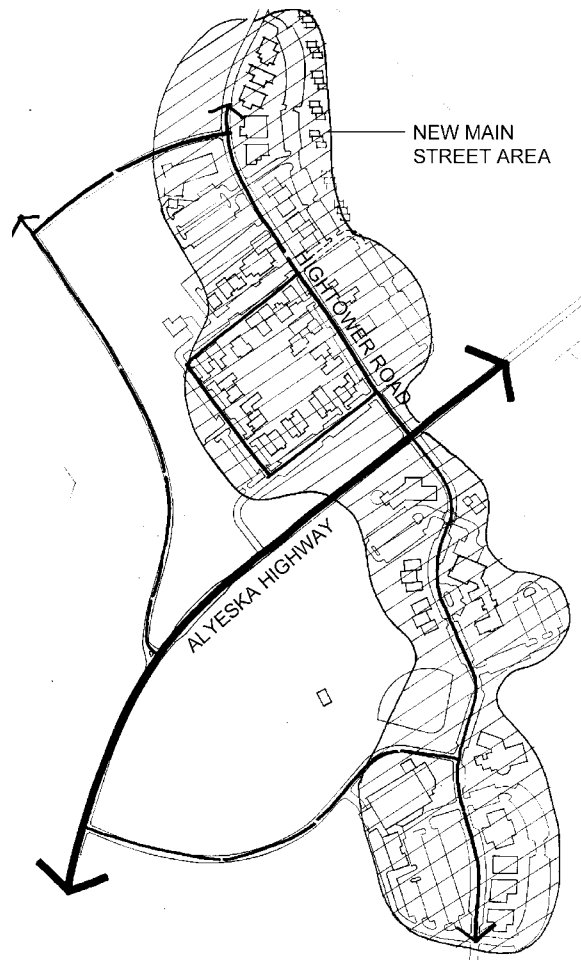
#### ORGANIZING CONCEPTS IN THE NEW TOWNSITE PLAN

Several fundamental concepts form the underpinning for master plan recommendations in the New Townsite.



Each of these is described in more detail in the paragraphs that follow and illustrated in the colored sketch plan that appears at the end of the chapter.

- *Create a real main street for Girdwood on Hightower Road.* Encourage the phased development of a continuous sequence of recreational, community, and retail experiences along the street, from the elementary school at the road's north end to and through the golf course lease area. Connect the uses and activities along the street with a pedestrian network of pathways, sidewalks, and arcades that is clearly demarcated from vehicular traffic areas.
- *Envision the town core as the area on both sides of Alyeska Highway.* The New Townsite should not be limited to the platted area around the town square, as the small lots there cannot accommodate some needed commercial services.
- *Strengthen the pedestrian linkages between the two halves to the greatest extent possible within the constraints imposed by DOT on Alyeska Highway.*
- *Provide improved public parking on the north side to support commercial growth and development around the town square.*
- *Celebrate the experience of entering Girdwood through natural landscape.* Protect views up and down the creek corridors from the road and preserve the forest edge on both sides of the highway at the entry to the New Townsite. Open up controlled viewlines into the central commercial area to let visitors know that there is a destination in the trees. Announce the creek crossings with notable bridges, not hidden culverts.
- *Retain Forest Fair Park virtually as it is today, and use it as the primary organizing element in the south townsite area.* Relocate only a few of the activities, like Little Bears, the



tennis courts, and the skate board park, that need better facilities. Enhance and enlarge the park itself by connecting it to existing and proposed greenbelts and trail networks along the creeks to the east and west. Also connect it to new residential, civic and commercial developments as they evolve in the core area. Ensure that the new community center is an integral part of the park, connected to it with year-round pedestrian pathways.

Fig. 9-6  
Diagram of the New  
Townsite Commercial  
Core with Hightower  
as the new main  
street.

Above all, the Master Plan recognizes the financial limitations that Girdwood faces. Lacking certain funding tools that most municipally incorporated resort communities have, such as sales taxes, Girdwood's ability to implement grand changes is limited. The plan accepts the reality that some existing conditions are not ideal, but cannot change.

## A Word about Master Plans

The sketch plans accompanying the following descriptions of development in the New Townsite are conceptual and are intended only to convey general notions of character, scale and organization of future commercial development and public infrastructure. The drawings do not represent architectural designs or schematic site plans for individual properties; considerable latitude remains for owners and developers to experiment with building footprints, building massing, site plans, and relationships to neighboring structures within general guidelines set for Girdwood by the MOA Land Use Regulations.

The amount of commercial development shown on the plans represents a maximum that is physically feasible, but this does not necessarily mean that Girdwood will need or support this much commercial space in the long term. Future demand is very difficult to forecast in a commercial environment that has shown very slow growth to date, and it is obvious that visitor numbers in the Girdwood Valley will have to increase in order to support future growth of any reasonable magnitude. *The intent of the Master Plan is, rather, to create a framework that encourages desired patterns of growth, regardless of the timeframe for full build-out or how much commercial space is ultimately built.* The end product of the master planning process is *not* a site plan. It is, rather, a *guideplan* that identifies connective road and pathway networks, public spaces and infrastructure, community facilities, open space, and appropriate general locations for new private development on the large, as yet unplatted tracts of land in the townsite vicinity.

## Hightower as Girdwood's New Main Street

Girdwood's multiple commercial areas are spread out but neither connected nor part of a cohesive district. Individually, none is strong enough to generate a level of activity that synergizes its neighborhood and encourages new growth.

Consequently, the master planning process began, as did previous Girdwood plans, with the question, *Where should we encourage a concentration of commercial and civic activity?* A majority of community participants felt that the New Townsite, despite its acknowledged drawbacks, is the right place to focus attention. This conclusion reiterates a similar finding in the Girdwood Area Plan and is reinforced by other previous planning work done by the Municipality.

In an attempt to visualize how new development might be organized, three basic conceptual alternatives were discussed in the second set of public workshops in late May 1999:

1. *No Change.* This alternative assumed: (1) no deliberate change in the existing development pattern on the north side of the highway and (2) no change in the location of commercial development on the south side, almost a quarter-mile south of the highway where the Girdwood Area Plan had designated a commercial district. This pattern was reiterated in the terms of the golf course lease, which assumed that any commercial development on the south side would take place in the same general area. Public discussion of this alternative made it clear that the community feared a negative effect on the potential vitality of the town square area if there were no effort to reduce the distance between the two development pods.
2. *Alyeska Highway as the New Main Street.* Disregarding for the moment that land on both sides of the highway is designated for parks and open space, this alternative moved commercial development close to the highway on both sides. This concept would give main street commercial development the greatest visibility and make clear to visitors that they had arrived in the heart of town, which might encourage them to slow down. However, there were numerous potential obstacles to this concept: (1) It could be difficult to change the designation on dedicated

parkland (which requires a vote of the entire Anchorage municipality). (2) There is a 200-foot-wide DOT right-of-way along the highway, which would make it difficult to unite the two sides of the street with an effective pedestrian streetscape. (3) Other small towns bisected by state highways are waging an uphill battle to mitigate the divisive effects of traffic speeds and volume – a lesson hard to ignore. (4) Access to and parking in front of shops along the Highway frontage may be problematic because of highway traffic. (5) The highway is raised like a levee, and the difference in grade between it and the land on both sides of it may make it difficult to create a comfortable relationship between the street and the buildings that would face it. (6) Because phasing could be sporadic, the most visible part of town could be left unfinished for a long time. (7) There is some concern about the visual quality of so many new buildings along the highway. (8) Residents were also concerned about the potential loss of forest cover at the highway edge and its replacement with a hard built edge as an entry experience. This concept did not seem consistent with their image of Girdwood's character. (9) Finally, some Girdwood participants were sensitive about moving Forest Fair Park south to a new location.

3. *Hightower as the New Main Street.* The idea of using Hightower Road to create a new main street perpendicular to the state highway became the community's preferred concept, for a number of reasons: (1) Slower vehicular traffic on the street should make possible a better pedestrian environment. (2) The view up and down Hightower from its intersection with the highway would give shops adequate visibility and entice visitors. (3) Commercial development may be easier to phase in this scenario. (4) The concept overlays nicely with the objective of linking the north and south sides of the townsite. (5) And finally, the preservation of the feeling of entering

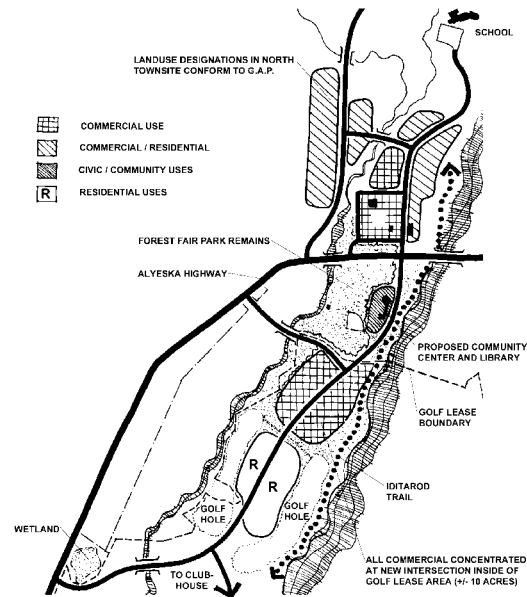


Fig. 9-7  
No change in existing commercial districts

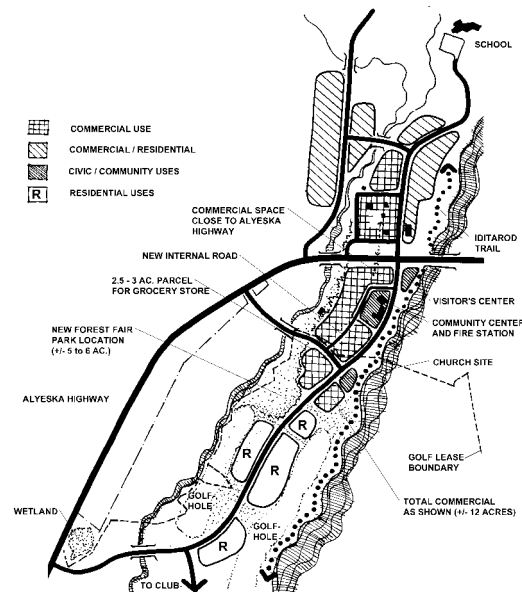


Fig. 9-8  
Commercial uses clustered on Alyeska Highway

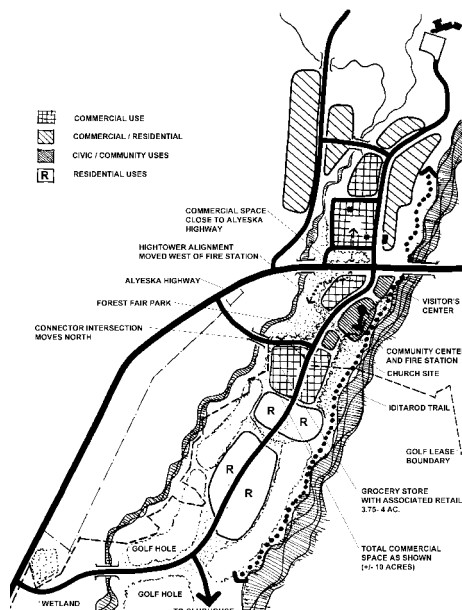


Fig. 9-9  
Commercial and civic uses clustered on Hightower

Fig. 9-10  
Eclectic mix of uses  
and buildings on main  
street in  
Breckenridge,  
Colorado



### Townsite Development North of Alyeska Highway

**General Character.** Reacting to photos of Alaskan and other small town main streets, community participants in the final set of work sessions outlined desired general characteristics of future development in the platted portion of the New Townsite. The traditional turn-of-the-century main street -- connected false-front, flat-roofed brick or clapboard buildings with a uniform wall along the street -- is *not* the image Girdwood residents project for their own town core. Rather, they envision:

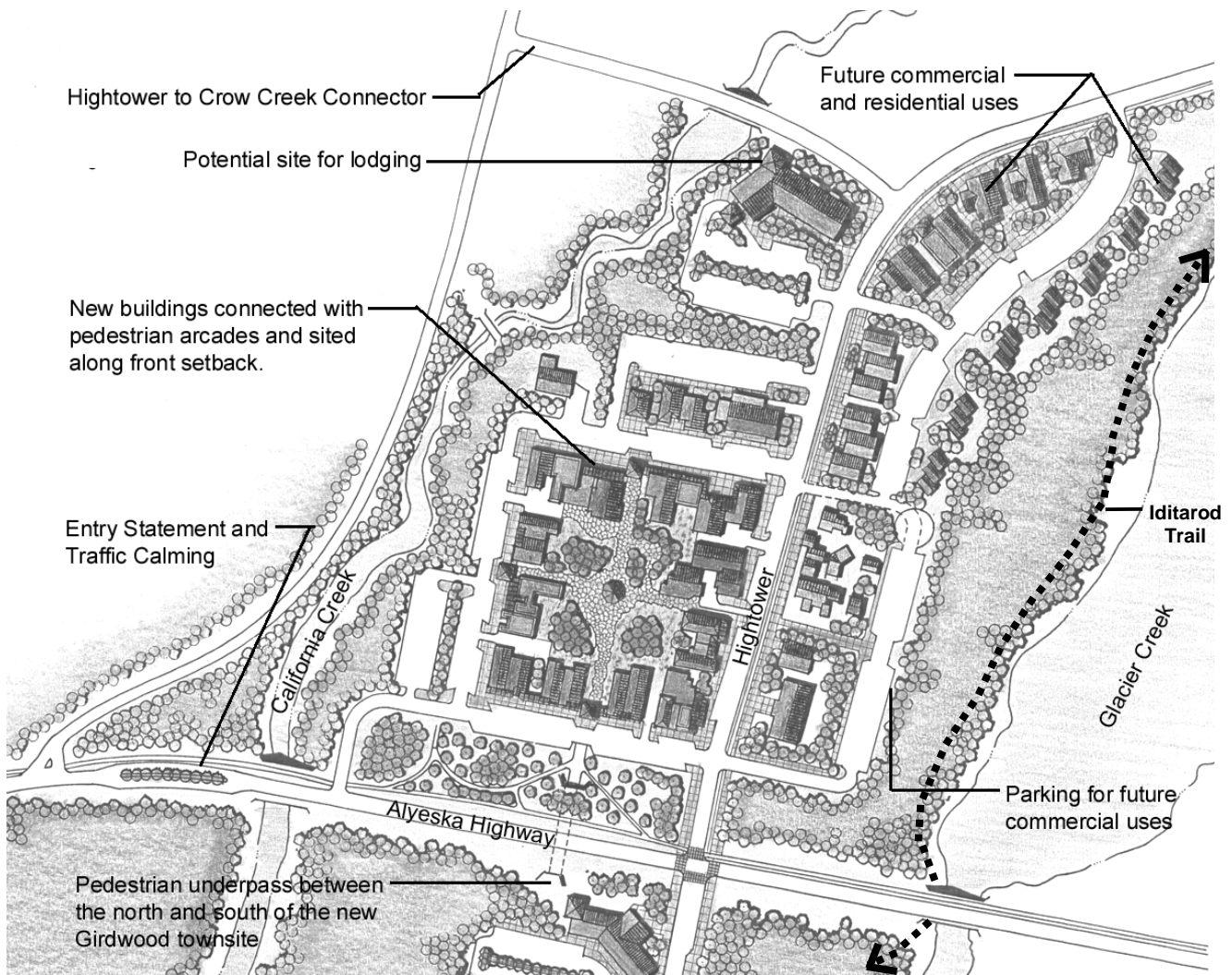
- Small, humanly scaled buildings that are faintly residential in character (i.e. pitched roofs) even though containing commercial uses on the ground floor. The main street of Breckenridge (Colorado) is a close analogy in this respect, as it still has a number of historic two-story residential structures now occupied by retail shops and eating establishments.
- An eclectic mix of simple forms and individually distinguishable structures, some connected to their neighbors, some standing alone.
- Buildings that have a strong relationship to the street, with setbacks no wider than necessary to accommodate the pedestrian network and snow storage requirements. However, a uniform "build-to" line along the street was considered unnecessary, and some variation and diversity in the facades along the street frontage was seen as a desirable quality.
- Motifs already in evidence in Girdwood, including natural materials, hand crafted signage, colorful trim and sparse ornamentation consistent with Girdwood's mining town origins. Also desired are better storefront merchandising, better lighting, and flowers.

Fig. 9-11  
Chair 5 Restaurant on  
the Town Square



**The Town Square.** The narrow lots encircling the town square park present their own unique conditions. If the designated park in the center of the block is ever to become a real amenity for these commercial properties and a gathering place for the community as a whole, then *any new development must relate to both the front and the back sides*. The Master Plan strongly recommends that ground floor retail at the edge of the square be *double-loaded* (i.e. opening onto both front and rear sides). It encourages commercial spaces with entries on the square and on the public passageways into it, as well as active courtyards, porches, terraces, windows, arcades linking to the street side, and private gardens facing the park. Consolidation and screening of service areas is





essential. Owners should take advantage of opportunities to cooperate in the design of intriguing passageways between buildings to access the park. Where on-site parking is unavoidable (i.e. for resident owners), it should be located in the side setbacks, not the rear yards, where it might detract from the quality of the park. (See also *Parks and Public Spaces* below.) On-site parking should be prohibited for commercial uses, on the condition that off-site and on-street public parking will be provided as an alternative. (See "Recommended Development Standards" section at the end of this chapter.)

**North and East of the Town Square.** Several larger parcels north and east of the square offer significant potential to extend the town center and, by introducing a residential component into the

commercial/retail mix, to bring more people into the core. Guest lodging, commercial offices, a civic facility, and residential units would be appropriate uses on these properties. (Proximity to the elementary school should be considered in the choice and design of uses located here.) In particular, the property at the northwest corner of Hightower and Linblad offers a prime opportunity for a landmark building, perhaps with a civic component and/or a new post office. (Because of the presence of a community water well on the site that currently supplies the New Townsite properties, connection to municipal water and sewer services will be a prerequisite for its development.)

As properties develop at this end of Hightower, they should express a visible transition from the built-up environment around the town square to a more

Fig. 9-12  
Conceptual plan for  
commercial infill in the  
New Townsite

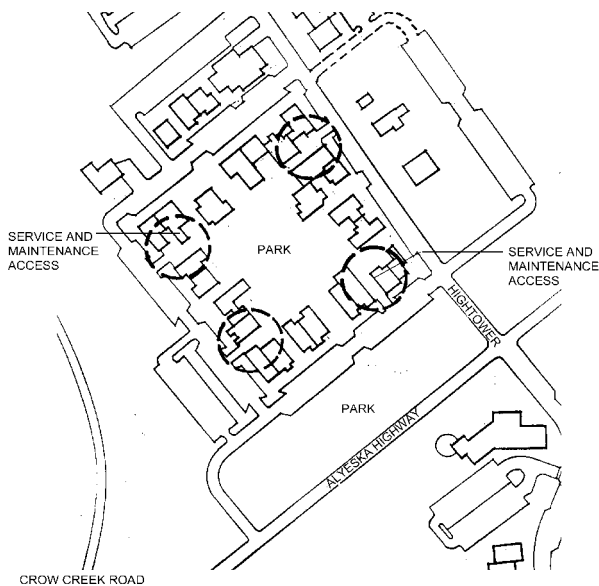


Fig. 9-13  
Diagram of  
consolidated service  
and delivery areas in  
the Town Square.

forested landscape along the northern extension of the street. Total building square footage on lots north of the square may be slightly larger than on the smaller lots east of the square (up to 10,000 sq.ft), where lot dimensions are similar to those inside the square. Still, the architectural character of larger buildings should be consistent with that described above for the town square area.

*Crow Creek Road.* There is a district on lower Crow Creek Road that is designated Commercial/Residential, although Alyeska Highway is presently the only connection between this area and the New Townsite. The intent here is to encourage a mix of commercial and residential uses that will enhance the New Townsite as a destination while continuing the same

Fig. 9-14  
Ski View  
Condominiums



rather low-key, low-density, “buildings in the forest” development pattern that exists on that road today. Commercial development on the ground floor is not required in this district, but may be more viable once the proposed connector road from Hightower (see Chapter 7) is completed. Improved pedestrian connections from the town square area are also essential for successful commercial activity. Residents expressed a strong desire that Crow Creek Road improvements retain the road’s forested rural character.

*Redevelopment Opportunities.* There are a number of existing properties in the New Townsite that may become incompatible with the more active pedestrian district that the community envisions unless they are remodeled or redeveloped to relate more effectively to the street.

In particular, the trailer park and the post office represent prime redevelopment opportunities. Although it is a good source of housing, the trailer park occupies an important site at the intersection of Hightower and Linblad, and its eventual redevelopment could be key to anchoring the northern end of the commercial district. The current post office is inadequate in size and causes major circulation and parking problems at the corner. It should be moved to a new facility in the same general area.

The Ski View Condominiums, located in a visually prominent position at the highway intersection, could greatly benefit the townsite by upgrading its façade with sturdier architectural materials and elements that are more compatible with the desired image of Girdwood. The pedestrian lane along the east side of Hightower in front of the building is made less functional because of the condos’ existing perpendicular parking spaces at the street edge. If these spaces could be relocated to the rear of the building (and if an improved Iditarod Trail could serve as the ped/bike connection to the school), on-street parking could be gained along that frontage, and there would be room for a sidewalk separate from the road.



## Townsite Development South of Alyeska Highway

**General Character.** Although buildings in the southern portion of the New Townsite are likely to be larger than buildings in the northern (town square) area, their desired character is still expected to be compatible with Girdwood's mining town origins. At the least, this means controlled building massing and aggregations of simple forms to reduce apparent scale; varied rooflines; protected entries; traditional window forms; well detailed retail frontages; and natural materials.

**Development Potential.** The sketch plan for the southern townsite illustrates building footprints that total up to 80,000 square feet of commercial/retail space on the ground floor. (This is in addition to

civic and municipal uses.) Development hugs the street edge of the Hightower extension in order to create a continuous pedestrian experience and is generally concentrated in two pods of commercial and retail uses that are intermixed with (and linked by) civic and community facilities. On-street parallel parking spaces supplement the surface parking lots behind the buildings. (There are no surface lots fronting directly onto the street.) The total area of the commercial parcels shown on the south side is approximately ten acres.

To strengthen the connection between the north and south portions of the New Townsite, the northernmost commercial pod has been pushed as far toward the highway as possible without sacrificing the Forest Fair Park or encroaching into the

Fig. 9-15  
Conceptual plan for new community and commercial development along the south Hightower extension

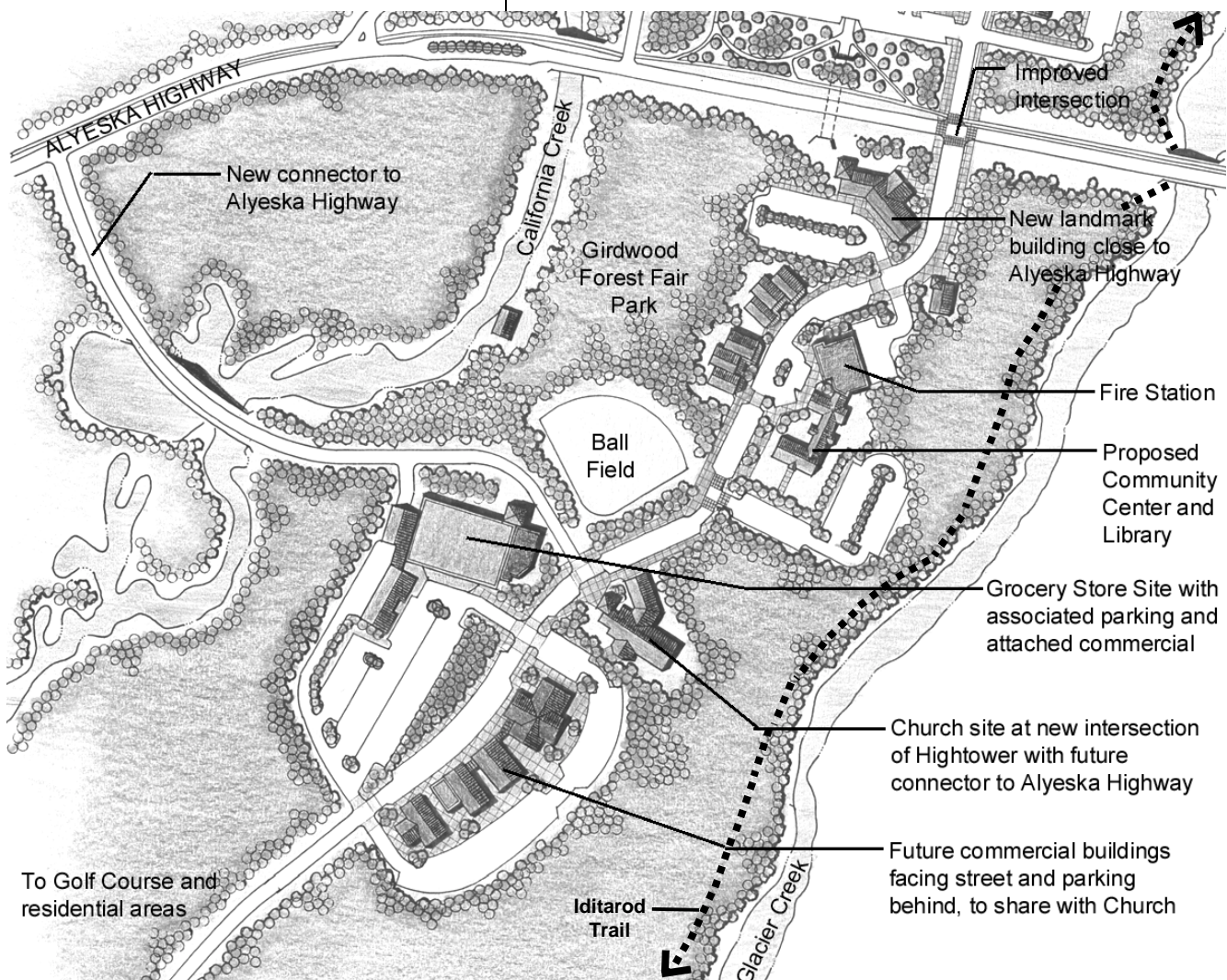




Fig. 9-16  
Little Bears in the  
south New  
Townsite

highway right-of-way. The pod consists of a landmark building in the most visible location at the highway intersection (up to 10,000 sq.ft.) and a row of small buildings (totaling up to 12,000 sq.ft.) that take advantage of adjacency to Forest Fair Park. Other than that one new building on the southwest corner (the Little Bears site), no other development is proposed at that key Hightower intersection. The plan depends on framed views into the townsite on both sides to reinforce the connection and create the visibility desired for the new main street.

The smaller buildings in the northern pod could be developed either as a coordinated, phased project by a single developer or as individual small parcels with some latitude for zero lot line plans. In either case, owners would share (and contribute to the cost of) a surface parking lot on the tennis court/skateboard site, which on weekends could be used for park activities. Municipal and community uses, including a visitor center, the existing fire station, and the proposed community center/library, line the opposite side of the street.



Fig. 9-17  
The plan  
recommends  
moving Hightower  
to the other side of  
the fire station to  
improve the  
pedestrian  
experience on the  
street

The southern commercial pod occupies two corners of a new intersection at Hightower and the proposed new connector road from Alyeska Highway. It consists of a grocery store (or other larger retailer up to 25,000 sq.ft.), associated retail attached to the grocery (5-10,000 sq.ft.), and, across the street, a row of smaller mixed-use buildings (up to a total of 20,000 sq.ft.) with parking behind. Like the northern cluster, this pod could be built by a single developer in a phased sequence responding to market demand. Or, it could be platted and sold in smaller individual parcels, in which case the phasing would be harder to control.

Between the two commercial pods is a beautiful site for a multi-denominational chapel and multi-use community facility. It is strategically positioned at the intersection so that a landmark building element or steeple could be the focal point in the view from the new connector road. This facility could house the daycare center that replaces Little Bears, as well as spaces for any other desired civic and community activities. On Sundays, the chapel could share the parking lot attached to the adjacent commercial development.

Both the chapel site and the community center relate well to a greenbelt or improved park along Glacier Creek. Both facilities can easily be connected to the Iditarod Trail and the ball field across the street. Major pedestrian crosswalks and connections link *all* destinations with parklands on both sides of the street.

In both commercial pods, it would be possible to add housing and/or offices in a second story as long as the site plans for individual parcels accommodate sufficient parking to support residential uses.

*The Radio Station.* Proponents of the community radio station have requested space for their broadcast function - and for other related activities that benefit the community - on land somewhere in the New Townsite. There are a number of centrally located sites that will give the station good access to trails, open space, and other businesses and civic uses in the New Townsite. Both the Glacier Valley



Development Corp. and the Heritage Land Bank have expressed willingness to help the station identify a new home. A specific site for the Girdwood Community Club and radio station will be identified and preserved prior to any new commercial development occurring in the new Townsite area south of Alyeska Highway.

*Recommendations for Parcelization.* Even though projects on the south side of Hightower will not be constrained by the small lot sizes that have hampered development in New Townsite, the intended character of the future commercial development in the south townsite is similar to the small-scaled individual buildings on the north side. With the possible exception of a single larger structure that may house a grocery store, all larger building footprints should appear as a composition of smaller attached structures. This does not preclude the platting of large parcels for development by a single entity, but it does suggest that considerable attention will be given in the master site plan review to how square footage will be distributed and building masses differentiated. Attached, but architecturally individualized buildings could in the aggregate exceed the 20,000 sq.ft. limit specified in the draft land use regulations for the GC-5 district.

*Alignment of the South Hightower Extension.* The alignment of an improved South Hightower Road diverges from the existing platted right-of-way. It has been routed around the west side of the existing fire station in order to make room for activities on both sides of the street. This is important because a continuous sequence of activity is needed to strengthen the connection between the two sides of the townsite on either side of the highway. If the street were to be left in its present alignment, there would be very little room for development of any kind on the east side of the street.

*The Sewer Intercept Line.* There is an existing sewer line in the platted right-of-way of South Hightower Road. Because it would be expensive, though not impossible, to move this line, the Master Plan assumes it will stay in place and has not sited any new buildings in the existing

right-of-way, even though the street itself has been realigned. It is possible that Chugach Electric will use the same right-of-way for a new underground electrical feeder line to Girdwood.

*Master Plan Implications in the Golf Course Lease Area.* In order to implement this plan for the south side, it may be necessary for the Municipality to work with GVDC to shift the boundary of the commercial area included in the golf course lease area northward.

*The King Estate Parcel.* There has been little mention of this parcel of undeveloped land south of Alyeska Highway and west of Timberline Drive in Alyeska Basin Subdivision, although it is designated for limited commercial uses. Presently isolated from other existing commercial areas in Girdwood, it could nevertheless be an appropriate site for a variety of lodging types and could become an intermediate destination along an improved pathway network linking the New Townsite with the Old Resort Base and the residential neighborhoods in between.

## Vehicular Circulation

By clarifying access to and circulation within the New Townsite, a number of the roadway improvements identified in the Transportation Master Plan (Chapter 7) will be important to the core area's commercial success. These include:

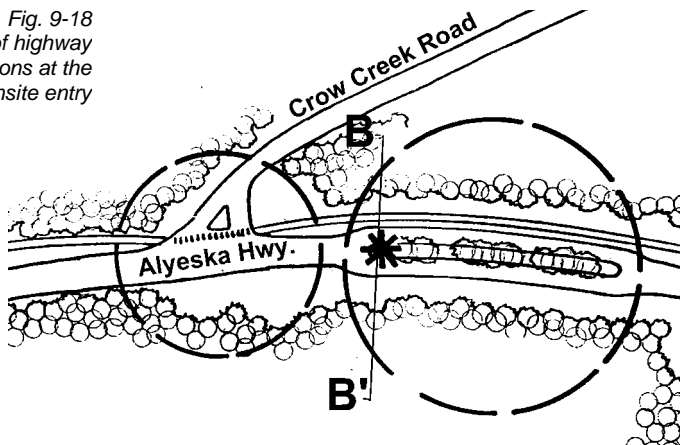
- The new connectors from Alyeska Highway and Crow Creek Road to Hightower Road.
- The realignment and reconfiguration of the South Hightower extension as a collector road. The exact alignment and re-routing to the opposite side of the fire station must be studied in more depth and worked out in conjunction with fire officials to assure that their operational needs are met.
- Traffic-calming modifications to Alyeska Highway beginning at or near the curve at Crow Creek Road

to reduce speeds and mark the entry to the town core with a change in roadway character. (Consider renaming the upper section of Alyeska Highway to something that implies it is a community street, not a highway, such as Alyeska Parkway or Forest Boulevard.)

- Intersection improvements for pedestrians crossing the highway at Hightower.

In addition, the Master Plan recommends formalizing the short curving spur from Holmgren in the town square to Alyeska Highway because another point of egress from the square could help to make commercial development more viable on the properties along the square's west and

Fig. 9-18  
Diagram of highway  
modifications at the  
New Townsite entry



south sides. (Using this road as a point of access from the highway, requiring that northbound cars make a left turn across oncoming traffic, is more problematic and would probably be discouraged by DOT.) It also recommends that the California Creek culvert under Alyeska Highway eventually be replaced with an attractive landmark bridge that celebrates the creek crossing.

### Parking

**North Side Parking (Town Square).** The sketch plan for the north New Townsite area relies on both on-street diagonal and parallel parking and on community parking lots to satisfy parking demand. If diagonal on-street parking were maximized on both sides of all streets surrounding the square, there could be as many as 220 to 265 on-street parking spaces. (This number may ultimately be reduced by crosswalks, dedicated service and delivery areas, private driveways, bus stops, and wintertime snow storage. Also, on-street parking on the east side of Hightower may not be possible unless some existing properties redevelop.) In addition, new municipal parking lots to the north, west and east (as proposed in the adopted 1995 supplemental parking plan) contain another 175 public spaces at the size drawn. Together, the lots and on-street

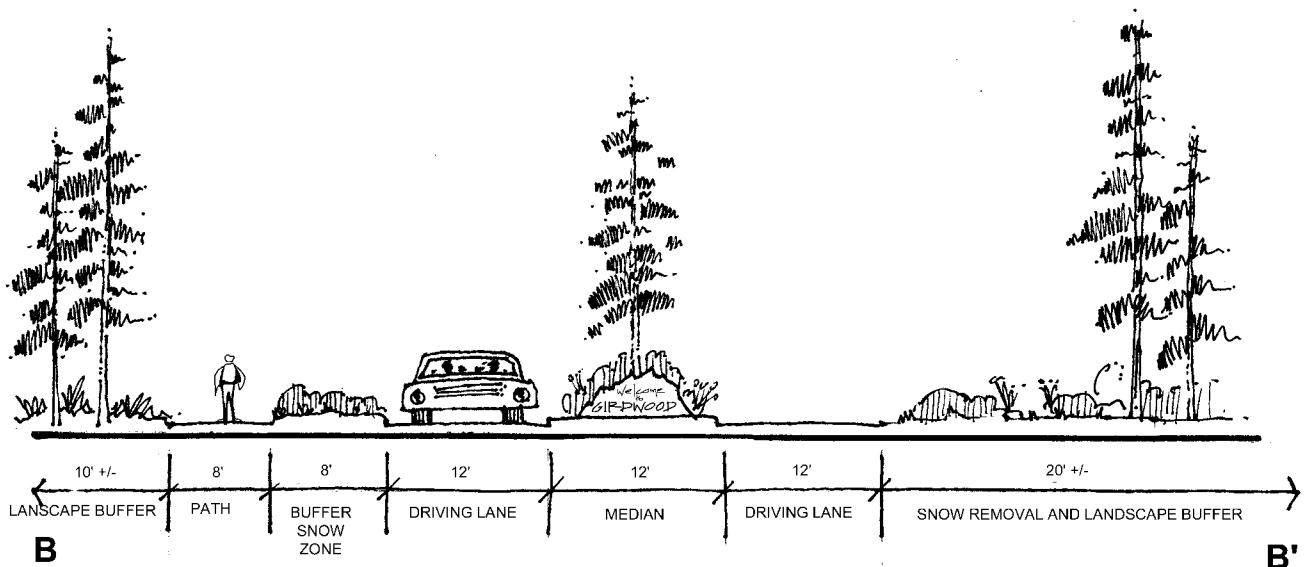


Fig. 9-19  
Section through proposed highway modifications

parking total about 400 public spaces.

The Master Plan recommends that the proposed on-street parking be constructed in the first phase as part of a larger effort to formalize vehicular traffic lanes and pedestrian walkways around the square. It is important that the street improvements are done in an early phase anyway in order to encourage commercial development in and around the square, and that project would create a large reservoir of on-street parking at the same time. The lot to the east of Hightower could be completed in a second phase. Then, when needed, the public lot to the west, along Holmgren Avenue, could be cleared in a third phase (and, if necessary, paved in a later phase of work). The Master Plan recommends holding off on construction of the eastern lot until the adequacy of first-phase on-street parking can be evaluated, development plans on east Hightower lots evolve, and an agreement on access to the lot can be worked out among the property owners. If the post office can be relocated, possibly to the parcel north of the square at Hightower and Linblad, its new parking lot could serve overflow needs at night. On-site parking within the square is not encouraged or recommended.

While some may oppose the idea of paving the streets in the New Townsite and adding curbing and sidewalks, the consultants feel strongly that this step – or something comparable – is necessary to protect the pedestrian network from cars, especially in winter. This recommendation is based on observation and experience in other resort towns in snowy climates. Any paving, however, in the New Townsite, needs to be done in the context of floodplain management and pollution potential.

On-street diagonal parking is a corollary benefit of paved streets with defined edges. On-street parking does not work in this climate unless the physical separation between street and walkway is very clear. Once engineering and schematic design are initiated on the street improvements, it is entirely possible that a number of design solutions may be found to accomplish the same goal in a style and

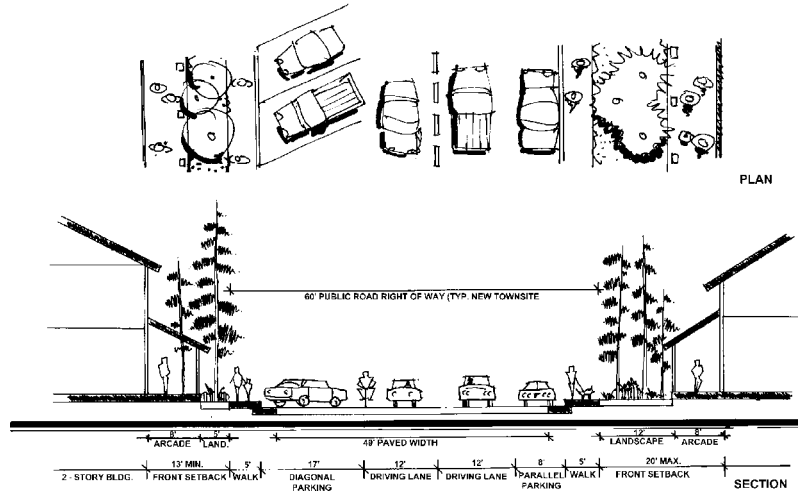


Fig. 9-20 (a+b)  
Section and plan  
views of Hightower  
as main street in  
the New Townsite,  
near the square

with materials that the community feels are compatible. While the final design will evolve through public process, it will be critical in any design to define the edge of the pedestrian zone and clearly separate it from parking areas.

An alternative to doing on-street parking, curbs and paved streets first is to build the public parking lots first. Although this may solve the parking shortage in the short-term, it does nothing to address the equally pressing issue of year-round pedestrian connections.

The area of the 22 commercially zoned lots inside the square (not counting the park) totals about 166,000 sq.ft. The six similarly sized lots on the east side of Hightower total another 69,000 sq.ft., for a gross land area of approximately 235,000 sq.ft. (about 5 ½ acres). If all 28 small lots opt to erect the largest structure allowable under the draft land use regulations (7,500 sq.ft., which planners consider unlikely), the total building area could equal 210,000 sq.ft. Of this, only 117,500 sq.ft. can be on the ground floor (at the 50% site coverage ratio proposed in the draft code). If that space is all commercial, requiring 3 cars per 1,000 sq.ft., and the remaining 92,500 sq.ft. is used for housing above (115 dwelling units at 800 sq.ft., each requiring 1.5 parking spaces), approximately 525 to 550 parking spaces would be required in the vicinity. This is about 150 spaces more than can be accommodated in the on- and off-street parking areas shown on the plan. With

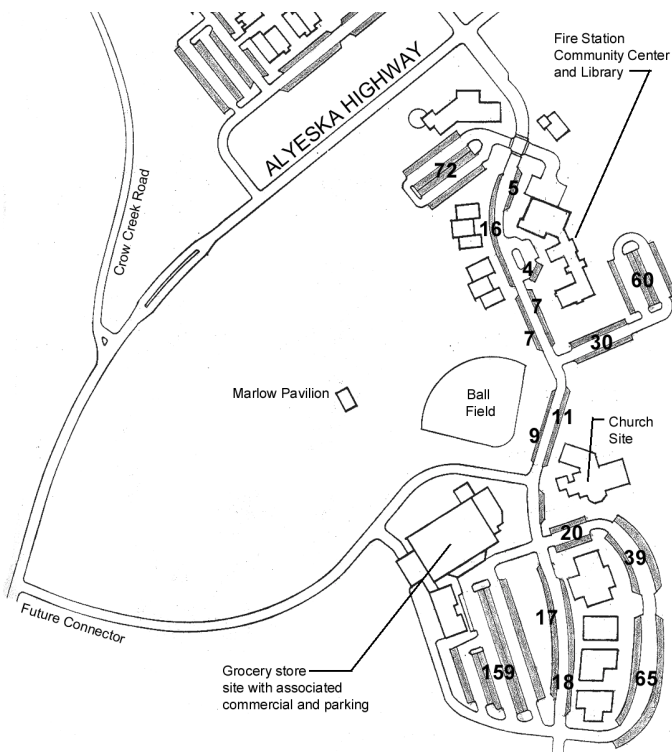
more restaurant uses in the area, this shortfall increases.

*It is likely that the north townsite will have difficulty supporting this much development without worsening congestion and parking shortages.* It is recommended, therefore, that the allowable building area be reduced and/or that the allowable building height be reduced from three stories to two on the small lots around the town square. Allowable residential density should also be reconsidered (see "Development Standards" section at the end of the chapter).

It is anticipated that residential and commercial development on the larger parcels north of the square, currently zoned Commercial/Residential and Commercial, will be required to accommodate their parking needs on-site.

**South Side Parking.** The parking shown on the south side plan exceeds the amount required by code if all buildings were single-storied. At a ratio of three parking spaces per 1,000 sq.ft. for the commercial space, 240 parking spaces

Fig. 9-21  
On-street and off-street public parking in the town center south of Alyeska Highway



would be required to support the 80,000 sq.ft. shown on the plan. (The required parking will vary from that number depending upon the amount of space devoted to restaurants and bars, which must provide 1 space for every three or four seats.) The plan shows 355 off-street surface parking spaces, plus just under 100 more in the parking areas associated with the fire station and community center. In addition, there are approximately 90 on-street parking spaces, for a total of 465 spaces on the south side.

### Transit Service to the New Townsite

The Master Plan for the New Townsite anticipates that a core area shuttle bus service within the townsite and between it and the Alyeska Prince Hotel would be implemented as a first phase of the proposed internal transit system. Routes connecting both sides of the New Townsite will be facilitated by the addition of new connector roads from Crow Creek Road to Hightower and from Alyeska Highway to Hightower. The sketch plan for the area assumes bus stops on Hightower at regular intervals, but does not foresee the need for a dedicated bus or transit terminal in the core.

### Pedestrian Linkages and Improvements

A number of specific projects have been identified in the New Townsite area that will enable the creation of a more pedestrian-oriented environment:



- *Improved pedestrian crossings of Alyeska Highway.* Formalized pedestrian crossings at the intersection of Hightower and Alyeska Highway will encourage continued development of the New Townsite and will provide connections between the New Townsite and the public and private development south of Alyeska Highway. Of similar importance will be a pedestrian underpass from the town square to the south side of the highway, which will provide a key pedestrian link between the north and south commercial areas of the New Townsite as well as access to parks, creek greenbelts, and the Forest Fair.
- *Improved pedestrian circulation along Hightower Road to the school.* This requires adding sidewalks along both sides of the roadway as well as crosswalks throughout the New Townsite. These improvements are essential to support main street commercial development along Hightower Road.
- *Sidewalks throughout the New Townsite.* The Master Plan proposes sidewalks along all the other streets around the town square in conjunction with paving them. In addition, protected walkways (arcades, porches, etc.) on the street side of all townsite buildings should be a requirement to preserve pedestrian connections during winter, when the sidewalks at the street edge may become impassable. While this may seem a redundant system in summertime, it will be the only usable network most of the time in winter. (See discussion in the "Development Standards" section at the end of the chapter.)
- *Sidewalks and crosswalks required in all future commercial development.* These elements will not be a public infrastructure project, but rather a regulatory requirement imposed in development review.
- *Warning and advisory signs.* Signs such as "Yield to Pedestrians in Crosswalks" should be installed at

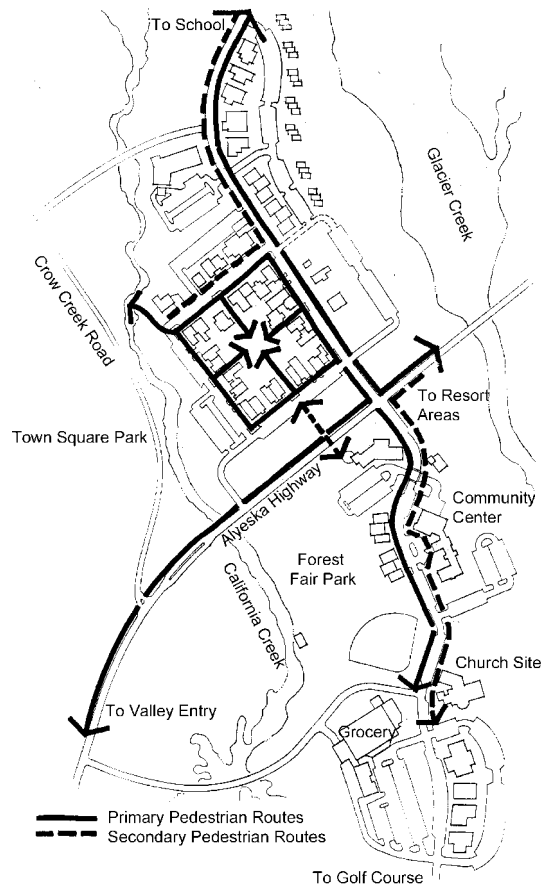


Fig. 9-22  
Transit service  
diagram in the  
town center

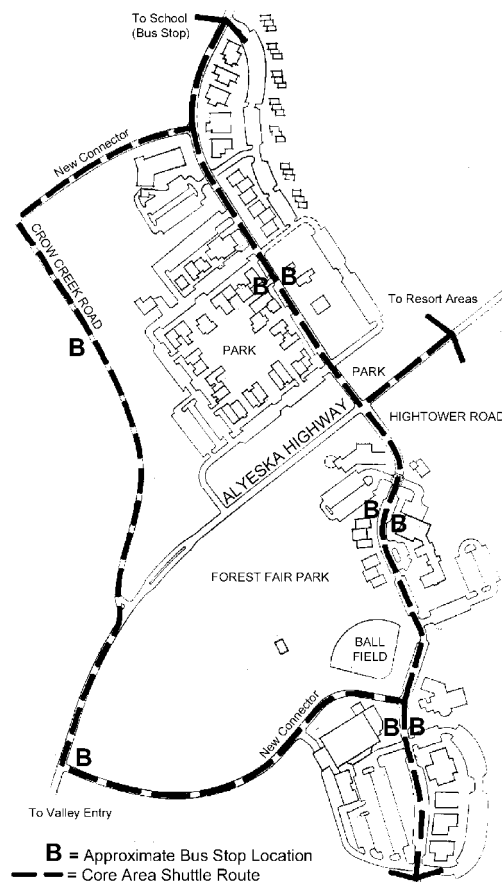


Fig. 9-23  
Pedestrian  
connections  
diagram in the  
town center

key points throughout the upper Valley.

- *Pedestrian amenities.* Add porches facing the street and public rights of way, path and street lighting, and directional signage.

## Parks and Public Spaces



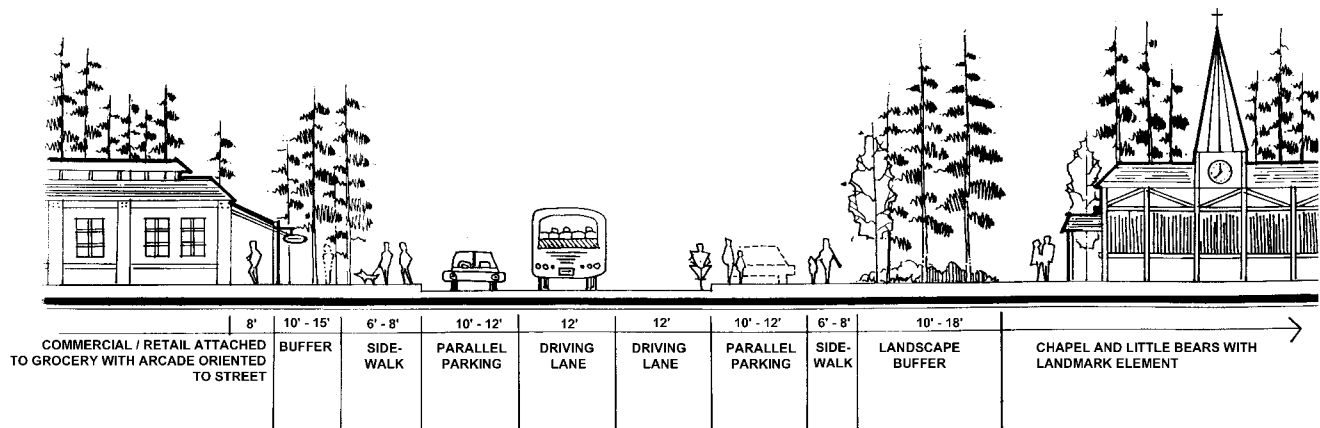
Fig. 9-24  
The Marlow  
Pavilion in Forest  
Fair Park

Recreational activities are as important as commercial and retail activity in the appeal of the community to residents and visitors. As one local participant commented, "Girdwood is a place to *do* stuff, not just *buy* stuff. Living here is about *doing* things." Girdwood's parks and recreation network is a fundamental identity-giving element and the glue that binds the physical elements of the community together. It is also the basis for a strategic program to grow low-impact tourism in the valley, as trails and natural open space have proven to be powerfully attractive destinations in other like-sized mountain communities. Resources of particular importance include:

*Forest Fair Park.* In this plan, the park retains its present character and existing recreational uses. It also remains virtually the same size, except that the tennis courts and the skateboard park have been relocated to permit commercial development on those sites. (A possible new site for these facilities is in the area generally east of the proposed community center, in the Glacier Creek open space corridor.) The ball field has shifted slightly to ease the space between it and the improved extension of Hightower Road, but it remains in essentially the same location. The Marlow Pavilion is unaffected. More trail connections into and through the park are recommended. The pedestrian underpass at Alyeska Highway and the improved Hightower intersection should further improve the connectedness of the park and the ability to distribute the parking for peak period events to the proposed new parking supply around the square. Weekend overflows in the park can benefit from shared use of nearby commercial parking lots.

To satisfy the community's recreational needs in the longer term, the Master Plan recommends that Girdwood undertake a programming exercise to identify desired recreational facilities that could be located in an improved Forest Fair Park complex. Among the ideas that came up at public meetings were an outdoor ice skating rink, a roller blade track, children's and tots' play areas, and a second play field.

Fig. 9-25  
Section through  
south Hightower



**Greenbelt Trail Corridors.** Glacier Creek and California Creek represent unusual opportunities for a high-quality, comprehensive greenbelt trail system. In addition to the planned Iditarod Trail along Glacier Creek, other trails might be explored to create a network of pedestrian linkages between open space and built areas. Also, a survey of the natural features in these corridors is recommended in order to assure that sensitive environmental and visual resources are designated as parkland and permanently protected or reserved for recreational uses.

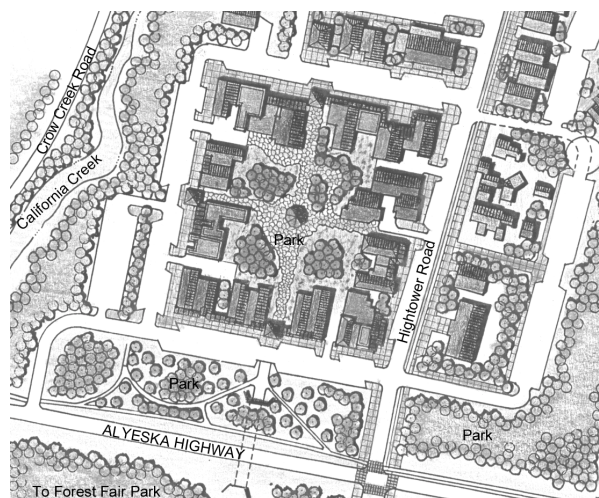
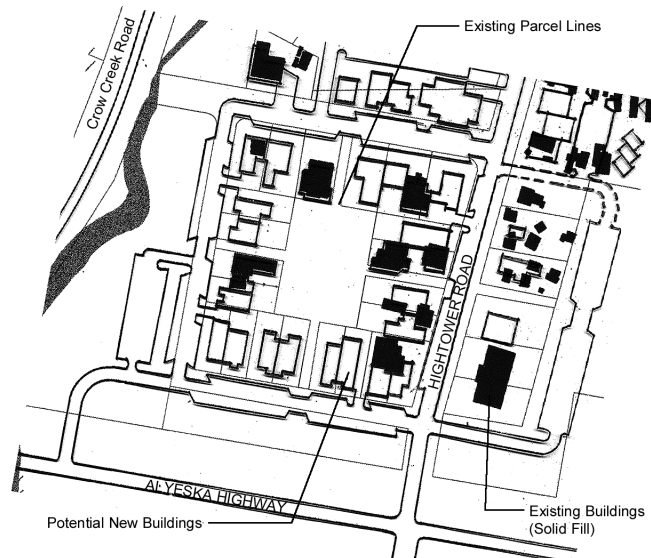
**Lions Club Park.** The Lions Club may wish to continue improving the small park at the intersection of Alyeska Highway and Hightower in an effort to make it a more visible landmark at the entry to the town core and to connect it more effectively to other parks and trails. Alternatively, the club could consider moving to another site, such as the parkland strip along the north side of Alyeska Highway (see next section) or a site that is more integrally connected to Forest Fair Park. This would leave the four municipally owned lots at that prominent intersection available for a visitor information center or other civic uses.

**Parkland along Alyeska Highway.** A small strip of land between Alyeska Highway and Girdwood Place in the town square is designated as a public park but is unimproved and largely impassable. It would be a considerable improvement to clear out the thickets of undergrowth and broken trees and to open up framed views into the town square area from the highway. A unique stand of birch trees in the strip should be identified and preserved. Planting flower gardens and a more park-like ground cover would further enhance the entry to the town center and make the park more usable for passive recreation.

**The Town Square.** The Master Plan encourages the development of small public spaces and seating areas along the town square streets and park, as well as the improvement of the park in the interior of the block so that it can function as the community's best (and only) central

gathering place. Concepts for park improvement should be developed by the community in concert with adjacent property owners, but could involve such amenities as a band shell or picnic pavilion, sheltered pathways and seating areas, shade arbors, community vegetable and flower gardens, a tot lot, and special path lighting. Properly equipped, the square could be the venue for anything from children's summer programs to jazz concerts, Rotary breakfasts, and sporting event awards celebrations. It is also recommended that commercial development adjacent to Town Square Park be encouraged to relate to the park with terraces and outdoor eating areas.

Fig. 9-26 (a+b)  
Enlargement of Town Square Park – overlay with plat showing relationship to existing buildings and concept enlargement.





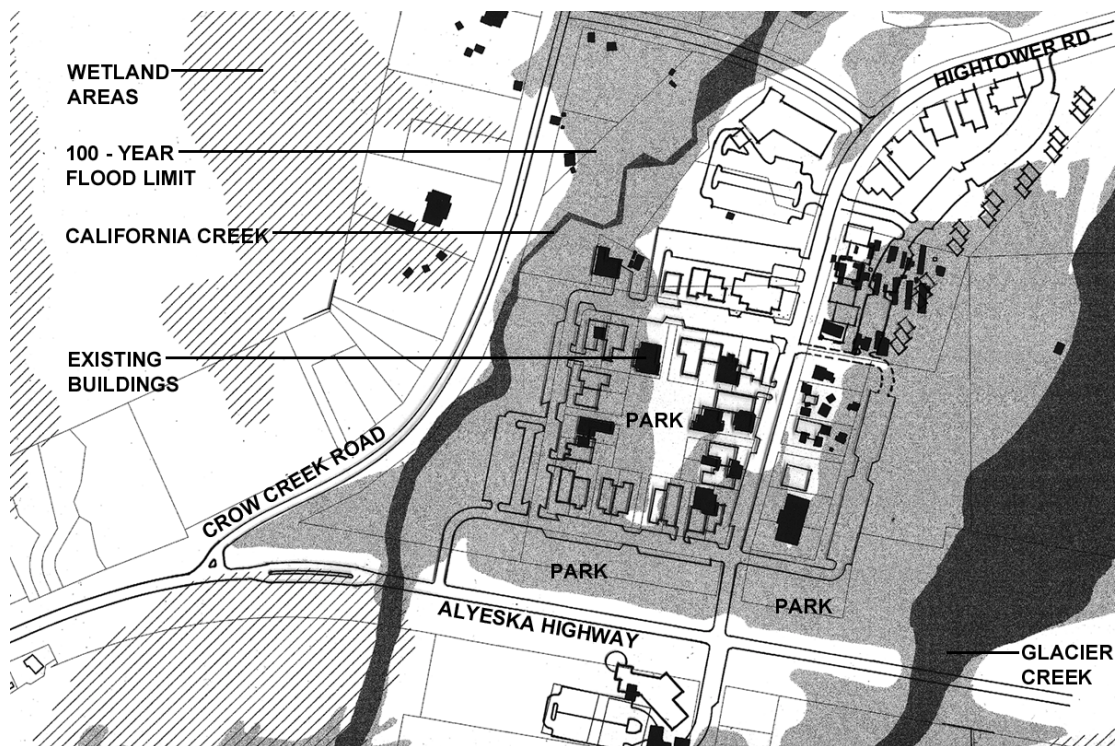


Fig. 9-27a New Townsite north of Alyeska Highway with existing conditions underlay to concept drawing information

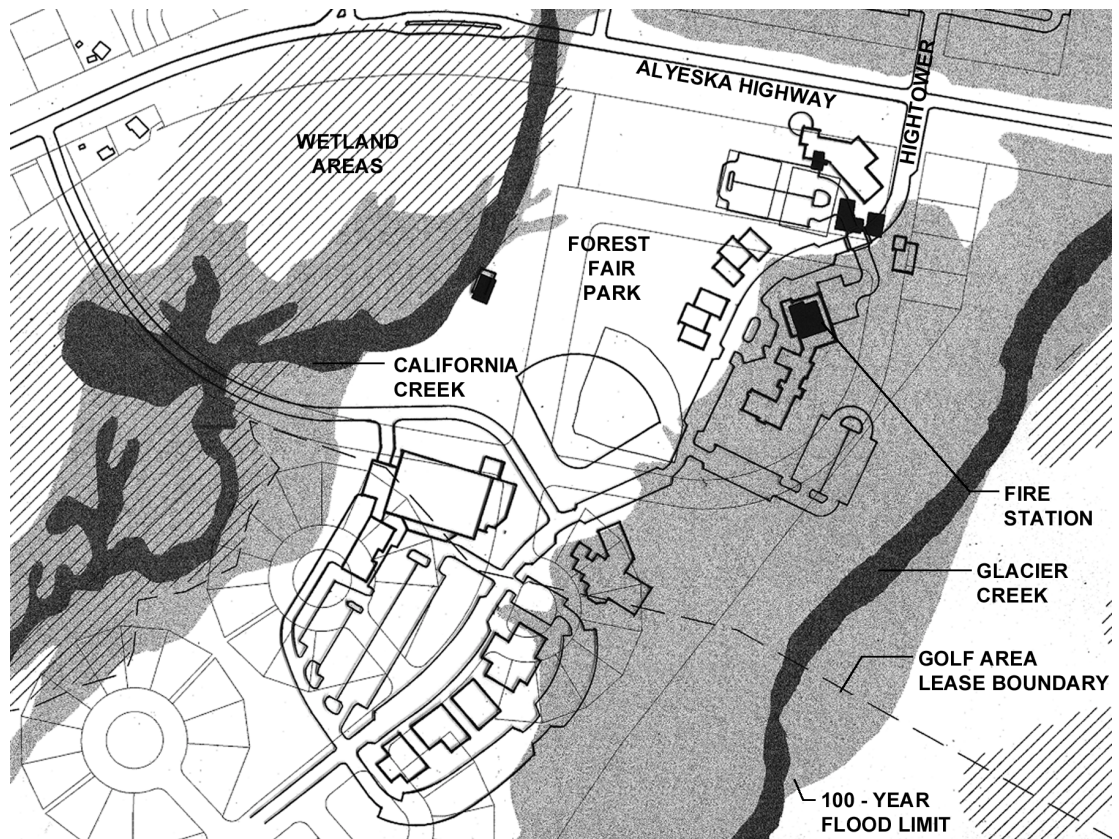


Fig. 9-27b New Townsite south of Alyeska Highway with existing conditions underlay to concept drawing information



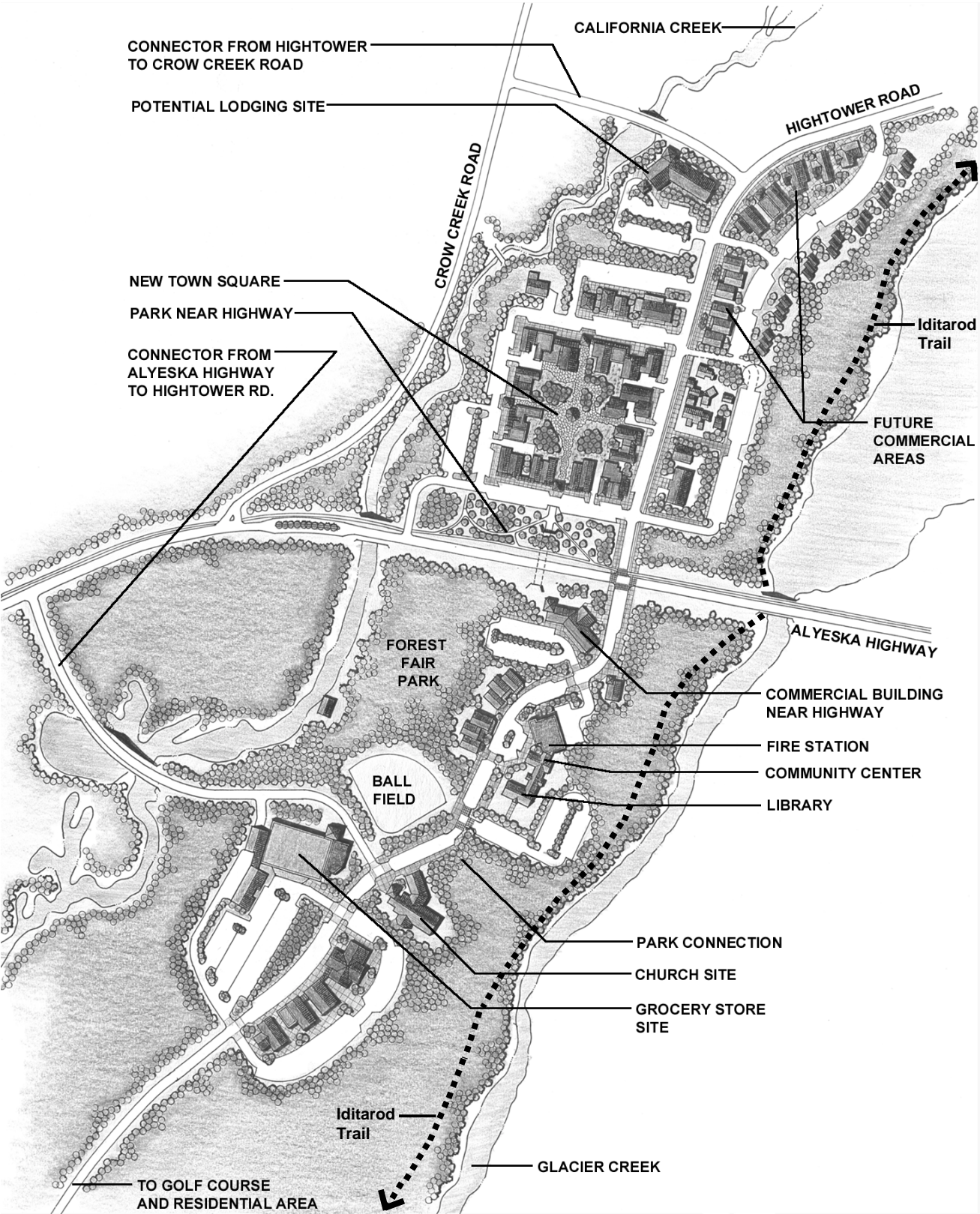


Fig. 9-28 New Townsite Concept Plan

*Valued or Historic Structures.* It is recommended that the community identify any structures in Girdwood that have historical or community value and develop a regulatory mechanism to protect them in some way. If desired, there may be old buildings in the original Girdwood townsite that could be moved into Forest Fair or Glacier Creek Park and adapted for recreational uses.

## Housing and the Golf Course Development

The golf course proposal includes a residential component. The Master Plan endorses the concept of locating housing as close as possible to the commercial development in the south New Townsite so that residents can walk to the services they need. In addition, some upper-story residential units are encouraged within mixed-use commercial development projects undertaken by GVDC (or other developers).

## Utilities

*Water.* Development generally east of Glacier Creek, including the Alyeska Prince Hotel, is served by a Municipal-owned water system. The water source, storage, and distribution system are owned and operated by the Municipality of Anchorage, dba Anchorage Water & Wastewater Utility (AWWU).

The New Girdwood Townsite and properties west of Glacier Creek are not in AWWU's water service area. Residences and businesses west of Glacier Creek are served by private or community wells; it is believed that some of these may not meet standards for potability.

The New Townsite commercial district is served by a community well located just north of the town square. It is believed that the water system may not meet pressure needs and cannot provide high volume (fire) flow capacity. An improved community water system with adequate fire flow capacity is essential to the area's future.

AWWU's *1994 Water Master Plan* conceptualizes how AWWU might extend water service to the entire Girdwood Valley and anticipates extending its mains and services to the west side of Glacier Creek. The *1994 Water Master Plan* identified the need for an additional water supply. In July 1999, AWWU completed a water source study (*Girdwood/Alyeska Water System: Pre-Design Analysis – Water Source-Related Improvements*) for the Girdwood area. Included in the study's recommendations were:

- A one million gallon reservoir adjacent to the existing reservoir;
- Extension of a 16-inch water transmission main from Alyeska Avenue, along Alyeska Highway and across Glacier Creek to Hightower Road;
- Further evaluation of the Cherrier-King-Cherrier well east of Hightower Road; and,
- Identification and development of an additional well source in the Glacier Creek Valley.

Following the 1999 source study recommendations, AWWU will perform a broader evaluation of water sources within the Glacier Creek Valley. Funding for design and construction of future water facilities in the Girdwood area will be paid in part by a \$1.7 million Federal grant. However, this grant requires a local match of \$1.4 million, which is currently programmed in the AWWU six-year capital budget for the year 2004, the earliest fiscal year that AWWU can allocate funds for any of this work without raising rates to the entire AWWU customer base. It should be noted that the AWWU funds budgeted in 2004 will not pay for all the work recommended in the *1994 Water Master Plan* nor in the 1999 source study. Work will proceed on a prioritized basis and as funds become available. The public will be included in the process of identifying the use of the Federal grant funds for these AWWU facilities.

*Sanitary Sewer.* A public sanitary sewer (or wastewater) collection system is

available to most of the properties in the study area. The wastewater collection system and treatment facility are owned and operated by AWWU. The capacity of the facility is adequate to accommodate the level of development contemplated in the Commercial Areas Master Plan. Additionally, AWWU regularly reviews and analyzes development and capacity issues to plan for anticipated growth.

*Natural Gas.* This service was recently installed and capacity is adequate.

*Electricity.* Electrical capacity is adequate to handle Girdwood's anticipated growth, but system reliability is an issue. Chugach Electric has adequate capacity, but the lines are overhead, and heavy snowfall frequently causes power outages. Chugach would like to add a second feeder line to create a looped system that would allow them to provide service from another line when the first one is down. New service will have to go underground. They also want to add a second transformer at the Old Townsite substation, but this is controversial because the community wants the substation relocated.

*Above-Grade Utilities.* The Master Plan recommends that the location of any electrical transformers or other above-grade utilities be approved as part of all development plans, particularly in the south townsite area. Utility boxes, switch cabinets, transformers, poles, and vaults should not be allowed on the street side of commercial areas nor where they would obstruct pedestrian passage. Wherever possible, they should be located behind buildings and fully screened from pedestrian areas. The same recommendation applies to utility improvements that are not part of private development plans. Utility providers are encouraged to work with MOA planners *before* installing any above-grade utilities to assure that the intent of the Master Plan is respected. All new electrical service lines must be underground.

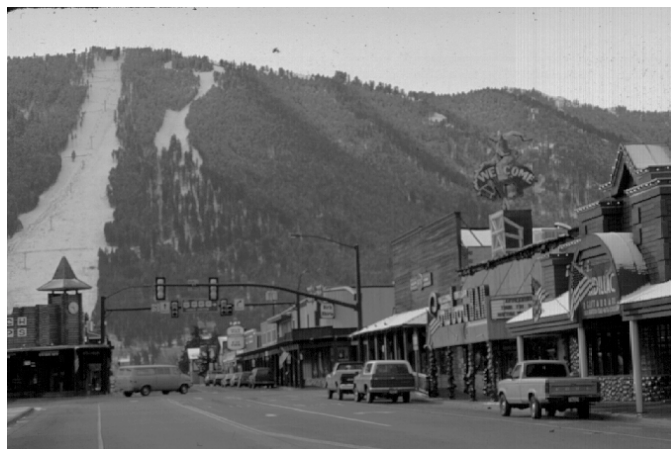
## RECOMMENDED DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

To encourage the desired pattern of pedestrian friendly main street development throughout the New Townsite, these specific modifications in the draft of the Title 22 Land Use Regulations are recommended:

### Guidelines Common to All New Townsite Districts (North and South) (GC-5, GC-6, GC-7, GC-8, GC-9 and GC-10)

*Arcades and Covered Walkways.* The draft code encourages, but does not require, covered walkways. To promote pedestrian connections in all weather, the Master Plan recommends *requiring* arcaded or roofed walkways along the street face of all new buildings, elevated at least 9 inches above grade. In the gaps between buildings, free-standing covered walkways are encouraged, and privately maintained walkways are required. Owners of existing properties with ground floor commercial uses are encouraged to follow suit and would be required to add a covered walkway as part of any application for modification or redevelopment of their property. The arcades do not have to be fully attached to the building (although this would be preferable) or of uniform design along the street frontage; they can vary and step with the line and style of the buildings to which they belong. A landscaped strip for

Fig. 9-29  
Pedestrian arcade,  
Main Street Jackson  
Hole, Wyoming

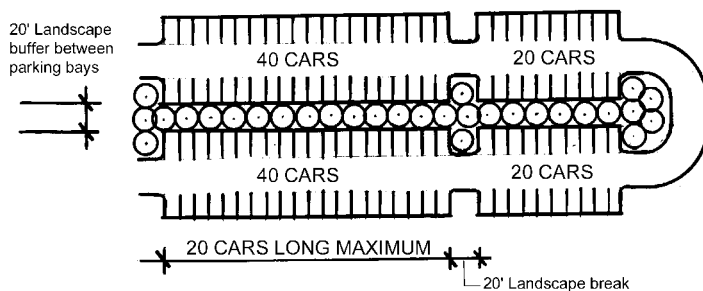




snow storage at least 5 feet in width should parallel the arcade and separate it from the street.

**Parking Lots.** The Master Plan illustration shows a number of surface parking lots behind buildings that are intended to satisfy the parking requirements for multiple commercial properties without detracting from the quality of the pedestrian environment along the street. In some cases, it will be necessary that these shared public lots exceed 40 cars. The draft code requires that parking areas of that size or larger be distributed in lots of up to 20 cars and separated by 20-foot landscaped buffers. Where parking is consolidated in larger lots, multiple landscape islands vastly complicate snow removal. The Master Plan proposes instead a required 20-foot landscaped break in any line of parking spaces over 20 cars long and a minimum 15-foot landscaped strip between every double-loaded bay of cars. An exception should be made for the larger parking lot attached to the potential grocery store at the south end; in this case, a landscaped strip 20 feet in width could be required between every other bay.

Fig. 9-30  
Parking lot guidelines



**Lighting.** Pedestrian scaled lighting (bollards, post-mounted, or attached to the building) should be required as part of the design of covered walkways.

### Additional Guidelines for the Town Square and Hightower Area (Districts GC-7 and GC-9)

If the town square area is to develop as a true mixed-use core commercial district, it is strongly recommended that more specific guidelines be added to the code

to reflect its unique scale and character. The smaller rectangular lots within the square and along the east side of Hightower need to be treated differently in the land use code from other, less central and more auto-oriented commercial nodes. The following recommendation would apply to all of the properties in these two districts:

**Front Setbacks.** The draft code specifies a minimum of 13 feet for the front setback, but does not specify a maximum, which is equally important to achieve the relatively unified street frontage that the Master Plan has described in the north New Townsite. It is strongly recommended that a provision specifying a *maximum* front setback of 20 feet be added to the draft code language. (Some limited portions of a building frontage might be allowed to step back further from that setback to create usable small public spaces in the front.)

### Additional Guidelines for Lots that Adjoin Town Square Park (GC-7)

The dedicated interior park makes this district of narrow lots unique. The community's clear intent is that the district should be finely textured and well connected, and that the park should become a public amenity supporting greater use, but remaining natural in character. Unless specific guidelines are written for the lots adjoining the park, that intent is unlikely to be realized.

Under the standards proposed for maximum building area (7,500 sq.ft.), building height (35 feet), site coverage (50%), and setbacks in this commercial district, buildings on the smallest lots would be forced into very small footprints and three stories in height to yield the full allowable square footage. The table and diagram on the following column illustrate the building area that would be possible on three typical lot sizes in the New Townsite.

Even if an owner builds out to all setbacks on the smallest lots (50' x 130'), site coverage would be closer to 40% than 50%. It is unlikely that all owners would

opt to maximize their buildings, but if they did, the image that evolves of skinny

<b>LOT</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>Lot Dimensions</b>	50 x 130	70 x 130	80 x 130
<b>Total Lot Area (sf)</b>	6,500	9,100	12,000
<b>Site area with Setbacks and % of Total Lot Area<sup>1</sup></b>			
With zero lot line one side	3,680 (56.6%)	5,520 (60.6%)	7,840 (65.3%)
With 10' setback Each side	2,760 (42.5%)	4,600 (50.5%)	6,720 (56%)
<b>Allowable Site Coverage (sf)</b>			
@ 50%	3,250	4,550	6,000
@ 60%	3,900	5,460	7,200
<b>Maximum Allowable Building Area (sf)</b>			
Draft Regulations	7,500	7,500	7,500
Recommended Modification	6,500		
<b>Square Feet in Two Stories</b>	7,800	10,920	14,400

Notes:

1. Assumes 13' front, 25' rear, 10' sides

3-story buildings with uniform spacing between them may be inconsistent with the community's desired character. It seems reasonable to adjust the maximums for this district to yield more realistic and equitable standards – and to produce a neighborhood that meets the community's expectations. Specific recommendations include:

**Site Coverage.** To maximize available core area commercial/retail space, which is usually on the ground floor, many comparable small towns have increased allowable site coverage in their downtown areas. Vail's pedestrian scaled Bridge

Street shopping district, for example, allows 80% site coverage, and Aspen is in the process of increasing allowable site coverage downtown from 75% to a recommended 90% after concluding that the 25% required open space did not contribute positively to the quality of pedestrian space. There is no maximum in Steamboat's historic downtown. Admittedly, these downtowns are more intensively developed than Girdwood envisions for its town center. Still, a higher site coverage ratio in the town square— at least 60% is recommended -- would allow owners to dedicate more of their total building area to ground floor retail or commercial uses if they wish. Further, in conjunction with modified setbacks recommended below, it would engender a greater sense of connectedness between buildings and along the town square streets.

**Side Setbacks.** The code specifies a minimum side setback of 10 feet on both sides (or 20 feet on both sides if a lot is larger than 21,780 feet, which none in these two districts are). In some cases, where adjoining property owners wish to connect their buildings or cooperate in the design of a public passageway or courtyard between them, a zero lot line would be appropriate. It is recommended that the draft be modified to allow a zero lot line plan on one side if adjoining neighbors agree. Buildings that connect across a property line, using the zero lot line option, must still appear to be two different buildings. Spaces between detached buildings should remain at least 20 feet. In concert with the requirement that all ground floor space be dedicated to commercial uses, the spaces between detached buildings should be designed to accommodate outdoor public uses wherever possible, and service areas in the side (or rear) setbacks must be screened. Maintenance of the side setback area between buildings is essential.

*Side Setbacks along Public Rights-of-Way.* In the townsite plat, there are four 20-foot-wide public rights-of-way that access the interior town square park. With sensitive building and site design on both sides, these passageways can become special spaces. However, if the lots on both sides are required to maintain a 10-foot side setback, the resulting 40-foot-wide passageways are more likely to become a no-man's-land. What happens at their edge greatly affects whether they will be used. It is recommended that the property owners adjoining these accessways be given the latitude, with conditional review, to build improvements up to the property line if they relate to the public space. No blank building walls or sight-obstructing fences should be allowed. Intimate public and semi-private spaces and low separations that create visual interest, such as plantings, low picket fences and garden gates, should be encouraged along these edges.

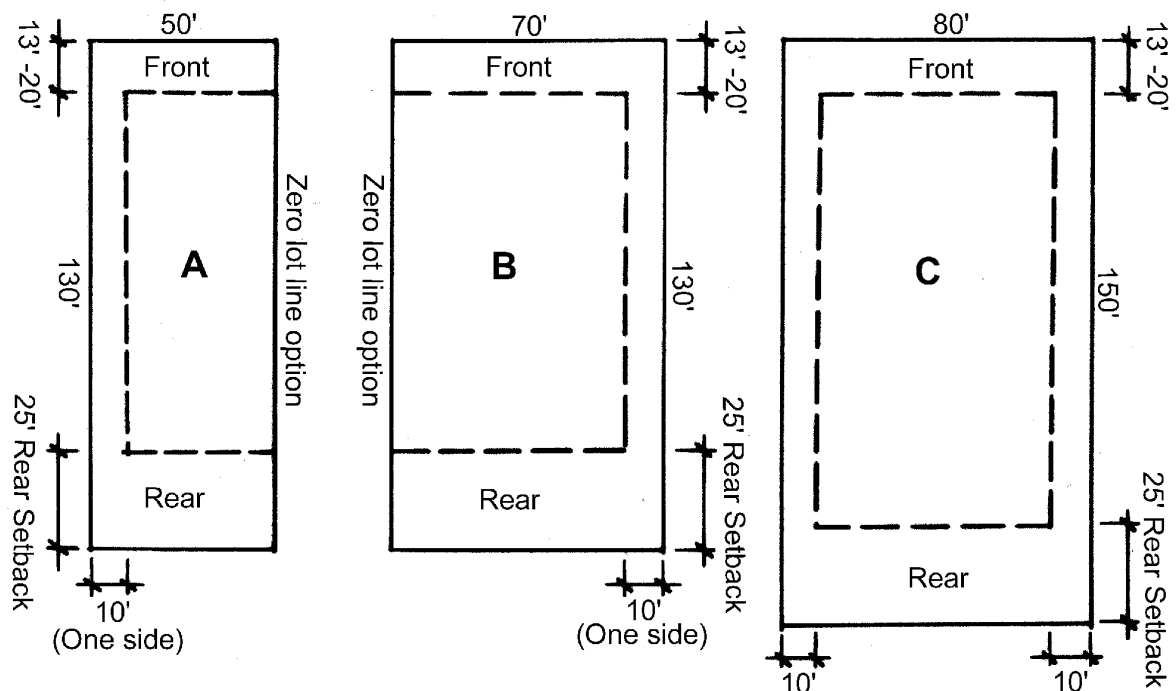
*Corner Lots.* Language should be added to the draft to clarify the setback requirements on corner lots. It is recommended that front setback requirements should apply to all street front property lines and that side setback requirements should apply to all property lines shared by other lots and not

adjoining the park. This means that corner lots will not have a defined rear setback.

*Rear Setbacks and the Relationship to Town Square Park.* The 25-foot rear setback specified in the draft code is workable and consistent with the change proposed in the site coverage ratio above. However, uses allowed in the rear setback should focus on public activity rather than being fully private (see "Double-Loaded Retail" in the next section). Landscape treatments should continue the naturalistic themes recommended for the park. Outdoor spaces such as terraces, porches and decks should relate to the park and be allowed to encroach into the rear setback. Service areas in the rear should be strongly discouraged; if unavoidable, they must be screened from the park. (Conveniently distributed consolidated service areas for the block are recommended.) On-site parking in the rear setback should not be allowed. Overall, the goal is to create the best possible relationship between the park and the commercial uses on the ground floor inside the building.

*Double-Loaded or Double-Sided Retail/Commercial.* Buildings on the square should be designed with ground

Fig. 9-31  
Guidelines for  
Setbacks in the New  
Townsite north





floor commercial space and/or retail shops that open onto the park as well as the front side. This will mean “double-loaded” buildings (i.e. commercial spaces along both the front and the back of a building, sometimes accessed from a central hallway) or “double-sided” (shops, offices or restaurants that extend all the way from front to back, such as Humpy’s in Anchorage). In no case should blank walls or alley-like uses be permitted on the park side. Food and bar establishments are particularly encouraged in sunny exposures at the park edge (like Chair 5).

**Gross Building Area.** A reduction in building area from the 7,500 sq.ft. specified in the draft regulations to 6,500 sq.ft. is recommended to reflect the smaller lot dimensions in this area.

**Building Height.** The Master Plan suggests that a two-story maximum is more realistic on the small lots in this district, although the code could permit owners to build limited portions of a building, but not an entire floor, up to three stories. A neighborhood of predominantly one- and two-story buildings may be closer to the community’s “small town in the wilderness” image.

**Residential Density.** The draft code allows residential densities from 10 to 20 units per acre with a conditional development review. While housing is a desirable component of development in the New Townsite, density this high could cause a significant issue with parking, whether it is on-site or off-site. It is unlikely that density of this magnitude would be achieved, given the other development standards on these lots (especially the requirement that all ground floor space be commercial). Accordingly, it seems more realistic to reduce the allowable density to 6 to 8 dwelling units per acre with a conditional permit.

**Parking Requirements for Upstairs Units.** It is recommended that a provision be added to the code to permit developers of upstairs dwelling units in the New Townsite to satisfy the parking requirements off-site and that discourages (or prohibits) on-site parking for these units. No on-site parking should be

expressly required. If on-site residential parking is allowed, it should be accommodated in the side setback, preferably in a garage.

**On-Site Parking and Driveways.** On-site parking for *commercial* uses on these lots should be prohibited in the code. The draft clause that permits parking in the front setback of lots in GC-7 and GC-9 should be deleted for GC-7, as it will make a cohesive pedestrian network on the street side impossible and is not necessary if on-street parking and public lots are provided. Driveways are also discouraged, but may be necessary for service or garage access; these should be consolidated wherever possible to minimize the disruption to pedestrians. Driveways to parking spaces or garages for upstairs residents should be subject to a conditional review, not a use by right.

**Snow Storage Areas.** Snow removal in the town square will become more complicated as the area develops, and some snow may eventually have to be trucked out. Snow storage areas in the side and rear setbacks should be designated where they will not interfere with or damage public spaces or passageways between buildings. See “Arcades” above for snow storage in the front setback.

**Fences.** Property line fences should not be allowed. Privacy walls or fences that match the materials of the building could be permitted around private terraces on the ground floor or to screen service areas. As noted above, any fences or walls bordering the public rights-of-way into the town square park should be low enough that children can see over them (36-42”).

### **Guidelines for the South New Townsite Area (GC-5)**

A master site plan is required in the GC-5 district. It may be appropriate in the land use code to allow negotiation of some development standards (setbacks, parking configuration, etc.) during the review process rather than to quantify them prior to parcelization of the commercial tract.

Language in the code applying to this district should differentiate between the smaller commercial projects or structures (as shown along the south Hightower extension), where a main street character similar to the north townsite is intended, and the development pod at the south end, where larger uses are contemplated. The code might also acknowledge that the GC-5 district could shift northward if the master plan is adopted, but that the development standards and guidelines would shift with it.

*Maximum Building Size.* The draft code limits buildings to a maximum of 20,000 sq.ft. It is possible that a grocery store or other larger retailer would eventually need as much as 25,000 or 30,000 sq.ft. Also, it is possible that the grocery would have other attached retail associated with the store, as suggested in the sketch plan. In this district, where a single developer may coordinate the phased development of a larger parcel, it may be enough to require that attached retail structures *look* like separate buildings.

*Setbacks.* Larger (or smaller) setbacks may be appropriate for the large grocery store site. For the smaller commercial buildings shown on the south Hightower extension, front setbacks should be the same as those that apply to the GC-7 and GC-9 districts (13 to 20 feet). Setbacks should be negotiated as part of the master site plan review.