

# URBAN DESIGN STUDY



## SECTION 2, Eagle River CBD Urban Design Study

### OVERVIEW OF THE CBD URBAN DESIGN STUDY

The principal goal of the Urban Design Study is to provide the residents of Eagle River with the tools to make central Eagle River a safer and more attractive place in which to work and live. It promotes the growth and vitality of Eagle River through:

- Development of a community core
- Walkway improvements that promote safety and encourage residents to travel by foot or bicycle in the downtown area
- Improved general appearance of the community

Recommendations to accomplish this include establishing an urban design plan, establishing design guidelines, and identifying implementation strategies.

#### A. Establishing an Urban Design Plan

Within the Central Business District of Eagle River there are a variety of development patterns. The Urban Design Plan assesses the different land use areas within the Central Business District with a primary goal of enhancing existing functions through aesthetic and safety improvements. Additionally, it creates a community core that is not just safe for pedestrians, but will attract pedestrian use. Secondary goals include improved general appearance for the community and a greater sense of cohesion. In essence, the Urban Design Plan

is a plan for allocating resources and effort within the CBD. The plan focuses on the following four components.

#### 1. The Old Glenn Highway

The plan acknowledges that the Old Glenn Highway, at least into the foreseeable future, will remain automobile-oriented. There are many factors that contribute to this. The current and projected volumes of traffic require two lanes in each direction and a center turn lane at intersections. There are currently no alternate routes that would relieve traffic to the extent that the road could become a more pedestrian-oriented space. Separating the walks from the roadway would require additional right-of-way acquisition through much of the Old Glenn Highway corridor. Within the core of town, this would severely impact or eliminate a number of businesses.

While the community has expressed a desire to make the Old Glenn Highway a “pedestrian friendly” environment, there is also a strong sentiment against using raised medians in the center of the roadway. Raised medians channel traffic efficiently, help mitigate the impact of the wide roadway, and provide a safe haven at the center for pedestrian crossings. With the benefits come drawbacks. Raised medians limit the ability for vehicles to make left turns, impede snow removal, and may potentially reduce the queuing space for left-turning vehicles at major intersections. Public sentiment, expressed through the public meetings, through the Citizen’s Advisory Group, and in written questionnaires is strongly opposed to the use of a center median. It must be noted that any significant improvements to pedestrian safety and comfort on the Old Glenn Highway will require some compromise to the convenience of vehicular traffic.

## 2. Establishing a Community Core

The area that encompasses Business Boulevard and the Old Glenn Highway between Monte Road and Eagle River Loop Road is selected as this core for a number of reasons. Town centers should be less than ¼ mile in diameter and offer the pedestrian a reason for being there. The city core offers the magnets of grocery stores, post office, retail outlets, and eateries. There are already good pedestrian facilities in place and new pedestrian facilities, soon to be constructed, will augment these. Traffic levels are relatively low and pedestrians can feel safe and comfortable in the area. Convenient parking is also available.

## 3. Establishing a Community Focal Point Within the Community Core

Virtually all of the Municipal functions located in Eagle River are in leased space at scattered locations. A new community center is proposed, which would house the library, Municipal offices, the WIC program, community meeting space and the Boys and Girls Clubs, making a very strong community focus. It also offers the opportunity to connect the Old Glenn Highway with the Business Boulevard area. A community plaza and entry would be available from the Old Glenn Highway. A second entry and parking would be provided on the Business Boulevard side. This would also offer the opportunity to bridge the grade change between the Old Glenn Highway and the Business Boulevard area, offering an ADA accessible link between the community above the Old Glenn Highway and the lower commercial area.

## 4. Concentrate Pedestrian Improvements Within the Community Core

Safety and comfort are clearly important to pedestrians. To draw pedestrians into an area, however there must be a higher concentration of interesting elements than are typically found in automobile-oriented spaces. Successful malls and city centers entice pedestrians by offering a variety of experiences that include shopping, interesting open spaces, people watching, and in some cases, the opportunity to recreate. Although this requires a concentration of resources in a small portion of the community, the entire town ultimately benefits from a vital town center.

## B. Establishing Design Guidelines

Design Guidelines have been broken into three subgroups that include:

### 1. Common Design Elements For Use Within Existing Right-of-Ways and for Public Facilities

Just as complementary furniture can create a pleasant atmosphere and a sense of order in the home, a unified approach to pedestrian amenities and enhancements help to establish a sense of order and visual continuity for a community. These enhancements offer the means to improve both pedestrian comfort and general appearance. The use of a unified design approach would be especially valuable along the Old Glenn Highway, where the concentration of auto-oriented development has created a sense of visual clutter that is difficult to interpret for either pedestrian or vehicular users. Because the improvements are placed on public property, there is one point of control and a comprehensive approach to design issues can be instituted.

## 2. Design Guidelines for Site Development

These guidelines are developed to instruct private property owners within the study area on issues of access, parking, building placement and orientation.

## 3. Suggested Design Guidelines for Façade and Building Improvements

This section deals specifically with architectural improvements to existing structures and new buildings.

- Update the Chugiak-Eagle River Transportation Plan.
- Press for stricter enforcement of speed limits on the Old Glenn Highway.
- Establish a business improvement district to deal with maintenance, beautification, and design issues.

## C. Identify Implementation Strategies

This Urban Design Study was initiated and has been developed under the guidance of the Municipality of Anchorage, Planning Department. The energy and drive to implement a study of this nature must come from the community. Successful downtown development projects in small communities can usually be traced to a small group of community activists. Through ingenuity, leadership, and persistence small groups have repeatedly demonstrated the ability to shape the character of their communities. In the course of preparing this study, it has become clear that there is a solid nucleus of residents concerned with the character of Eagle River.

The implementation strategies stress a strong community role and local control. Following are some key recommendations.

- Establish an overlay district to achieve local control over development.
- Establish a transportation committee within the Chamber of Commerce, or identify a representative from the Community Councils who can act as an AMATS representative for the community.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### A. Roadway Traffic and Circulation

Vehicular circulation is a key factor in the urban character of any community. Public roads create the framework for our towns and cities. Additionally, the way automobiles are parked and gain access to adjacent properties greatly affects the appearance and pedestrian comfort within our communities. In Eagle River this is especially true because a single road, the Old Glenn Highway, essentially defines the central business district. Because of this, an examination of traffic and circulation provides a good starting point for a discussion of the existing urban character of Eagle River.

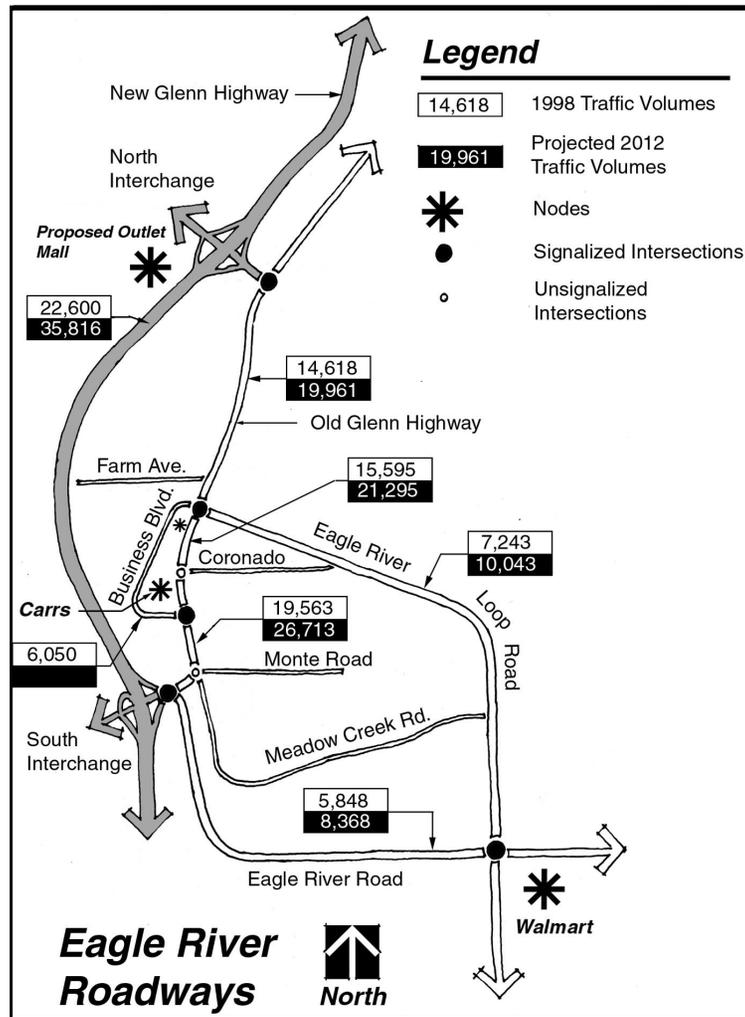


Figure 2-1 Existing Roadway Conditions

## 1. The Old Glenn Highway

The Old Glenn Highway has been the principal shaping force in the physical layout of Eagle River. The community grew up along the Old Glenn Highway. When the New Glenn Highway bypassed the community, the Old Glenn Highway became the “Main Street” of town by default. The Old Glenn Highway is the major arterial in Eagle River and projections indicate that volumes will increase significantly in the near future. A contributing factor is that there is only one continuous north-south alternate route that links the residential developments on Eagle River Road with the Central Business District and that is Eagle River Loop Road. Figure 2-1 identifies current and projected traffic volumes, key intersections, nodes and destinations. The traffic volumes and projections for the Old Glenn Highway were provided by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. Traffic data for other roadways was obtained from the Chugiak-Eagle River Transportation Plan, which was completed in October of 1996. The plan has a great deal of pertinent data relative to traffic volumes, housing and business throughout Eagle River. Traffic projections identified in the plan, however appear to have significantly underestimated traffic volumes for the Old Glenn Highway. The actual traffic volumes identified by ADOT&PF in 1998 were greater than the year 2015 projected volumes identified in the Transportation Plan.

- **Volume**

More than 19,000 vehicles a day travel between the South Interchange and the southern intersection with Business Boulevard on the Old Glenn Highway. Between the two Business Boulevard intersections the traffic volume drops to about 15,500 as a portion of the traffic is diverted to Business Boulevard. The northern portion of the Old Glenn Highway from Eagle River Loop Road to the North Eagle River Interchange carries

approximately 14,500 vehicles per day. Although all of the roads identified have the capacity to carry both current and projected volumes, the Old Glenn Highway between Artillery Road and the south intersection of Business Boulevard is projected to decrease from Level-Of-Service D to Level-Of-Service E. This is a standardized measurement that indicates a very high level of congestion.

- **Geometry**

The Old Glenn Highway right-of-way is approximately 100 feet wide through most of the Central Business District. It expands to as much as 110 feet wide in some locations. The extra width may be useful for screening or landscaping. The road width is fairly common for an arterial of this nature. It accommodates five traffic lanes, two in each direction and a center turning lane. It also includes an 8-foot wide walkway on either side of the road and a narrow band of exposed soil between the road and the walkways. There is very little room for additional landscaping or pedestrian amenities within the existing right-of-way. From the perspective of the pedestrian, the walkways are noisy and uncomfortable because of the traffic volume and speed. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that there are parking lots adjacent to the sidewalks just outside of the right-of-way and in some cases encroaching into the right-of-way, with numerous curb cuts for access.

- **Accidents**

A complete listing of accidents for the previous five-year period was reviewed to determine if any of the intersections on the Old Glenn Highway are of particular concern. Although there is a strong public perception that many of the intersections are hazardous, statistics indicate that intersections with the Old Glenn

Highway have average levels of accidents for the volume of traffic.

- **Crossings**

There is one crosswalk and two signalized pedestrian crossings of the Old Glenn Highway within the Central Business District. The signalized crossings require pedestrian activation, and are located at the two intersections of the Business Boulevard with the Old Glenn Highway. The unsignalized crossing is located at the intersection of Monte Road and the Old Glenn Highway. Many pedestrians, especially children, were observed jaywalking at any convenient location. This is not a safe practice, given the traffic volumes on the roadway. The speed limit on the Old Glenn Highway is 35 miles per hour, however traffic often seems to travel at a faster pace.

## 2. Business Boulevard

Business Boulevard is the other significant roadway in the Central Business District of Eagle River. Business Boulevard was constructed in segments during the 1970s and 1980s and services the larger retail establishments in the CBD. It carries approximately 6,000 vehicles per day. Business Boulevard provides access to single-family and multi-family housing between the Old Glenn Highway and the New Glenn Highway. However, the principal source of the traffic is related to the businesses adjacent to the Boulevard.

The appearance of Business Boulevard benefits from Municipal improvements, such as Town Square Park and the Transit Center. Landscaping of private development also contributes to an improved appearance. Business Boulevard does not have pedestrian walkways. The Business Boulevard Safety Improvements Project,

provided walkways on both sides as well as additional enhancements. Based on the existing conditions and the proposed improvements, the appearance and pedestrian safety on Business Boulevard will be much improved in the coming years.

## B. Architectural Character

There is no architecturally distinct character to the Eagle River CBD. This is typical of modern suburban and arterial development. There is no unique construction style or building material within the Central Business District. There are a number of nationally franchised restaurants and strip malls found along the Old Glenn Highway and a wide range of building styles. Additionally, there is no one location that can be considered a focal point or city center.

## C. Natural Constraints and Opportunities

- **Topographic Constraints**

A grade change of twenty to thirty feet between the Old Glenn Highway and Business Boulevard poses a constraint to linking the Old Glenn Highway with the lower area on Business Boulevard. The change is especially severe near the two intersections of Business Boulevard and the Old Glenn Highway. In both locations, retaining walls create a solid barrier between the two areas. In the middle portion, steep slopes isolate the upper area from the lower.

- **Views**

There are excellent views to the Chugach Range throughout the Central Business District. There are few tall buildings and views are not obstructed. On clear days there is a view of Mt. McKinley to the north. This view from the Old Glenn Highway is degraded by the Matanuska Electric Association Power Substation, which occupies the foreground.

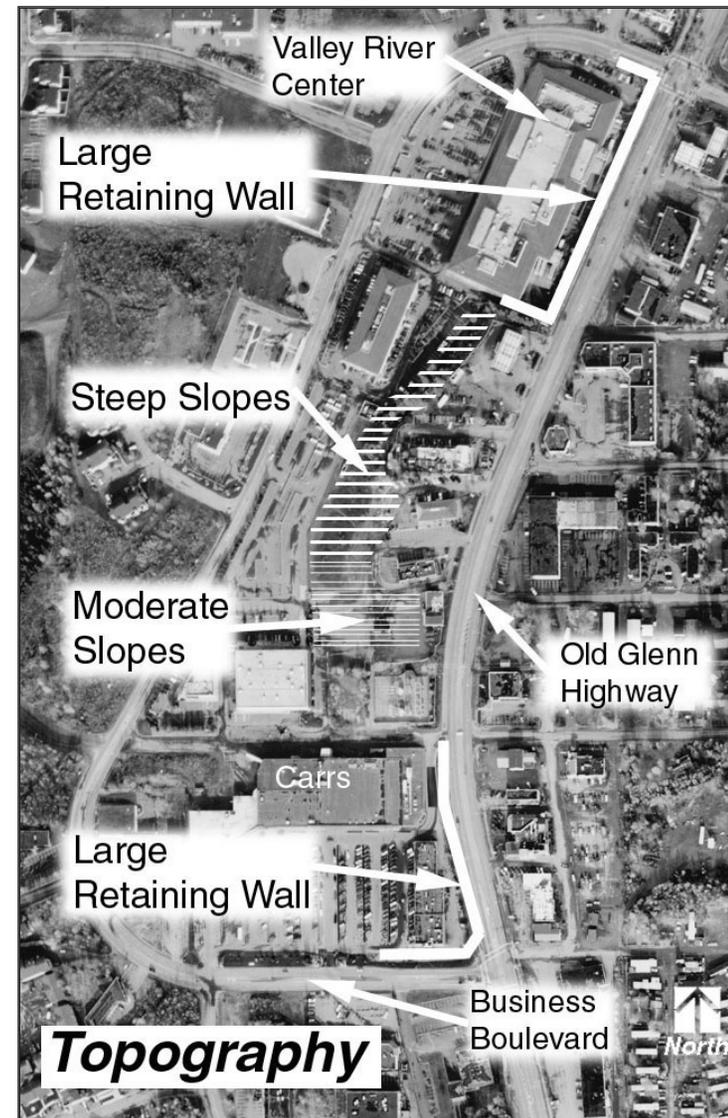


Figure 2-2 Topography in the Eagle River CBD

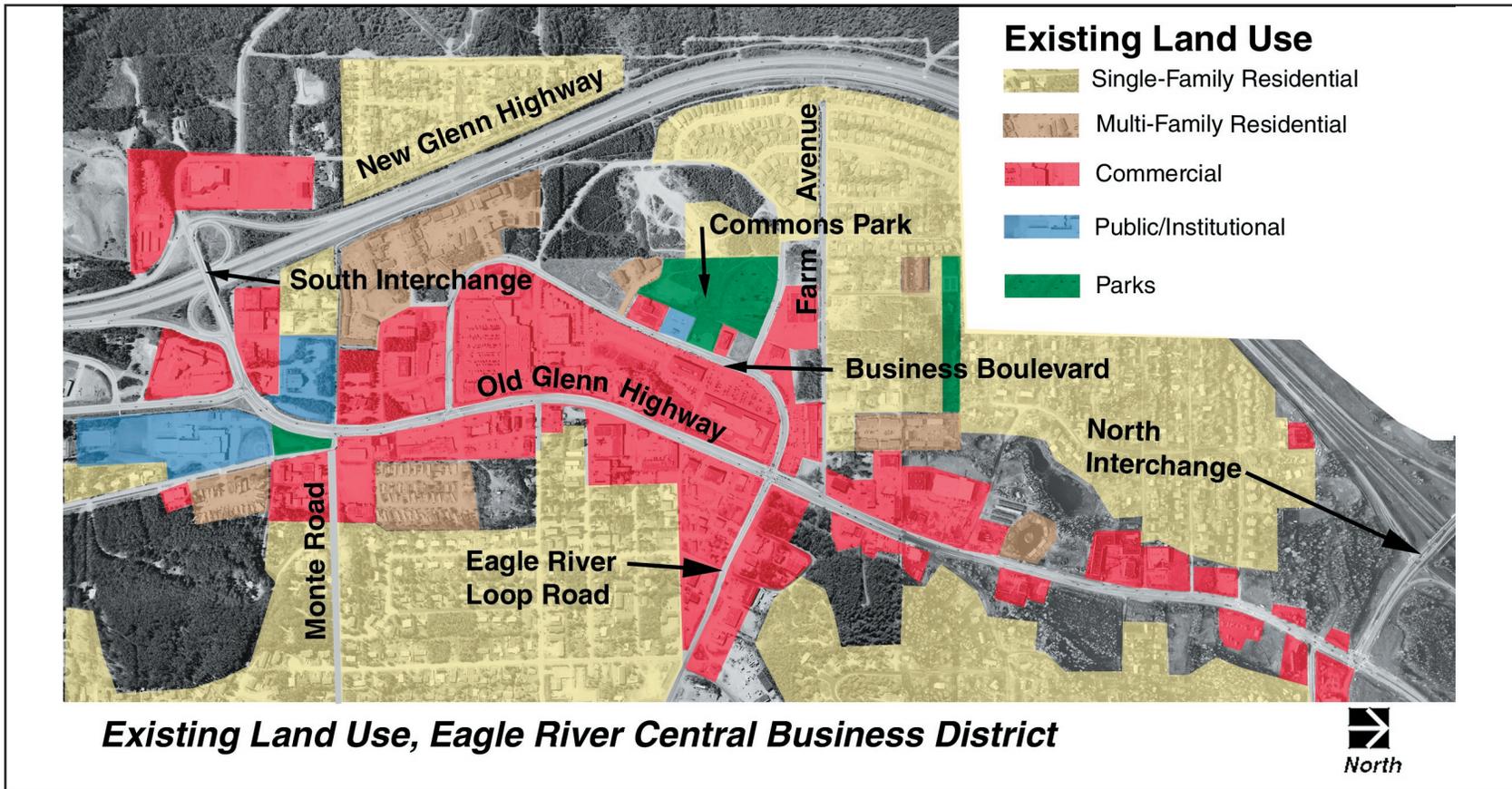


Figure 2-3 Eagle River Land Use Map

**D. Land Use**

Figure 2-3 shows existing land uses within the core area of Eagle River. The diagram shows the Old Glenn Highway as the commercial spine of the community. It also shows that the high-density core of the town lies between Monte Road on the south and Farm Avenue on the north. There is a significant amount of both single-family and multi-family residential

development surrounding the high-density core.

During the course of three public workshops and meetings with the Citizen’s Advisory Group, a variety of issues and concerns were raised. Key issues are identified here.



## URBAN DESIGN ISSUES AND CONCERNS

### A. Traffic

- Traffic on the Old Glenn Highway moves too fast and should be slowed down either by utilizing traffic calming techniques, lowering the speed limit, or by better enforcement of the existing speed limit.
- The intersection of Eagle River Road and the Old Glenn Highway is perceived as dangerous because of weaving traffic, poor visibility, and congestion.
- The intersections of Monte Road and Coronado Road with the Old Glenn Highway are perceived as dangerous due to the difficulty of turning onto the Old Glenn Highway.

### B. Pedestrian Issues

- Pedestrians do not feel safe to walking along the Old Glenn Highway.
- Crossing the Old Glenn Highway is difficult. There is significant concern about the safety of children.
- There are very few attractions, such as stores or activities in the area, which draw or encourage pedestrians to walk.
- It is very difficult to get around on foot during the winter months, due to the absence of sidewalk maintenance and snow hauling.

### C. Maintenance

Eagle River residents currently pay lower property taxes than those in Anchorage. This is, in part, due to the fact that snow

is not hauled away, but simply pushed to the side. Modified design of roadways should not require the hauling of snow.

### D. Architectural and Town Character

- Eagle River is not an attractive town and efforts should be made to improve the community's image.
- Driving or walking north on the Old Glenn Highway through the CBD, one has to look down at the rooftops and mechanical systems of buildings on Business Boulevard.
- The Matanuska Electric Association Power Substation occupies a prime location on the Old Glenn Highway and has very little screening.
- The small town atmosphere of Eagle River should be maintained and enhanced.

## URBAN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

People like to live in Eagle River because of its friendly, small-town character. There is ready access to nearby fishing and hunting. The Eagle River Valley offers exceptional opportunities for hiking, biking, and water sports. Generally, housing costs are lower in Eagle River than in Anchorage. For these combined reasons, Eagle River maintains a higher growth rate than the rest of the Municipality.

Unfortunately, rapid growth has the potential of undermining the attributes that people move to Eagle River to enjoy. There is growing concern about Eagle River's future as a community, especially in terms of traffic congestion, pedestrian safety, comfort, and general appearance.

Recommendations included in the Central Business District Urban Design Study have been segregated into the three categories identified below. They are intended to reinforce small town character, establish a town core, provide greater opportunity for pedestrian activity, and improve the general appearance of the community. The recommendations cover a broad spectrum including both physical improvements and management recommendations.

1. **Establish an Urban Design Plan**
2. **Establish Design Guidelines for:**
  - A. **The Public Right-of-Way**
  - B. **Building Sites Including Access and Parking**
  - C. **Buildings and Façade Improvements**
3. **Implementation Strategies**

## URBAN DESIGN PLAN

The Urban Design Plan has three principal components. First, the plan segregates the Central Business District into three distinct areas, the town core, South Gateway, and North Eagle River. The Eagle River CBD is not homogenous in character and the plan recommends different treatment for the different areas. Second, the plan examines vehicular circulation within the CBD and the alternatives available for circulation. Third, the plan recommends establishment of a town core that encourages pedestrian use and a stronger sense of community identity.

### A. Districts within the CBD

The Eagle River CBD is linear in nature, spread along the Old Glenn Highway. It is not uniform in character. The CBD can be broken down into three districts, each of which share

common characteristics. These areas are identified below. The Urban Design Plan and Design Guidelines section recommend improvements for all three areas. The focus is on the town center because the greatest opportunity to establish a pedestrian core lies within this area.

- **Town Core.** The town core consists roughly of the area with the greatest density of commercial development. This includes the Old Glenn Highway and Business Boulevard between Monte Road and Eagle River Loop Road. The Town Core also extends west to include Commons Park and the Transit Facility. (Figure 2-4)
- **“South Gateway”.** This includes the Old Glenn Highway from Artillery Road to Monte Road. This area is not highly commercial and has a park-like feel due to the adjacent churches and the landscape improvements at the National Bank of Alaska and First National Bank. Pedestrians using this area are likely to be travelling through, toward the city center or from nearby housing to Eagle River Elementary School.
- **North Eagle River.** This area encompasses the Old Glenn Highway and extends from Eagle River Loop Road to the North Interchange. This area is rural in character and businesses tend to be more utilitarian in nature. It is not an area pedestrians are drawn to, but rather transit through to get to other parts of town.

### B. Traffic Circulation

#### 1. Community Character Impact

The linear nature of the Old Glenn Highway, traffic volumes, traffic speed, and access to adjacent properties all contribute strongly to the appearance of and pedestrian

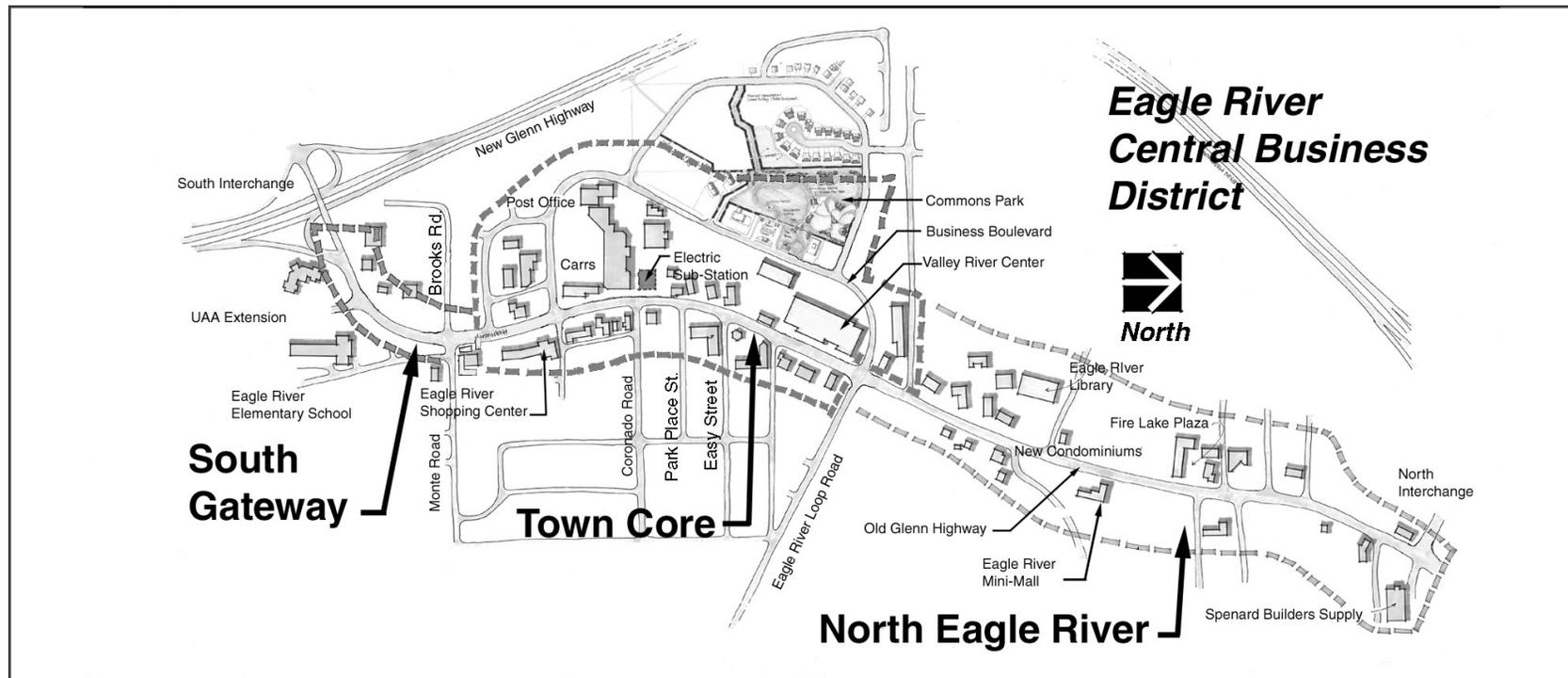


Figure 2-4 The Eagle River Central Business District and three specific urban design improvement areas.

comfort in the Central Business District. Like many modern suburbs or towns that have grown along major roadways, Eagle River is an automobile-oriented community. The impacts of being an automobile-oriented town include:

- **Dispersed Development.** Commercial development is dispersed throughout the town. There is no clearly identifiable town center.
- **Lack of Pedestrian-Scale Interest.** Because development is spread and interspersed with large areas of asphalt paving, there are few pedestrian amenities to shape a stimulating walking experience.
- **Lack of Pedestrian Comfort.** Heavy traffic volumes, noise, frequent driveways, and inadequate separation between cars and pedestrians creates a sense of vulnerability and risk to those on foot.
- **No Sense of Place.** Automobile-oriented communities grow in a generic fashion. They could be anywhere, they are predictable, and are often criticized as being boring.
- **Cluttered Appearance.** Because signage and buildings are oriented to the driver, their scale and spacing are inappropriate for the pedestrian. The development pattern creates a sense of clutter.

## 2. Traffic Circulation Issues

There are a number of issues associated with traffic circulation through Eagle River that affect any long-term plan and must be dealt with as part of any modification to existing circulation patterns.

- The Old Glenn Highway carries more than 19,000 cars on average, per day. This is projected to increase to more than 25,000 cars per day by the year 2015.
- The width of the Old Glenn Highway, with two travel lanes in each direction and a center turning lane, is not conducive to establishing a pedestrian friendly town core.
- There are no other continuous north-south routes, that offer a link between the South Interchange/Eagle River Road and the North Interchange with the New Glenn Highway.
- The continuous center turn lane on the Old Glenn Highway coupled with frequent curb-cuts fosters pedestrian/vehicular conflicts.
- Although the speed limit on the Old Glenn Highway is 35 miles per hour, vehicles often exceed the speed limit. There is a strong consensus that some mechanism for traffic calming should be instituted.
- There are other issues associated with traffic and safety that do not relate specifically to the urban design of the Eagle River Central Business District, but should be addressed because of strong community concerns. Two of the key issues are:

The configuration of Artillery Road and Eagle River Road is perceived as a serious hazard. There is a lot of lane changing at this location due to the current configuration.

The intersection of Monte Road and the Old Glenn Highway presents a hazard to both pedestrians and vehicles. Monte Road drops steeply to the intersection at the Old Glenn Highway. Sight distances are not optimal and steady traffic on the Old Glenn Highway, particularly during peak flows, causes long delays.

## 3. Circulation Alternatives

A variety of circulation alternatives have been proposed for Eagle River which deal primarily with traffic calming, dispersing traffic, or reducing the apparent width of the roadway. The fundamental problem is that the Old Glenn Highway carries a high traffic volume and there are no readily available alternative routes through town. The following alternatives have been suggested as a means of dispersing or better channeling traffic to benefit pedestrian uses.

### *Alternative A, The Perron Alternative*

Alternative A was developed as part of a previous study by the Perron Collaborative. In this alternative, a roadway loop similar to Business Boulevard is constructed on the east side of the Old Glenn Highway, intersecting with Eagle River Loop Road. The intent of this alternative is to disperse traffic between Business Boulevard, the Old Glenn Highway, and the new roadway. In doing this, the Old Glenn Highway could be reduced from two lanes in each direction, with a center turning lane, to one lane in each direction, a center median, and on-street parking (Figure 2-5). The project would provide additional room within the right-of-way for improved pedestrian walkways, landscaping, lighting, and a variety of site furnishings.

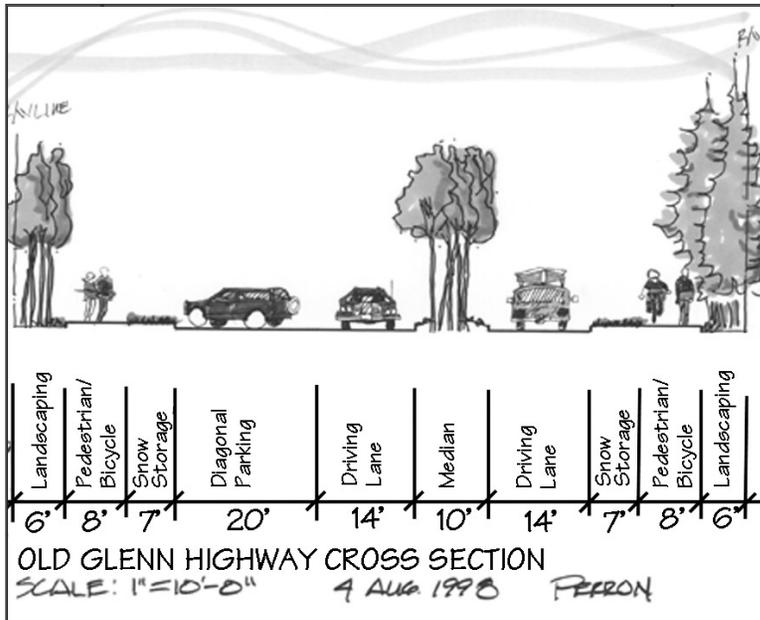


Figure 2-5 Old Glenn Highway cross-section as proposed by the Perron Collaborative

**Strengths:**

- The width of the vehicular portion of the Old Glenn Highway would be significantly reduced. This would improve pedestrian comfort in crossing the highway.
- Traffic speeds on the Old Glenn Highway, between Business Boulevard and Eagle River Loop Road, could be reduced and on-street parking would have the effect of calming traffic.
- The reduced number of travel lanes would provide space for pedestrian improvements and landscaping.
- The combination of the three roadways would contribute toward the establishment of a town core.
- The availability of on-street parking on the Old Glenn

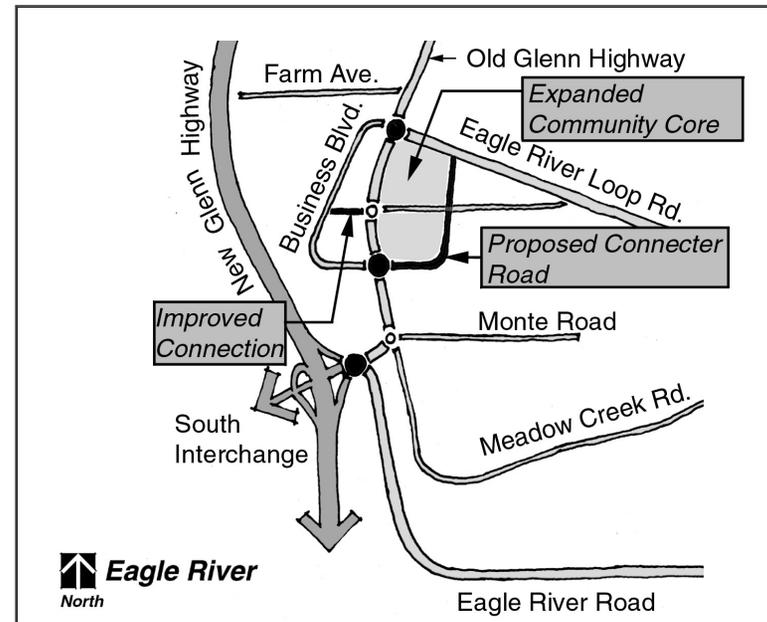


Figure 2-6 Circulation Alternative A

Highway would relieve what is now perceived as a parking shortage on the Old Glenn Highway.

**Weaknesses:**

- The Old Glenn Highway currently carries a minimum of between 14,500 and 15,500 vehicles per day between the South interchange and the North Interchange. This is projected to increase to be well over 20,000 by the year 2015. The addition of a loop road that does not connect to Eagle River Road or Artillery Road at the south end of town does not offer an alternative for through traffic and is not likely to significantly reduce traffic on the Old Glenn Highway.
- If traffic volumes on the Old Glenn Highway are not reduced, a decrease in the number of travel lanes

from two in each direction to one in each direction will increase congestion, which is currently perceived as a serious problem during peak periods.

- Virtually all of the property east of the Old Glenn Highway is currently developed as residential. Although some portion of this loop could be developed from existing roadways, significant right-of-way acquisition would be needed in areas where properties have already been developed.
- Construction of a new commercial street in this area would erode a well-established residential neighborhood. This is contrary to the stated goals of the 1996 Chugiak-Eagle River Transportation Plan and community sentiment.

### **Alternative B, One-way Couplet Alternative**

Alternative B suggests a one-way couplet utilizing Business Boulevard and the Old Glenn Highway. In this alternative, Business Boulevard would be extended to join Artillery Road at the intersection with Eagle River Road.

#### **Strengths:**

- The Old Glenn Highway and Business Boulevard would share the traffic load equally. As a result, the roadways could be reduced to three travel lanes. This would significantly reduce the width of both roadways allowing for easier pedestrian crossings.
- On one-way roads there are no left-turn conflicts with on-coming vehicles and traffic moves more smoothly.
- A one-way couplet system would easily handle existing traffic volumes and projected volumes well into the future.
- The one-way couplet system would establish a

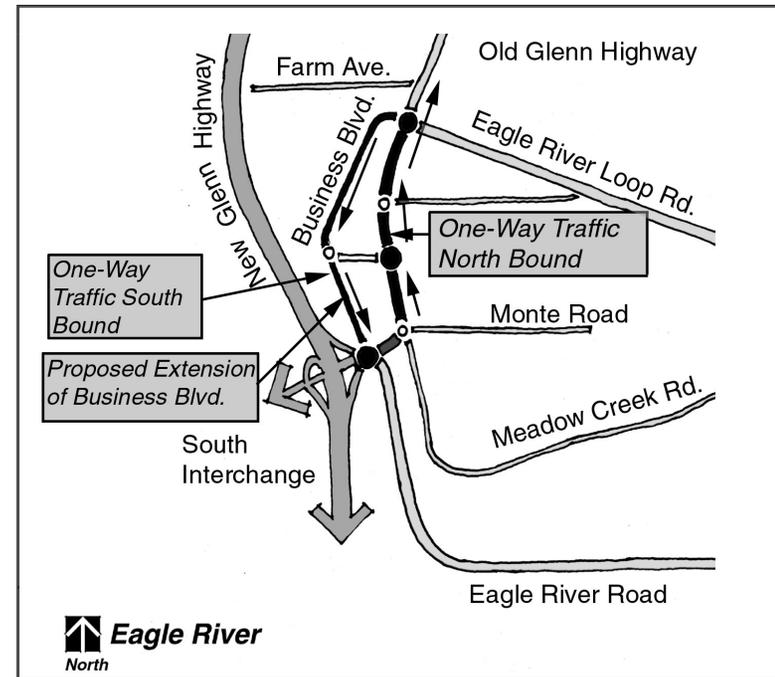


Figure 2-7 Alternative B, one-way couplet alternative

commercial core between Business Boulevard and the Old Glenn Highway.

- A reduced number of travel lanes for each of these roadways would allow for better separation between pedestrians and the vehicle lanes.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- One-way roads encourage higher traffic speeds.
- One-way roads could impact access to adjacent businesses because traffic can only arrive from one direction.
- The provision of cross streets linking the two

one-way streets is crucial to avoid long loop trips. The opportunity for cross streets is limited by site topography.

- Many city planners feel that one-way streets are detrimental to the fabric of a community. One-way couplets tend to increase vehicle speed and reduce individual choice. A number of communities have converted one-way couplets back to two-way streets.
- Right-of-way would have to be acquired through the multi-family housing area at the south end of Business Boulevard.

### **Alternative C, Existing Configuration**

Alternative C (Fig. 2-8) maintains the existing roadway alignment and has been broken down into two sub-alternatives. In the first sub-alternative, landscaped medians replace the continuous center turn lane (Fig. 2-9). At all intersections, left turn lanes are provided. The 1996 Chugiak-Eagle River Transportation Plan suggested the use of non-traversable medians as one means of improving traffic flow.

#### **Strengths:**

- Reduced traffic conflicts because the potential for two vehicles entering the center turn lane at the same time is eliminated.
- Improved traffic flow.
- Improved pedestrian comfort, because the perceived width of the roadway is reduced by the center median and a safe haven may be provided for street crossings.
- Improved appearance due to landscaping in the center median.
- Could be accomplished within the existing right-of-way.

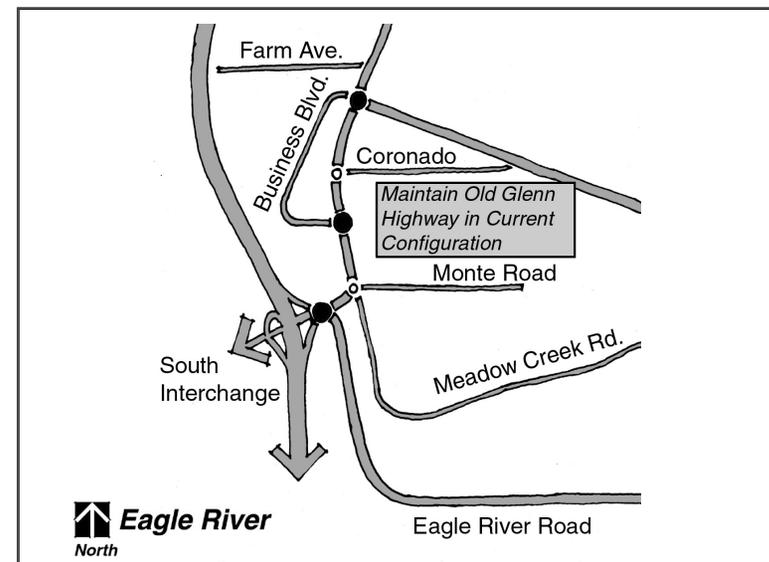


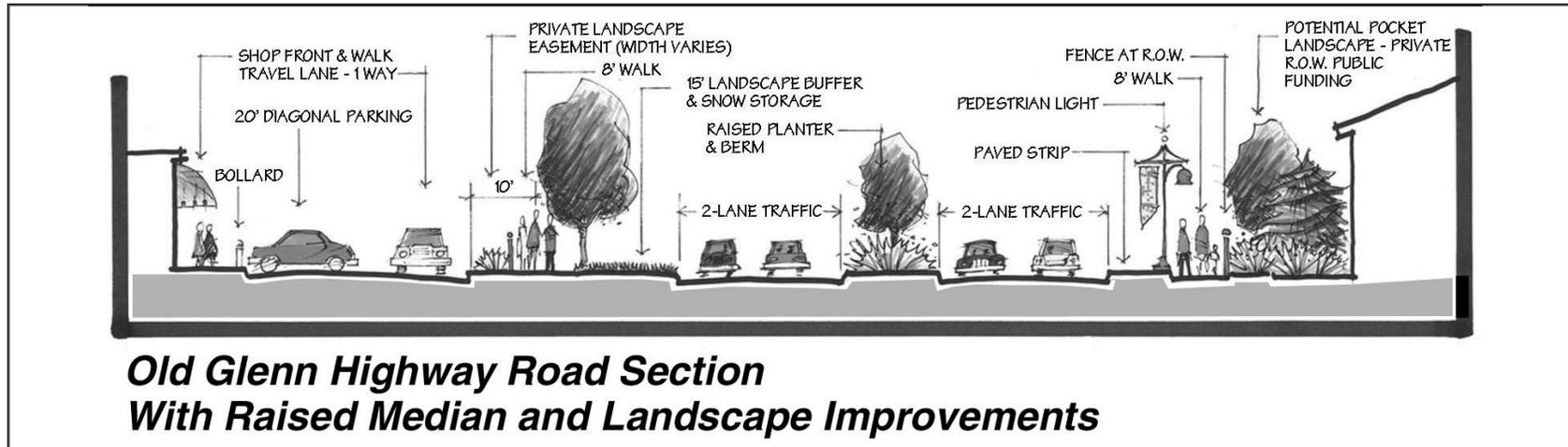
Figure 2-8 Alternative C, Existing Configuration

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Increased need for “U” turns at intersections.
- Access to adjacent businesses is impeded for left-turning traffic.
- Snow removal is made more difficult and probably would require hauling to a snow storage site.
- Increased maintenance costs associated with the median landscaping.

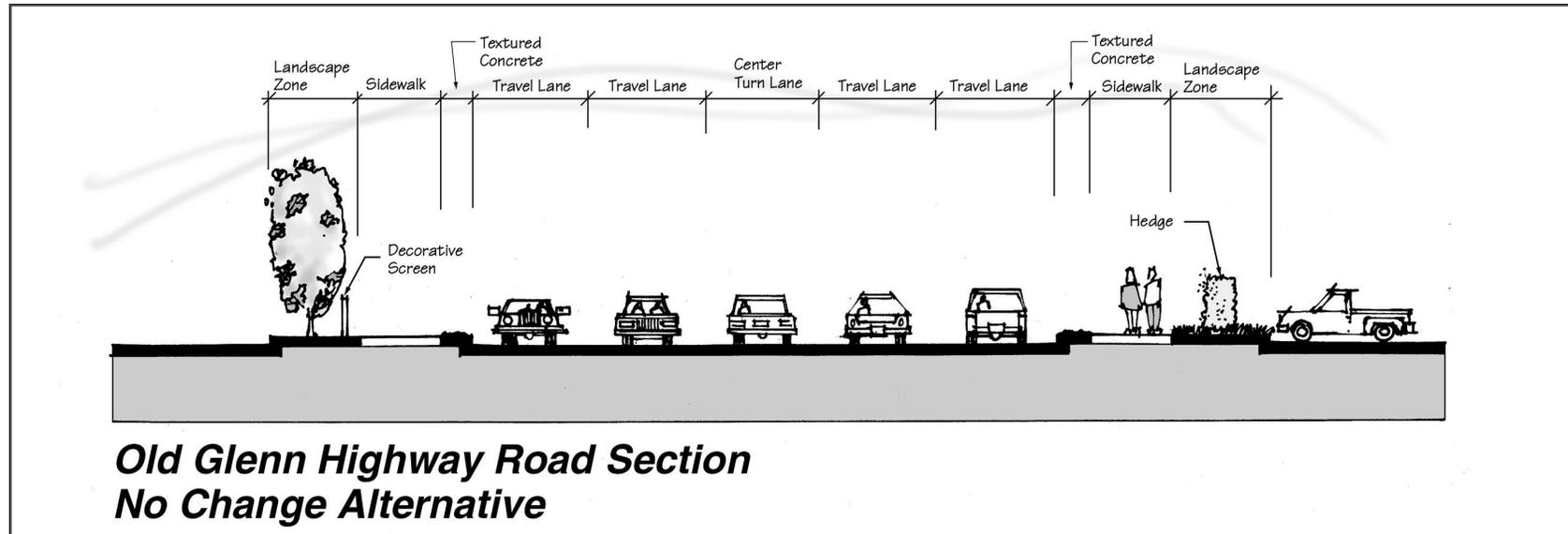
The second sub-alternative is a no-change alternative, which leaves the existing configuration of two travel lanes in each direction and a center turn lane. (Figure 2-10).

This alternative calls for cosmetic improvements within the right-of-way, but no substantive alterations to the roadway



**Old Glenn Highway Road Section  
With Raised Median and Landscape Improvements**

Figure 2-9 Old Glenn Highway with Center Median



**Old Glenn Highway Road Section  
No Change Alternative**

Figure 2-10 No-change circulation alternative

section. In key locations, short center medians are included to provide safe havens at pedestrian crossings.

#### Strengths:

- Adequate capacity for current and projected traffic volumes.
- Provides direct access to all businesses on either side of the Old Glenn Highway.
- Snow plowing and maintenance requirements remain at current levels.
- There is no need for acquisition of additional right-of-way.

#### Weaknesses:

- There can be no significant improvement for pedestrian comfort walking parallel to or crossing the Old Glenn Highway. The Old Glenn Highway will remain automobile oriented.
- There is little room for enhancements to the Old Glenn Highway. Site amenities, such as lighting, benches, banner poles and other design elements could be placed only in those locations where extra room allows.

#### 4. Traffic Recommendations

There are no simple solutions to the traffic situation on the Old Glenn Highway. Any design solutions for the Old Glenn would need approval by ADOT&PF. Traffic will continue to increase as the population increases, because there are few alternate routes. The alternatives identified above were presented to the Citizen's Advisory Group and at three public meetings. Both oral and written comment supported maintaining the Old Glenn Highway in its current alignment of two travel lanes in each direction with a continuous center turn lane. It was noted that medians had been placed in the center of the Old Glenn Highway

as part of a previous project, but were soon removed in response to strong public opposition. Residents are also clearly frustrated with the congestion on the Old Glenn Highway and wish to avoid any design that would appear to aggravate the situation.

Following are four recommendations that can help provide direction:

- Prepare an updated transportation plan for Eagle River.** The Chugiak-Eagle River Transportation Plan was prepared by planning staff from the Municipality of Anchorage in 1996. It is now due for an update. Based on Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facility (ADOT&PF) statistics, traffic volumes have increased well beyond those projected in the 1996 study. Additionally, there are a number of potential and new traffic generators that will strongly influence the Central Business District. These include:
  - The Powder Ridge subdivision also near the north interchange
  - The new Walmart at the intersection of Eagle River Road and Eagle River Loop Road
  - Expansion of subdivisions along Eagle River Road
  - The potential of a new Fred Meyer retail store

These are all substantial changes that will affect all of the roads in Eagle River. A new plan would gather necessary traffic and pedestrian data; make projections, based on new and proposed development; and make specific recommendations relative to roadway alignment alternatives. In particular, a focus could be on identifying alternate routes to relieve traffic volumes on the Old Glenn Highway. Specific intersections, such as the intersections of Eagle River Road and Monte Road

with the Old Glenn Highway, that are a concern to the community, should be addressed in the design of the Old Glenn Highway Rehabilitation Project.

- b. Prepare a circulation study for downtown.** In addition to an update to the Chugiak-Eagle River Transportation Plan there is a need for a comprehensive circulation study for the entire road network within the core of Eagle River. There are a number of potential and new traffic generators that will strongly influence the CBD. These include:

- The Powder Ridge subdivision also near the north interchange,
- The Walmart at the intersection of Eagle River Road and Eagle River Loop Road,
- Expansion of subdivisions along Eagle River Road and the Old Glenn Highway, and
- The new Fred Meyer retail store.

These are all substantial changes that will affect all of the roads in Eagle River. The circulation study would gather necessary traffic and pedestrian data; make projections, based on new and proposed development; and make specific recommendations relative to roadway alignment alternatives. In particular, a focus would be on identifying alternate routes to relieve traffic volumes on the Old Glenn Highway, including the movement of freight vehicles. Specific intersections, such as the intersections of Eagle River Road and Monte Road with the Old Glenn Highway, are a concern to the community and should be addressed in the design of the Old Glenn Highway Rehabilitation Project.

- c. Press for stricter enforcement of existing speed limits.** Motorists tend to drive to the design

speed of a given roadway. The design speed of the Old Glenn Highway is about 50 miles per hour, which makes enforcement of the existing 35 mile per hour speed limit difficult. Public comment has suggested lowering the speed limit to 25 miles per hour. This is likely to have little impact and according to the Alaska Department of Transportation may actually increase the potential for accidents, due to a broader range of travel speeds. Communities and neighborhoods can impact enforcement, however, by maintaining pressure on local enforcement agencies.

- d. Maintain the Old Glenn Highway in its current configuration.** Residents of Eagle River have stated, both in written surveys and orally at public meetings that they would like to see the Old Glenn Highway become safer and more pedestrian oriented. At the same time, residents have stated emphatically that they are opposed to altering the design of the roadway in such a way that maintenance would increase or that the center turning lane would be eliminated. While some improvement can be made to promote safety and comfort for pedestrians on the Old Glenn Highway without altering the current design, it will not be a significant change from the current situation. It will not be a place that pedestrians are attracted to. The combination of road noise, road width, traffic volume, speed, and numerous curb cuts diminishes any positive contributions made by improved sidewalks, site furnishings, and lighting.

The decision to maintain the current roadway configuration rests with the community. There isn't a right or a wrong answer. The community must understand, however that in making this choice, the goal of a pedestrian orientation for the Old Glenn Highway cannot be realized.

Besides enforcing vehicle speed limits, there are a number of things that can be done to improve the existing situation for pedestrians. They are dealt with more specifically in the design guidelines portion of this Urban Design Study and they include:

- The provision of visual cues to drivers that they are entering Eagle River. Gateway features make a strong statement that it's time to slow down.
- Raised medians in key locations. There are key locations in the Central Business District where raised medians will not impact the ability of vehicles to make left turns. Raised medians provide a safe haven for pedestrians in the center of the road and help to calm traffic.
- Improved general appearance and clear delineation of walkways, driveways, and parking areas.

### C. Establish a Town Core

This third component of the Urban Design Plan identifies an area and provides recommendations on creating a town core that is pedestrian oriented.

#### 1. Characteristics of a Good Town Core

Eagle River is an automobile-oriented community. Development is dispersed around the town and it is difficult to identify an area that can clearly be called out as the town center. Eagle River should consider "creating" a town core, and concentrating their efforts and investment toward fostering a strong core that local residents can identify with, and enjoy. As a starting point, the list below outlines elements that are common to good city centers.

- **Anchor Uses.** Anchor uses are stores and public facilities that normally draw people into town. Examples

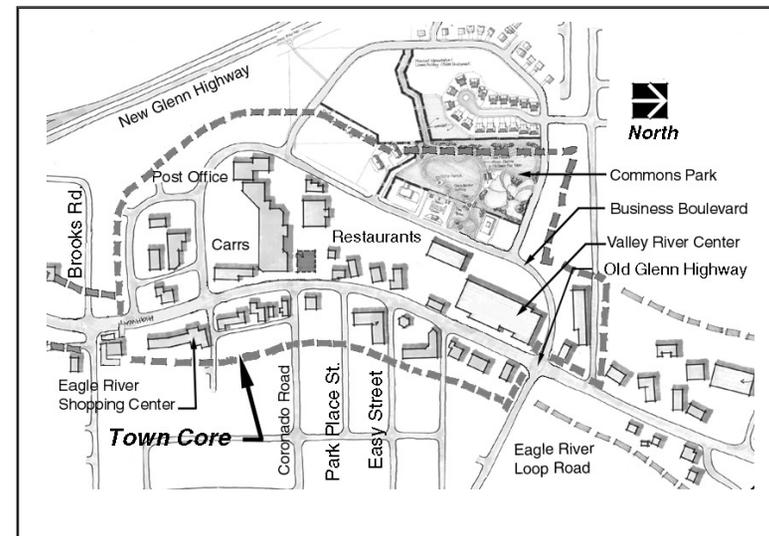


Figure 2-11 Town Core

include grocery stores, post offices, book stores, libraries, city offices, and department stores.

- **Gathering Places.** Successful town centers need gathering places. Gathering places can be indoor or outdoor, but they should offer food and drink, a lively environment, and a safe comfortable setting.
- **Parks and Open Space.** Parks and open space should be located within or immediately adjacent to a successful town center. This fosters recreation, large community gatherings and festivals, or just a place to relax.
- **Concentrated Development.** Town centers should be compact and offer the pedestrian much to see and do. A rule of thumb is that downtown anchors should be within a five minute walking radius. Most town centers favor shopping as a primary activity with store fronts, signage, and facades supplying most of the interest.

Other features that make town centers lively include site furnishings, landscaping, and public art. Pedestrians are attracted to areas with a high density of visually interesting components.

- **Nearby Residential Development.** Nearby residential development supplies a steady population base to support the town core. A key ingredient to the vitality of any town center is the human component.

## 2. The Town Center Concept

Figure 2-11 identifies the area designated as the town center of Eagle River. Although the area cannot currently be considered pedestrian oriented, it already has many of the attributes common to a good town center. These include viable anchor uses that typically draw pedestrians. Also, residential development surrounding the area includes a considerable amount of multi-family housing. The new Commons Park and the Municipal Transit Center is contained within the area. The two biggest weaknesses of the proposed town core are poor pedestrian connections and a general lack of intensity. Opportunities for pedestrian connections are clearly present, however. These are shown on figure 2-12. Each of the individual components identified by the letters A-F is dealt with in greater detail in Section 3, the Pedestrian and Bicycle Circulation Plan. Existing walkways in the area are identified by red lines. The walkways are well-designed and comfortable. Additionally, the walkways bring pedestrians immediately adjacent to retail businesses and offices in the area. The existing walkway system in the area would be enhanced and extended with new walkways and pedestrian improvements. Improved links to surrounding neighborhoods and to the Old Glenn Highway would be of particular importance. Following is a brief description of the Town Center Pedestrian Concept.

**A/B** A new mid-block pedestrian crosswalk is included to strengthen the link between the community east of the Old Glenn Highway and the Business Boulevard area. A handicap-accessible route to the Business Boulevard area is accomplished by an elevator, which would be constructed as part of a new library/community center. This link occurs at the location where existing topography offers the greatest opportunity.

**C** A new promenade walkway links the existing walkways at the Valley River Center to the existing walkways at the cinema complex. The walkways could be bordered by sports courts or other development that would bring vitality and interest to the area.

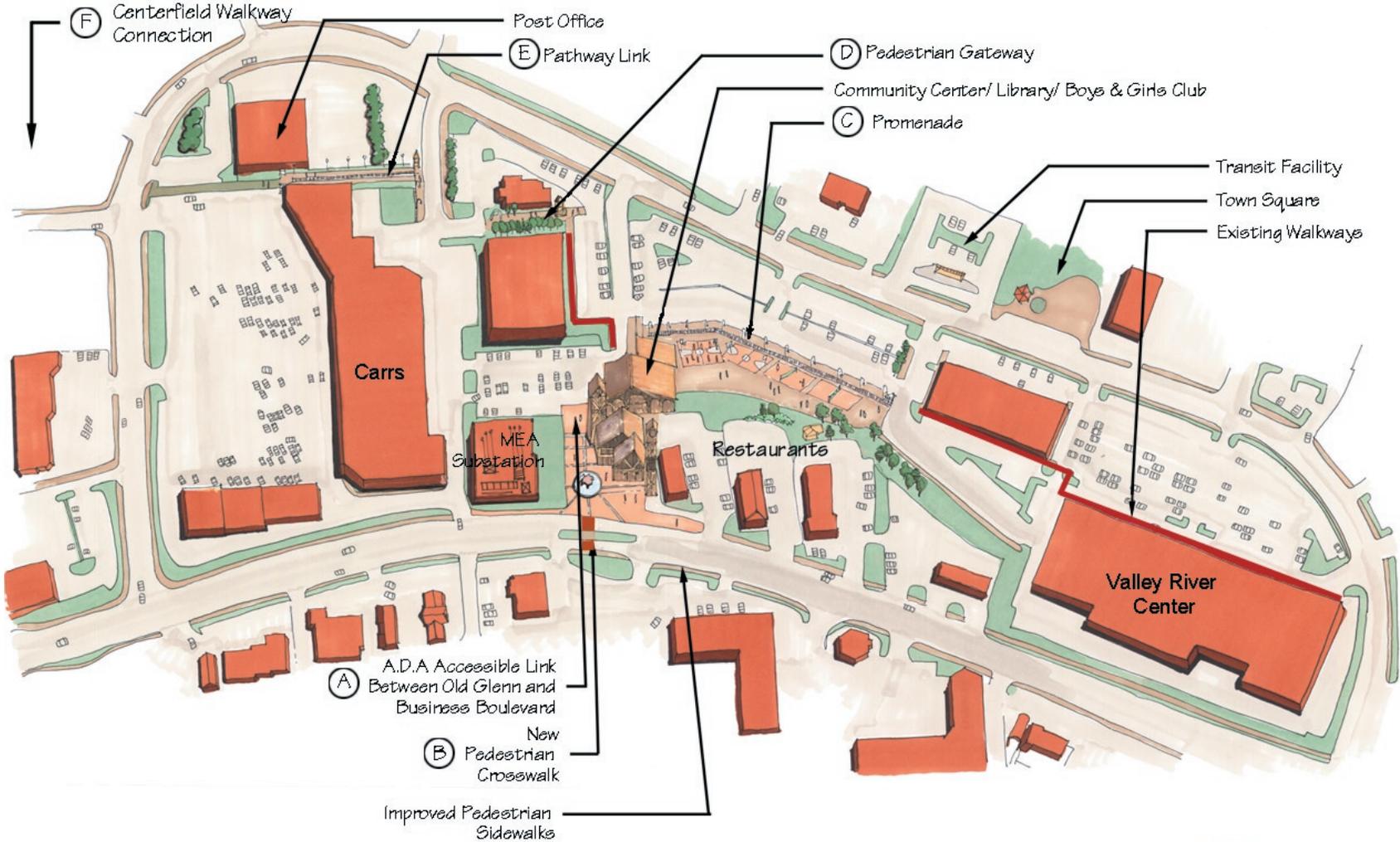
**D.** A pedestrian gateway and plaza occupies what is now an alleyway between the restaurant and the cinema complex. This helps to create the north/south link and reinforces the pedestrian character of the area.

**E** A new walkway is established between the Carrs grocery store and the Post Office. This formalizes an existing pathway. It also creates a complete north/south pedestrian link through the town center that is not associated with a roadway.

**F** A new walkway is developed along Centerfield Drive, which would connect to the existing bike route and better link the multi-family housing nearby.

Planned improvements to Business Boulevard will include pedestrian crossings to Regency Drive, the transit facility and Town Square Park. In addition, the Business Boulevard improvements include walkways on both sides of the boulevard and pedestrian amenities.

Overall, the Town Center holds a great deal of promise for an improved pedestrian experience in Eagle River.



# Proposed Eagle River Town Center

Figure 2-12 Proposed Town Center



### 3. Establish a Community Focal Point

Most communities have some public building or space that is clearly considered a community focal point. Although there is no such focal point in Eagle River, there is an opportunity to establish one. Municipal offices are currently spread out in a variety of lease spaces. From time to time these facilities change location due to the expiration or renegotiation of leases. As an example, the library, which was once situated in the town center relocated to its current location when a cheaper lease was obtained. The new location is not considered as desirable or accessible as the previous town center location. When the current lease expires, there is the potential for relocation again. There has been growing support for finding a permanent location for the library. If the library could be combined with other Municipal offices and a public meeting space, there is an opportunity to create a permanent central focus and landmark for the Eagle River Town Center.

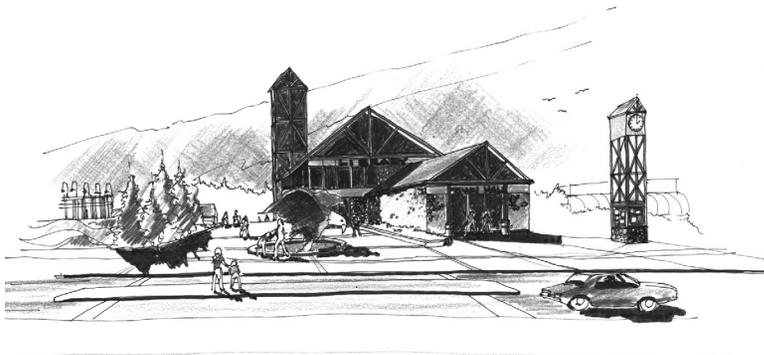


Figure 2-13 Proposed Community Center/Library from the Old Glenn Highway

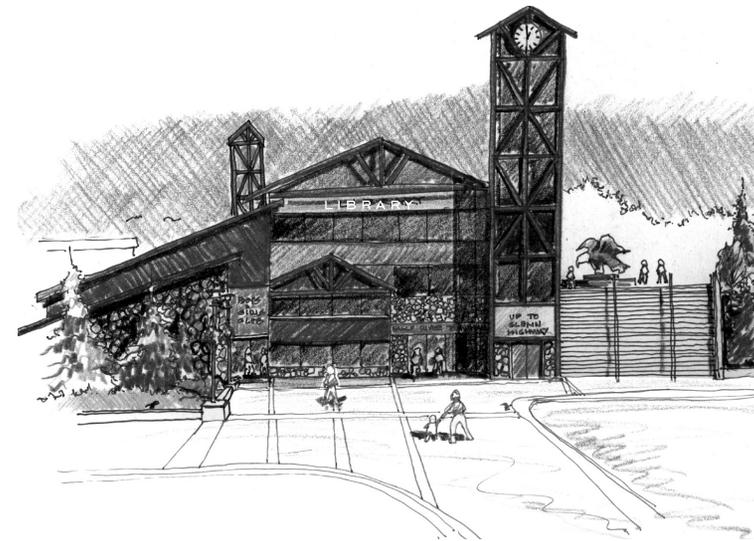


Figure 2-14 Proposed Community Center/Library, as seen from Business Boulevard.

Several sites were discussed, but one site in particular would benefit the community. The site now occupied by the Boys and Girls Clubs, next to the Matanuska Electric Association (M.E.A.) substation is owned by M.E.A. This site would make an ideal location for a combined facility that would house a new library, Municipal offices, public meeting rooms, and new facilities for the Boys and Girls Clubs. This site is centrally located for residents above and below the Old Glenn Highway. The facility could face onto the Old Glenn Highway, but rely on the lower area for parking. Additionally, the site is the best location on the Old Glenn Highway to create a strong A.D.A. accessible pedestrian link between the upper area of the Old Glenn Highway and the lower area of Business Boulevard. The building could be used to set an example in terms of materials and style for private development within the Central Business District.

#### 4. Concentrate Pedestrian Improvements Within the Town Core

There has been a lot of study on what makes successful downtowns work. As discussed in the previous paragraph, a compact city center with a high level of intensity is critical. This level of intensity is very low throughout the Eagle River CBD. The town core has the greatest potential of achieving the necessary level of intensity to act as a pedestrian draw. Paving, lighting, landscaping, and the built environment contribute toward the intensity in the city center. Eagle River should avoid the temptation to spread improvements evenly throughout the broad area of the Central Business District, but instead focus improvements within the core. The entire community benefits from a strong downtown, which can expand to encompass adjacent areas in time. The density of development is what establishes a downtown as the town core. Recommended pedestrian improvements within the town core include:

- Concrete Sidewalks. Sidewalks should be constructed of concrete and include different paving textures in key locations. Avoid the use of asphalt paving.
- Include pedestrian lighting only in the downtown area. Pedestrian scale lighting need not be spread evenly through the downtown, but should be used at nodes and pedestrian junctions.
- Include decorative poles with banners to add color.
- Use decorative fencing to separate parking and sidewalks when space does not allow for landscaping.
- Bicycle racks and trash receptacles should be used as design elements and not just as utilitarian features.
- Where possible, incorporate landscaping and displays of annual flowers.

Even the most extensive use of pedestrian improvements cannot of itself create a successful downtown. Pedestrian improvements, however, can create an environment that encourages private investment. In concert with private development, the use of strong pedestrian links, interesting public spaces, and pedestrian improvements will help add vitality to the city center of Eagle River.



*Figure 2-15 Establishing a pedestrian core requires a concentration of interesting features.*

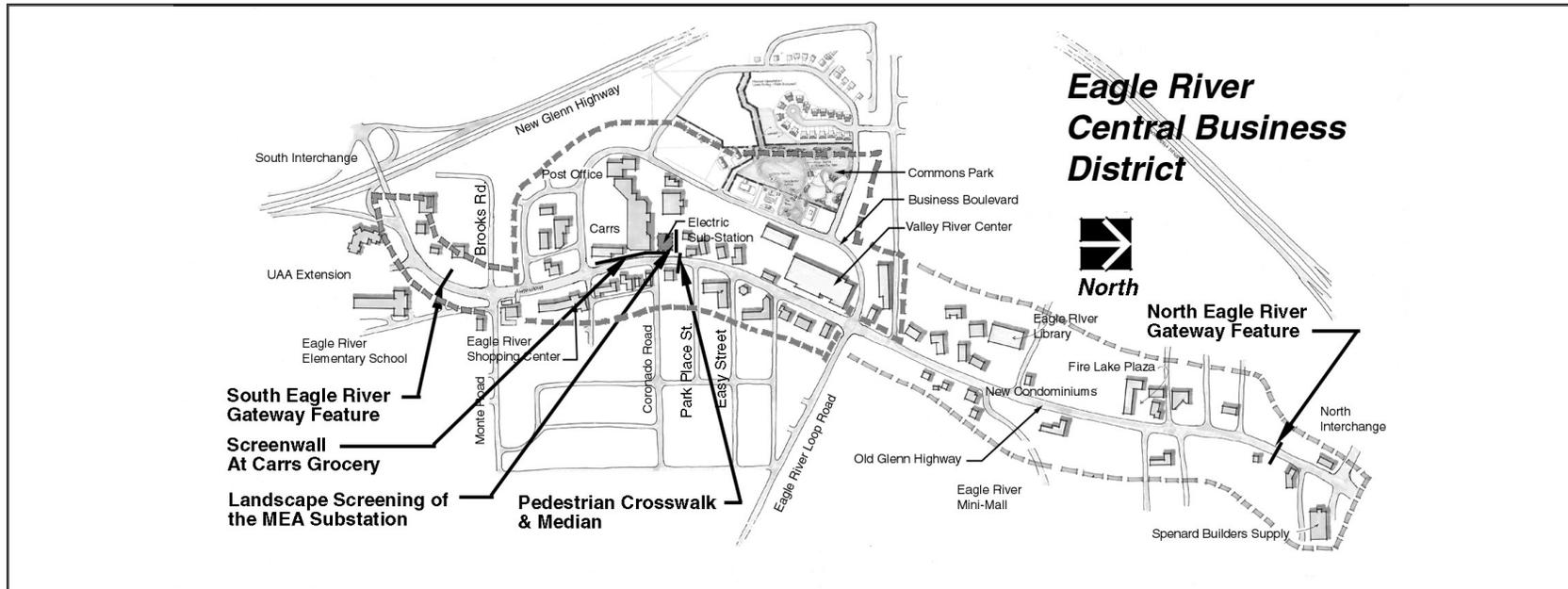


Figure 2-16 Site specific improvements within the Eagle River CBD

## DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design Guidelines have been broken down into three sub-categories that include:

- Design Guidelines for the Public Right-of-Way
- Design Guidelines for Site Development
- Suggested Architectural and Signage Design Guidelines

### A. Design Guidelines for the Public Right-of-Way

The design guidelines for improvements within the public right of way are the easiest to implement and can have a major impact in establishing a sense of cohesion in an area where there is a diversity of building styles and site conditions. As new projects develop, the following guidelines can be incorporated into street and roadway projects. Within the Eagle River Central Business District, the right of way design guidelines identify site-specific improvements that deal with problem areas as well as improvements that extend throughout the CBD.

### 1. Site-Specific Improvements

- South Eagle River Entrance Gateway Feature.** The South Eagle River Gateway is intended to reinforce the community entrance and serve as a visual cue to drivers to slow down. A gateway of this nature can become a community symbol. The gateway spans the entire width of the Old Glenn Highway and is supported by columns on either side and in the center median. A center median already exists at this location. The design reflects recommendations made in the building design guidelines. The design uses materials which could be found locally including stone and heavy timbers. The gateway would offer the opportunity to post event banners or signage in addition to welcoming visitors to Eagle River.

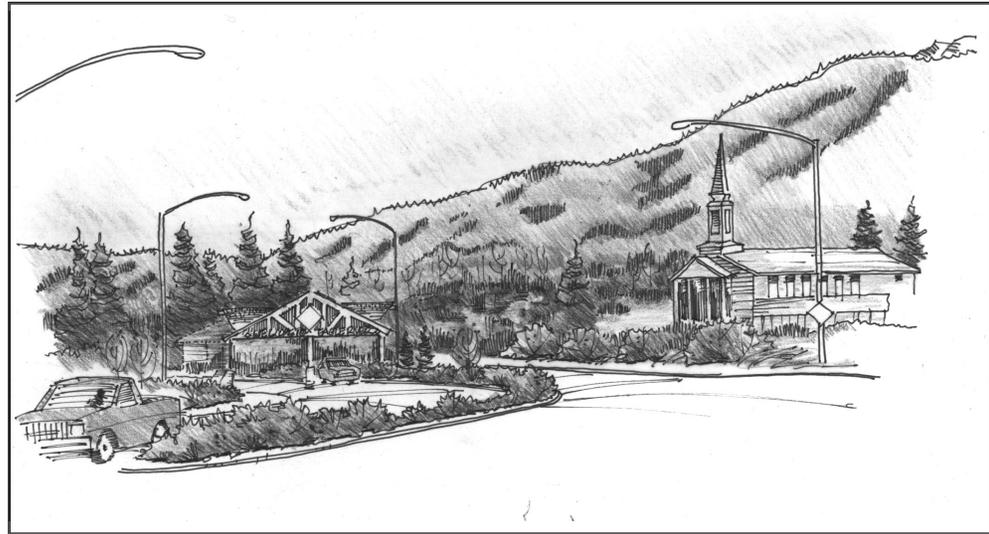


Figure 2-17 South Eagle River Gateway.

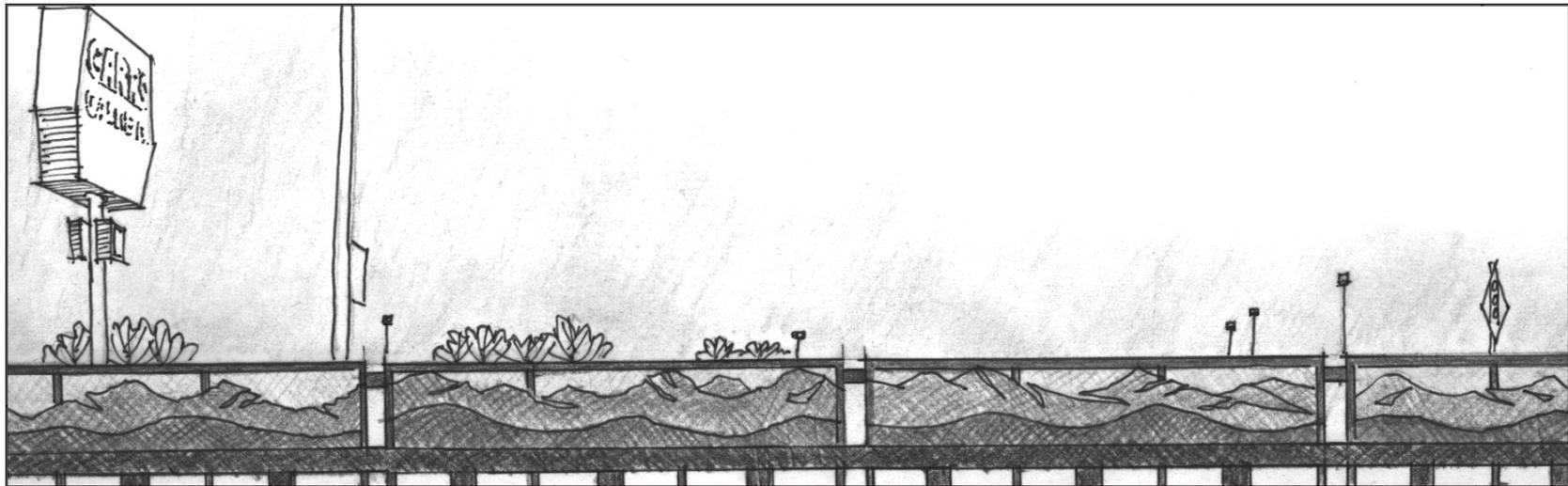


Figure 2-18 Screen Wall

- **Screen Wall next to Carrs.** Because of the grade change between the Old Glenn Highway and Business Boulevard, traffic and pedestrians are presented with a view of the rooftop of the Carrs Shopping Center. This includes the heating and ventilation systems as well as other rooftop utilities. The intent is to screen the rooftop utilities without blocking signage or other important identifying features.
- **Screening of the Matanuska Electric Association Power Substation.** The power sub-station, located prominently near the intersection of Coronado and the

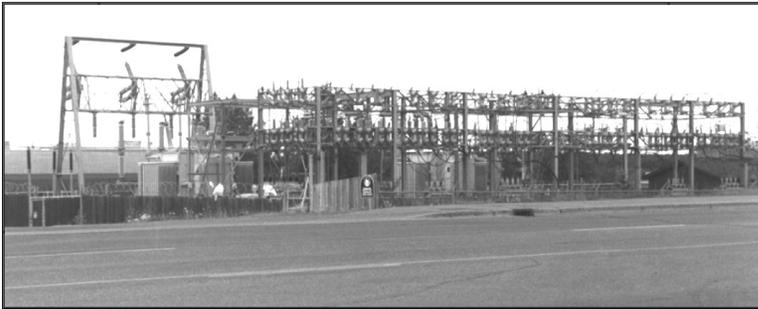


Figure 2-19 M.E.A Sub-station on the Old Glenn Highway

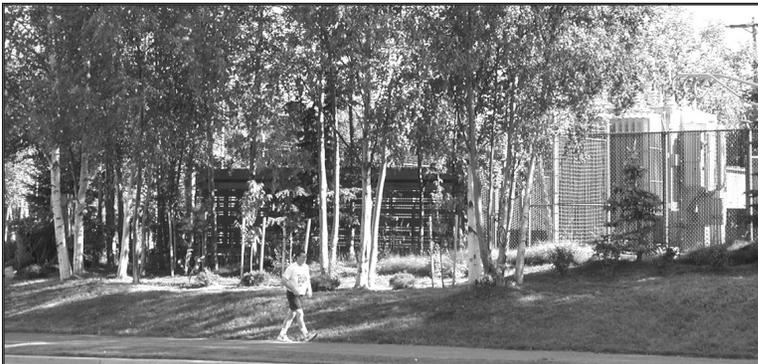


Figure 2-20 Appropriately screened sub-station

Old Glenn Highway is one of the strongest negative visual elements within the Eagle River CBD. The visual impact of this sub-station can be seen in Figure 2-19. Relocating the sub-station is not a viable alternative due to the high cost. There is virtually no screening of the facility at present. Figure 2-20 shows a screened sub-station. Note the use of a high chain link fence with slatting, a lower decorative fence and a significant amount of landscaping. The M.E.A. sub-station could be improved by using similar techniques.

- **New Pedestrian Crosswalk at the Boys and Girls Clubs Facility with Center Median.** The proposed location of a new crosswalk is mid-block, between Coronado and Park Place. This location facilitates crossings to the Boys and Girls Clubs, the dining establishments, and the Carrs grocery store. It is one of the few locations where there are no left turn requirements and a center median can be constructed to aid pedestrians. This location would also serve the proposed community center and establish a stronger link between the Old Glenn Highway and Business Boulevard.
- **Future North Gateway.** As North Eagle River develops, a gateway feature similar to the south gateway is recommended. This gateway feature would serve the same purpose as the one at the south end of town. It would signal to drivers that it is time to slow down and also serve as a community focal point.

## 2. Community-Wide Right of Way Design Guidelines

A variety of other improvements can be incorporated throughout the Eagle River Central Business District that will help to establish a cohesive appearance within the

CBD. The remainder will be compatible with the elements used in that project. Items include:

- Street Lighting and Signal Posts.** Street lighting provides the ambient light for streets and sidewalks throughout much of the day during our Alaskan winters. The streetlight standards should be 35 to 40 feet in height and provide sharp cut-off lenses for the edge of the roadway area. Lighting standards and luminaires should be the same throughout the CBD. The lighting poles should be tapered with a baked enamel finish. Color should be reasonably dark and neutral. Forest green or antique copper are recommended. Banner arms can be attached to the tapered posts for the addition of seasonal banners.
- Pedestrian Scale Lighting.** Pedestrian scale lighting should be used sparingly. Pedestrian lighting is generally decorative in nature and is not used to provide a uniform level of lighting. Luminaires should be relatively low wattage (100 watts maximum) to avoid glare. Pedestrian lights should be used only in the town center and only in those locations where several can be placed in close proximity. Pedestrian lighting works best when placed at 40-foot intervals or less. There is no pedestrian scale lighting included in the Business Boulevard Project and there is no pedestrian-scale lighting currently in use in Eagle River. A simple pole and luminaire style is recommended so that it will be compatible with a variety of building styles.
- Banner Posts and Banners.** A custom banner post has been designed for use on the Business Boulevard Improvements Project. As seen on Figure 2-21, it is pedestrian in scale and should be used in those areas that are primarily pedestrian. This again, would include

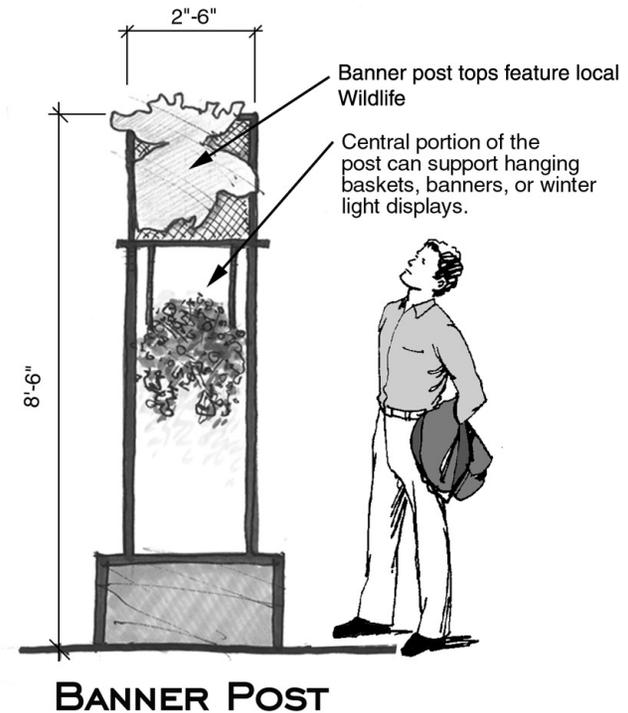
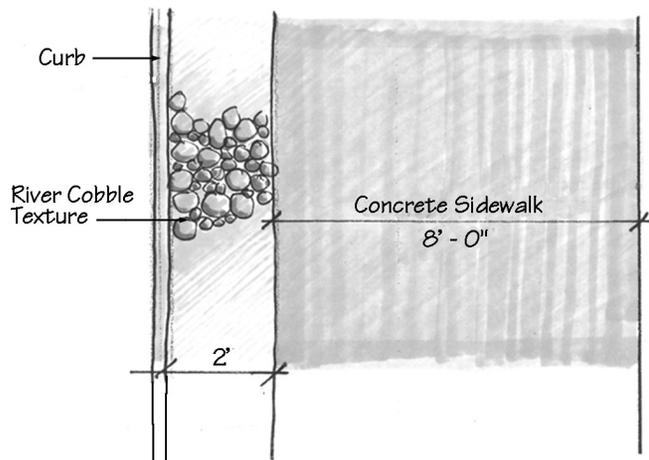


Figure 2-21 Banner Posts

the town core. The banner posts are very flexible in design and can be used to support banners, hanging flower baskets, and winter light displays. The fixtures will be used on Business Boulevard, and should also be used as pedestrian improvements within the community center area and on the east side of the Old Glenn Highway between Monte Road and Eagle River Loop Road, where space allows.



Sidewalk with texture strip.

Figure 2-22 Concrete Paving Detail

- Pedestrian Paving.** Pedestrian paving, in concert with landscape treatment, will play a key role in improving pedestrian comfort and the appearance of downtown Eagle River. Existing walks in Eagle River are poorly maintained and ill-defined. They remain littered with winter gravel through the summer. A lack of maintenance of the lawn area between the back of curb and the edge of the walk conveys the message that pedestrians are not important. One Eagle River resident was surprised to find out that there were walkways on both sides of the Old Glenn Highway. This individual has lived in Eagle River for more than ten years. Improvement of the walkways and better maintenance of these areas will significantly improve the appearance of Eagle River.

Walkways within the town center should be constructed of concrete. This includes both sides of the Old Glenn Highway between Monte Road and Eagle River Loop Road. The concrete will have a more permanent and finished appearance than asphalt paving and remain in good condition for many years. It is recommended that the area between the back of curb and the walkway be filled with a river cobble paving pattern. This paving pattern reflects a desire to use materials common to Eagle River in an overall design theme. The paving pattern could be done using river cobbles grouted into place or by a patterned concrete, which would be more economical to construct.

For the South Gateway Area and the North Eagle River Area, separated pathways constructed of asphalt to municipal trail standards are recommended. In these areas, the trails should be placed at the outside edges of the right of way with a lawn area between the back of curb and the trail. This would allow approximately



Figure 2-23 In addition to being poor places to walk, existing sidewalks in the Eagle River CBD contribute to the unsightly appearance of the Old Glenn Highway



Figure 2-24 In the South Gateway area and the North Eagle River portion of the CBD, asphalt walks are acceptable. Walks should be moved to the outside edge of the R.O.W.

eight feet of space between the road and the walkway. The lawn area can serve as a snow storage area during the winter. This change from the existing would require additional maintenance of snow removal on the walkway in winter and lawn care during the summer months. Note in Figure 2-24 the difference that maintaining a clean edge on the walkways has on the general appearance.

- Landscaping.** The opportunities for landscaping within the right of way are limited by the width of the roadway and the adjacent walkways. They are also limited by the very important requirement of maintaining sight distance triangles for cars entering the Old Glenn Highway from adjacent driveways. A sight distance triangle is a space in which nothing is allowed to obscure the view of oncoming traffic from either direction. The simple use of lawn as a landscape treatment is very effective as a means of creating a

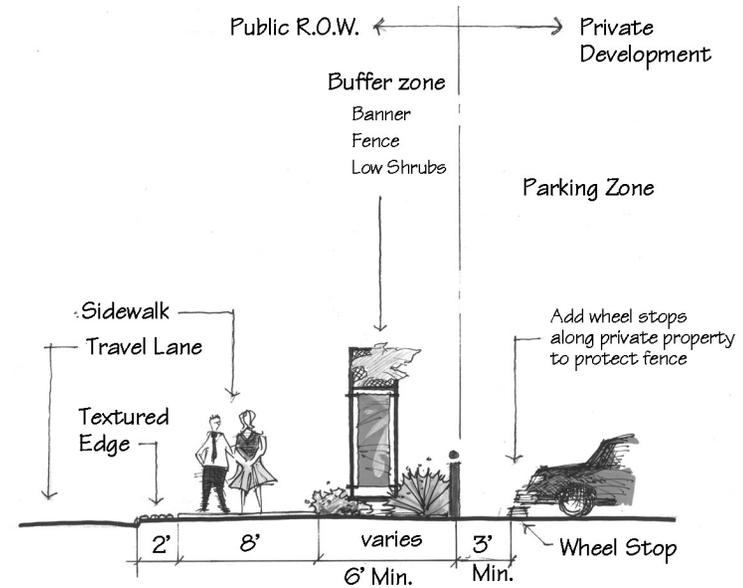


Figure 2-25 Use of landscaping in limited space

clean and attractive appearance without disrupting sight lines.

There is very little room on the Old Glenn Highway for landscaping; however, it can still be used to good effect for screening parking areas and in some locations to establish focal points. In other areas where there is enough room for landscaping, trees and shrubs should be grouped together in planting beds. Planting beds should be separated from adjacent lawn areas using edging material, and beds should be topped with a layer of geotextile fabric and three to six inches of gravel mulch (2-inch to 4-inch river cobbles). Avoid individual trees placed in lawn areas.

- **Decorative Fencing.** The use of fencing or screening is not often considered an important element in the preparation of an urban design plan. In an area with many parking lots and little room for separation between pedestrians and vehicles, screens can significantly improve pedestrian comfort and street appearance. Screens should be used to separate walkways in the town center area from adjacent parking lots. Screens should be constructed of heavy-gage metal cut in a decorative pattern. The Business Boulevard project uses metal screens with silhouettes of Alaskan wildlife in key locations. It is not critical that the same pattern be used throughout town. If the same general style is used, other patterns might be incorporated.

## B. Design Guidelines for Site Development

Design guidelines for site development are intended to establish standards for private property owners adjacent to the Old Glenn Highway and Business Boulevard within the Central Business District of Eagle River. These guidelines have been developed for the benefit of the entire Central Business District. As the quality of the Central Business District improves, residents and business owners benefit. The intent of the guidelines is not only to improve the general appearance, but also to make the downtown a more lively and desirable destination for pedestrians. Because of existing site constraints characteristic of the Old Glenn Highway, many businesses cannot comply with the suggested guidelines. Most of the existing parking areas within the CBD were built prior to enactment of Municipal Title 21 legislation, which mandates parking lot set-backs and minimum landscaping requirements. In a number of locations, existing parking could be reorganized to accommodate additional landscaping and walkways. A good example is the Eagle River Shopping Center. The existing parking lot aisle is quite a bit wider than for a standard lot. Figure 2-26 is an aerial photograph of the building and adjacent parking lot. Note



Figure 2-26 Aerial Photograph of the Eagle River Shopping Center

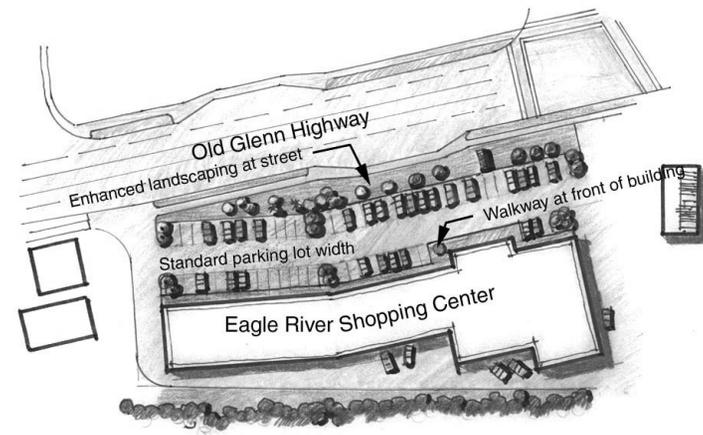


Figure 2-27 Sketch showing how parking could be reorganized to include walks and additional landscaping.

that vehicles park adjacent to the face of the building and there is no walkway. Figure 2-27 shows how the parking could be reorganized to include landscaping and a walkway at the front of the building.

**The intent of the site development guidelines is to ensure that all new construction and major renovation to existing buildings comply with the guidelines to the extent practicable. The signage and architectural design guidelines are meant to provide guidance for developing a local character for Eagle River and are not considered mandatory but are recommended.**

Many of these improvements must be dealt with on a site-by-site basis, therefore the entire length of the Old Glenn Highway was examined to reduce curb-cuts, reorganize parking, and identify locations where additional landscaping could be incorporated. A reduced set of these plans is found in Appendix C. Following are specific recommendations associated with site development:

### 1. Parking Setbacks

Parking setbacks are inadequate along much of the Old Glenn Highway, primarily between Artillery Road and Eagle River Loop Road. A result is that there is no opportunity to screen the parking lots from the street or to separate pedestrian walkways from the parking areas. On-site snow storage also consumes up to ten feet of space during the winter months.

#### **Recommendation:**

- *Require a 20-foot parking lot setback from the edge of the right of way. The first ten feet would be kept relatively flat and covered only with lawn. This would serve as a snow storage area during the winter. The remaining ten feet could be contoured and would consist of the landscape buffer.*

### 2. Building Setbacks

Current building setbacks vary widely. In the worst cases, the setbacks make parking awkward in both the front of the building and the back. Setbacks should vary according to the type and use, but should facilitate simple circulation and efficient parking.

#### **Recommendations:**

- *For restaurants, offices, and small freestanding retail buildings under 10,000 square feet, parking should not be placed between the right of way and building. Instead, the building should be placed at the 20-foot setback line. Parking should be located at the sides and rear of the structure only.*
- *Larger commercial sites should be organized to facilitate shared parking and clearly accommodate pedestrian use of the overall site. Parking for this type of development should be distributed in the front, sides, and at the back of the buildings. No more than 50% of the parking should be in the front of the building.*

### 3. Parcel Access and Curb Cuts

Numerous curb cuts, often closely spaced, pose a safety hazard to pedestrians along the Old Glenn Highway. Additionally, they interrupt the continuity of pedestrian movement and also the size of landscaped areas. It is often difficult to change existing curb cut conditions, due to resistance from business owners, who often perceive the loss of curb cuts and the sharing of driveways to be detrimental to their business. However the establishment of a few simple design criteria could significantly improve conditions in the future for those locations where current development is not extensive.

**Recommendations:**

- *Driveways should be placed at right angles to the adjacent right of way. Curb cuts should be 24 - 28 feet in width for two-way entrances and 12 - 15 feet in width for one-way entrances. One-way entrances must be clearly marked.*
- *The entrance radii for curb cuts should be no greater than twenty-five feet and no less than twenty feet.*
- *Driveways should typically be spaced a minimum of 100 feet from the intersections of major thoroughfares unless one-way traffic flow is used.*
- *One site entrance is adequate for most small sites and is recommended for uses including restaurants, offices, and small retail (up to 15,000 square feet). Two site entrances are acceptable for restaurants with drive-thru. If a second entrance is desired for these uses, it should be developed as a shared entrance with the adjacent parcel owner. Shared access points and contiguous, shared parking areas are encouraged whenever possible. Provision of inter-parcel access, between adjacent parking lots is highly encouraged. An example is the connection between the McDonald's parking lot and the Chevron filling station on the Old Glenn Highway.*
- *One or two site entrances are recommended for gas stations, restaurants with drive-thru service, drive-in banks, car washes, and other auto-oriented service uses.*
- *For large retail developments (larger than 15,000 square feet), two or more site entrances may be required. The appropriate number should be based on the size of the establishment and the quantity of required parking.*

**4. Building Orientation**

Orient buildings to pedestrian walkways. Buildings can provide the best site design opportunity to support a pedestrian network. They can contribute human scale, shelter over the sidewalk and entrances, visual interest, and safety while providing a continuous building edge to promote walking.

Properly designed and sited buildings can reduce perceived walking distance and encourage pedestrians to walk further and conduct more trips on foot. Conversely, large, uninterrupted walls discourage pedestrian activity by overwhelming the individual with a massive scale, or increasing perceptions of unsafe or deserted walking areas.

**Recommendations:**

- Place all commercial buildings as close as possible to the pedestrian network, preferably within 8 feet of the sidewalk to allow space for landscaping. Buildings should be placed no farther than 15 feet from the sidewalk to accommodate outdoor seating areas, plazas, bicycle parking areas, or other non-auto related uses.
- Orient buildings to pedestrians by locating building entrances, windows, and displays along building facades adjacent to the pedestrian walkways.

**5. Parking Lot Design**

Parking lots should be designed as efficiently as possible to hold the maximum number of cars for the quantity of paved area.

**Recommendations:**

- *Parking lots should be designed to maximize efficiency*

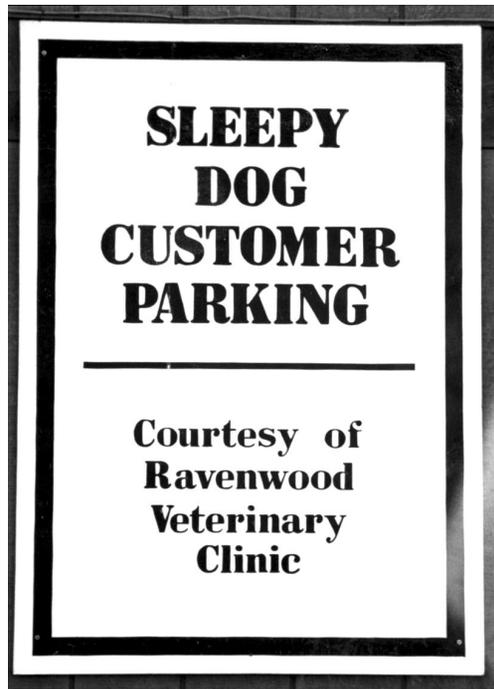


Figure 2-28. Where possible shared parking should be encouraged, as this sign suggests.

and minimize safety problems and traffic-flow conflicts. Although angled parking is allowed, two-way, ninety-degree parking layouts are generally preferred. Ninety-degree parking layout dimensions should be as follows: 64-foot-wide-overall parking bays with individual stalls measuring 9 feet by 20 feet. Lanes should facilitate two-way traffic and should be 24 feet in width.

- Clearly define the boundary between landscaping and edge of paving through the use of curbs. Where curbs are inappropriate, because of drainage requirements, wheel stops should be used.

- Where drive-thru facilities exist, drive-thru lanes should be separated from other circulation and parking aisles and adequate room should be given for stacking.
- Where possible, encourage shared parking. As an example, theater parking, which is primarily used during the evening hours, could serve a different use during the day. The current shared use between the Sleepy Dog Coffee Company and the Veterinary Clinic next door is an excellent example.

#### 5. On-Site Pedestrian Walkways

Although there are notable exceptions, most retail and commercial parcels are given over entirely to automobile parking and circulation. Little attention is given to safe pedestrian access within parking areas or around the buildings. The following guidelines are intended to balance the need for parking and circulation with the desire to make the Old Glenn Highway a more pedestrian-friendly place.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Provide sidewalks continuously along the front and two sides of a building's perimeter. Sidewalks should be a minimum of five feet in width and constructed of broom finish or exposed-aggregate concrete.
- Sidewalks which connect adjacent parcels from building to building are encouraged.
- Establish a pedestrian link from the right of way sidewalk to building entrances. Where these pedestrian links cross parking aisles or auto circulation routes, clearly identify them as pedestrian routes by signage, striping, or other means.

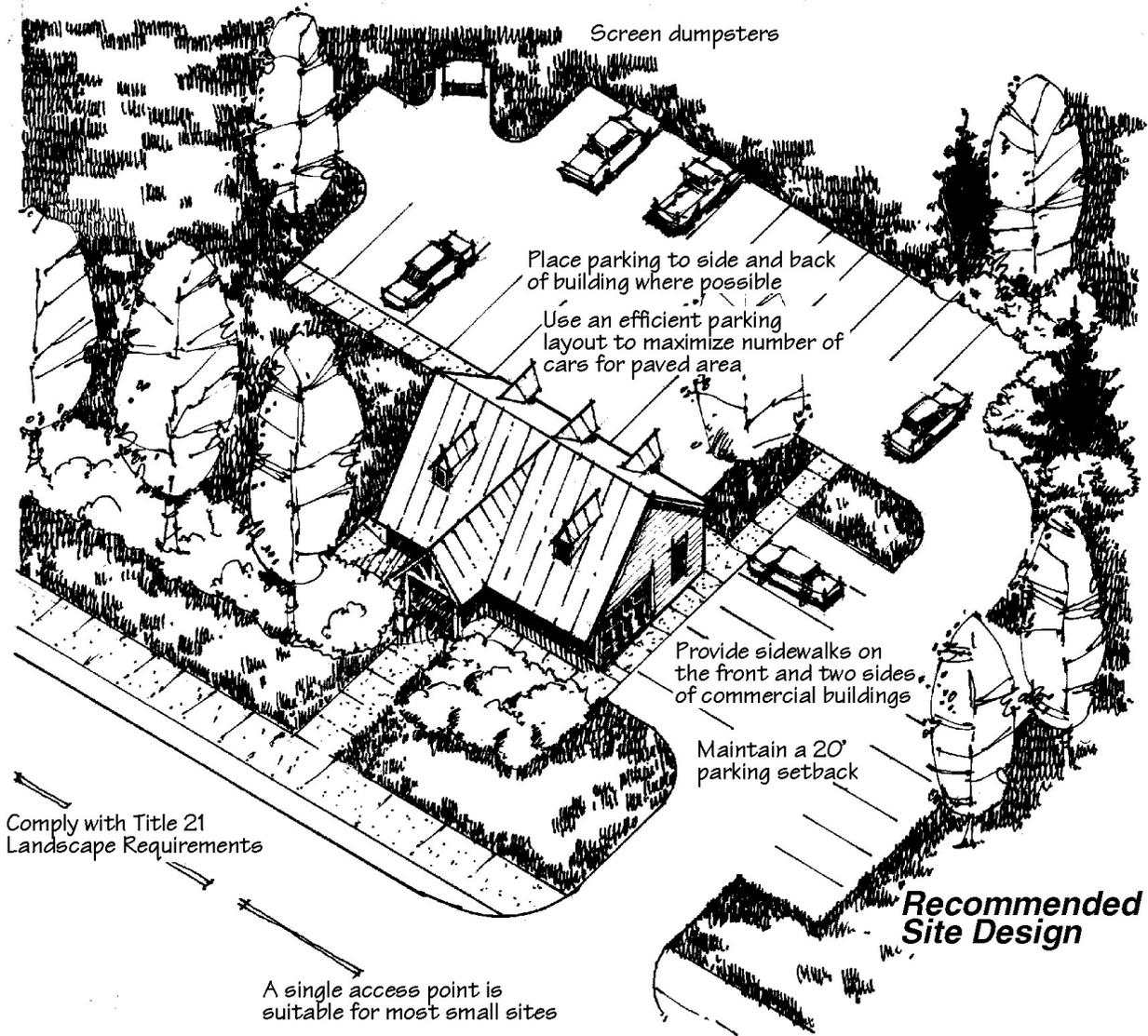
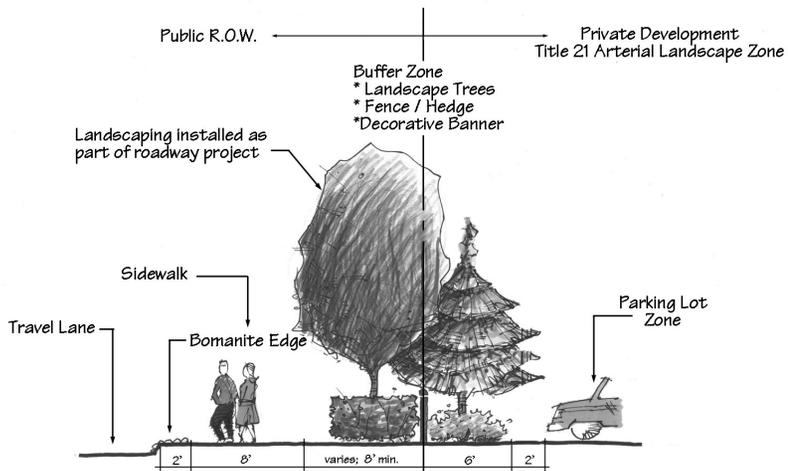


Figure 2-29 Site Design Guideline Example



**Sidewalk Section Showing Title 21 Landscape Improvements**

Note: Many existing properties were built prior to implementation of the MOA Title 21 Landscape Ordinance. Site improvements by property owners will require an 8-foot buffer at minimum

Figure 2-30 Title 21 Landscaping

## 6. Site Landscaping

Anchorage Municipal Code, Title 21 requires incorporation of landscaping into commercial parking lot design. The landscape guidelines for the Old Glenn Highway are not intended to be more stringent than Title 21 requirements. Compliance with Title 21 would significantly improve the appearance of the Old Glenn Highway for those locations where space allows.

### **Recommendations:**

- *Landscape plans must be prepared for review. Landscape plans should be prepared by a landscape design professional. This includes licensed landscape*

*architects or landscape designers holding a master gardener's or nurseryman's certificate.*

- *Maintain ten feet of lawn within the twenty-foot parking lot setback for snow storage immediately adjacent to the right of way. In the remaining ten feet provide buffer landscaping in accordance with Title 21.*
- *In those locations where space does not allow the landscape treatment identified above, use hedges or low screening fences to separate pedestrian walkways from adjacent parking areas.*
- *In our Alaskan climate, tree roots concentrate near the surface and grow horizontally. Trees should be limited to planting beds that are a minimum of 8 feet in width. Avoid planting trees in small planting pits within hard surface areas.*
- *Planting beds that include trees and shrubs should be raised above surrounding paved areas by means of berming, low walls, or curb and gutter.*
- *Site and roadway landscape design should allow for a clear sight line from the driveway entrance to the roadway based on an appropriate sight distance triangle. Plant material within this zone should include only high-branched trees or shrubs lower than 24 inches.*

## 7. Site Lighting

In recent years site lighting has become a serious issue. Improper lighting results in glare and discomfort for drivers and pedestrians. Excessive lighting with spill-over to adjacent land can be a nuisance to neighboring properties. Site lighting on the Old Glenn Highway is inconsistent. Lighting for some commercial establishments is excessive and glaring, while at others, lighting is nearly non-existent. The issue of appropriate lighting is particularly important in

Alaska because of our long dark winters.

**Recommendations:**

- *Exterior lighting should be designed to provide uniform illumination with low glare. Light should be placed to avoid excessive spill onto adjacent sites.*
- *For parking, pedestrian, and service areas, utilize metal halide lamps. This will provide a uniform color and character throughout the CBD while maintaining economy and function during cold spells. Incandescent lamps may be used in perimeter areas if desired.*
- *Parking lot light fixtures should be of a very simple design and architecturally neutral. The fixtures should be mounted at a height not to exceed 28 feet and should incorporate sharp cut-off luminaire design with horizontally mounted lamps. Poles and luminaires should be neutral in color.*
- *Avoid floodlighting.*
- *The lighting requirements, as measured in footcandles on the pavement surface are generally lower for pedestrian areas than for parking lots and vehicular circulation areas. Lighting intensity is also generally higher at regional shopping centers and fast food facilities than at community shopping centers or public facilities such as hospitals, civic centers, or parks. Recommended levels include the following:*

*- Pedestrian Areas*

*Regional Shopping Areas / Fast Food Establishments*

*0.9 footcandles minimum on the pavement with no greater than 3.6 footcandles of light in any one location*

*Community Shopping Areas / Public Facilities*  
*0.6 footcandles minimum on the pavement with no greater than 2.4 footcandles of light in any one location*

*- Vehicular Areas*

*Regional Shopping Areas / Fast Food Establishments*  
*2.0 footcandles minimum on the pavement with no greater than 6 footcandles of light in any one location*

*Community Shopping Areas / Public Facilities*  
*1.0 footcandles minimum on the pavement with no greater than 3 footcandles of light in any one location*

**8. Signage**

Signage is an issue considered crucial to most retail and restaurant establishments. It is often argued that the larger the sign, the better for business. Invariably it is an issue that raises controversy when limitations are discussed. The problem is that too many signs and too much information along a roadway is difficult to comprehend, especially for motorists. Additionally, it creates a sense of clutter along urban and suburban arterials, where no control is in place. Monument signs and consolidated signs would visually simplify the Old Glenn Highway corridor environment. Monument signs offer the pedestrian and motorist a uniform means of identifying where things are. The use of a uniform base detail would provide continuity and communicate an image of distinctiveness not found elsewhere in Alaska.

**Recommendations:**

- *All signs should be constructed of quality materials.*

Sign panels should be fabricated by professional sign makers to insure durability, safety, and an attractive appearance. All signs will meet state/municipal codes and safety regulations. It is desirable that materials be consistent with the architectural design guidelines.

- Messages on signs should be kept to a minimum for optimum comprehension. Avoid the use of reader boards or changeable type on a sign. In some communities it is restricted to a percentage of the overall sign area. In other communities reader boards are restricted to specific uses, such as schools, service stations or public service facilities. All signs oriented to vehicular traffic should be legible to moving traffic.



Figure 2-31 Fire Lake Plaza sign is almost unreadable for most passing motorists

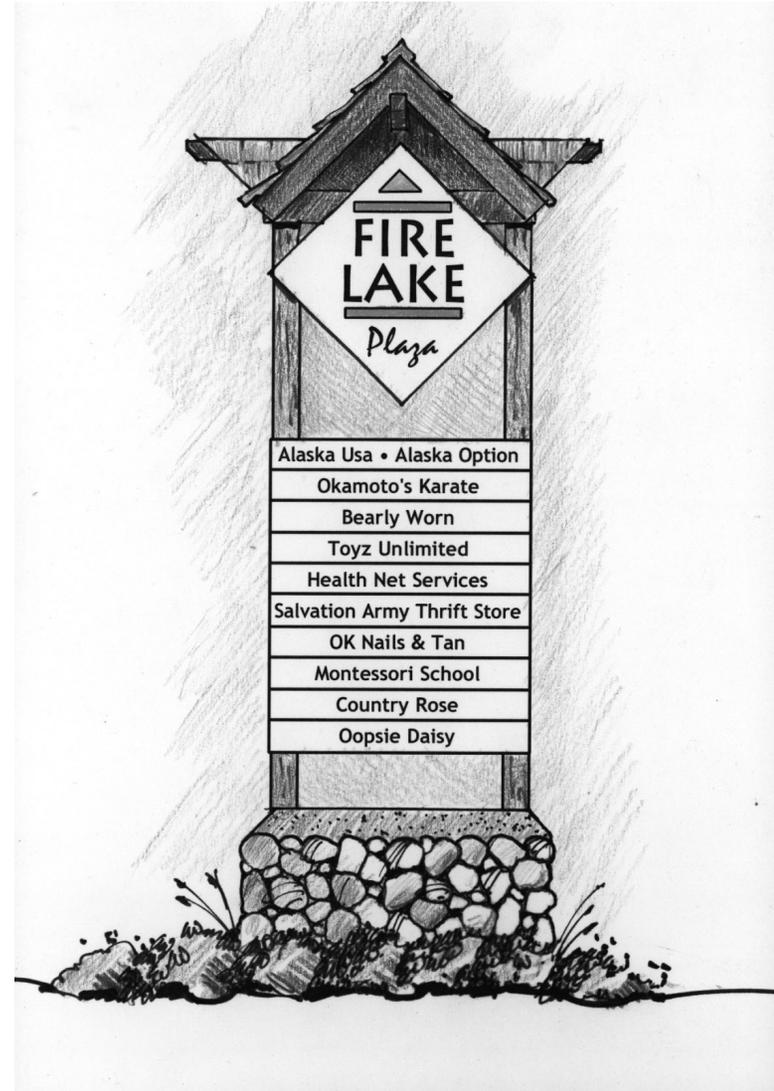


Figure 2-32 Monument sign presents a better sense of order

- *Monument signs are to be located on private property near the right of way. Each building may be allowed a monument sign. Buildings that house more than one business may use a tall monument sign with individual businesses identified on the sign in a uniform type face and size. Individual businesses should use a short monument sign. No freestanding sign should be permitted within 50 feet of another such sign on the same side of the street.*
- *Each tenant within a building should be allowed a building-mounted sign. Building-mounted signs should be in scale with the building and readable from the street. Lettering should be in the range of 9 to 14 inches tall and include upper and lower case. This is easier to read than all capitals. When more than one sign is situated on a building, it is recommended that signage be placed at a uniform height in a band on the building. Signage should be placed in such a manner that no portion extends above the building roofline.*

### C. Architectural Design Guidelines

As with site design guidelines, the architectural design guidelines relate to private property adjacent to the Old Glenn Highway. There is currently no overriding architectural quality or design theme to identify Eagle River as something different from anywhere else. The Old Glenn Highway Corridor features many of the same franchise restaurants, filling stations, and strip mall developments as may be found anywhere else in the country.

Existing buildings must be dealt with on an individual basis. Previous studies have suggested that existing flat-roofed buildings should retro-fit pitched roofs in an effort to establish a more uniform building appearance. Due to our snow loading and other requirements, this is not very practical. In some

cases, it would cost more to retro-fit existing buildings than it would cost to construct a new building. Figures 2-33 and 2-34 present examples of how existing flat roofed buildings could be improved. In Figure 2-33, a unified wash of earth tone colors is used on the building. This is offset by brightly colored awnings to accent the building. Signage is given a more unified appearance. Landscaping and a decorative screen round out the improvements. The existing mansard awning, attached to the front of the Eagle River Shopping Center is probably not structurally strong enough to support signage. Figure 2-33 presents the suggestion of placing signage on the rooftop if attached to a parapet. A more playful approach is recommended for the signs. Again, the use of colorful awnings is recommended to offset an earth tone backdrop.

The following guidelines are for new construction and for major renovation of existing buildings. They are intended to establish a rustic architectural style that offers flexibility to individual users, but also reinforces the imagery associated with Alaska by visitor and resident alike.

During the course of preparing this study, there was a persistent suggestion that a design theme should be established for Eagle River. The one most frequently suggested was a “western frontier town”. A Bavarian theme was also suggested.

Based on the experience of other communities, the use of a specific theme is discouraged. Although these have been highly successful in a handful of communities, dozens of communities have tried this approach and failed. The development of a very specific theme of this nature requires a strong central control that most communities are unable to maintain. In Alaska the “frontier town” theme has been tried in strip malls and roadside stops as far north as Fairbanks. As a theme, it is often selected because it is the least expensive alternative. Unfortunately, that is the impression visitors are often left with.

The design guidelines that follow are intended to create a rustic appearance that has a sense of permanence and quality. The lodges of Yellowstone Park and Banff, Alberta, Canada are good examples of this type of construction.

### 1. Facade Design

Facade design should strike a balance between being overly complicated and the monotony that results when a building is too simple. Long facades that continue without interruption tend to be unattractive. Set-backs and details which change the shadow pattern are important and add visual interest. In commercial buildings, windows, doors, and displays add variety along pedestrian routes. Windows are preferred because they provide building occupants with a view of people walking by, increasing pedestrian safety and security. Although many larger buildings require uninterrupted expanses of walls for purposes of internal displays, storage, or security, these facades should be designed to increase pedestrian safety and to encourage pedestrian activity.

#### **Recommendations:**

- *On commercial buildings, provide building entrances and views into the building and display areas along those walls adjacent to the pedestrian network. At a minimum, 30% of the front facade, not counting doorways, should be transparent.*
- *Along pedestrian routes, vary the building line and create offsetting walls, awnings, arcades, modulated wall textures, and materials that reduce the scale of the wall.*
- *Design of the side and rear facades should be consistent with the front façade in terms of materials and style.*

- *Buildings should be placed square to the street and a major proportion of the building mass and the major entrances should be oriented to the street.*

### 2. Roof Design

Roof design can have a strong unifying effect for a community. The use of pitched roofs in Eagle River is a natural response to our local climate. Care must be taken to ensure that pedestrian walkways, parking areas, and entries are not impacted by snow sliding from roofs.

#### **Recommendations:**

- *Pitched roofs are strongly recommended for freestanding commercial buildings. A minimum pitch should be 6:12, however greater pitches (up to 12:12) may be used dependent on the architectural style of the building.*
- *Roof materials may include asphalt shingles, shakes, or standing seam metal roofs. In the case of standing seam metal roofs, dark or neutral colors should be used. Avoid the primary colors often found on franchise food businesses.*
- *Wherever possible, eaves should extend out over pedestrian walkways. This reduces maintenance for snow removal and helps to insure safe walkways during the winter months.*
- *For large commercial establishments, where pitched roofs are impractical, (greater than 15,000 square feet of floor space) flat roofs are permitted. Adequate detail and visual interest should be incorporated into the parapet or roof design.*



Figure 2-33 Existing mini-mall with suggested improvements



Figure 2-34 Eagle River Shopping Center showing suggested improvements



- *If mansard or false mansard roofs are used on large commercial structures, they should be consistent on all sides and high enough to screen any HVAC equipment that may be placed on the roof.*

### 3. Building Materials

In years past, building materials were a key factor in establishing local architectural character. This is due to the fact that building construction utilized materials that were locally available.

Building materials and construction techniques are now mass produced and there is little differentiation between regions. Through the use of locally common materials, such as stone, logs, and naturally finished wood, Eagle River could create a unified appearance and imagery compatible with Eagle River's Alaskan setting.

#### **Recommendations:**

- *The use of natural, rustic materials found locally is highly encouraged. Designs that incorporate rough timbers of the sort associated with National Park design, spruce logs, river cobbles, stone, shingles, and cedar wood siding are recommended.*
- *Avoid the use of exposed T 111 (textured) plywood or concrete blocks.*

### 4. Colors

The use of color can be as strong a unifying element as building materials or facade design. It is important, when specifying a color scheme, that the range of colors is not so narrow as to create monotony, but narrow enough to establish a unifying effect.

#### **Recommendations:**

- *The use of warm colors including tans, browns, and reds is highly encouraged. The use of clear finishes and warm colored stains is encouraged on wood facades.*

## URBAN DESIGN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Eagle River benefits from a solid core of individuals who have demonstrated a commitment toward building a better community. This group has successfully marketed a bond proposal for the development of Eagle River Commons Park. The group has also developed community festivals, constructed parks, encouraged retail development, and has expressed a strong interest in improving community appearance. Most of this has been accomplished through voluntary effort. Based on community input, the implementation strategies rely heavily on the continued efforts of this core group.

Following are strategies for implementing the urban design improvements that have been discussed.

### A. Development of an Urban Design Plan

As mentioned in the introduction, great communities don't happen by accident. They are the product of design and community involvement. If developers are allowed to develop in any fashion they choose, Eagle River will likely continue to grow in the same patterns as already exist.

The urban design plan calls for establishing a consensus among residents about how the Central Business District of Eagle River will develop. A focus of the plan is the future character of the Old Glenn Highway. The plan acknowledges that there are different types of development within the Eagle River CBD



*Figure 2-35 Use of natural materials and natural finishes is encouraged*

and that a concentrated effort should be made to establish a city center. Another key recommendation is a new Eagle River Community Center and Library.

### **1. Old Glenn Highway Improvements**

Many of the issues within the Eagle River Central Business District relate specifically to the Old Glenn Highway. These issues range from traffic circulation to installation of site furnishings as part of the Old Glenn Highway Rehabilitation Project. The Old Glenn Highway is a state highway and as such it is administered by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. New projects related to the Old Glenn Highway are prioritized through the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) process. A key issue to Eagle River residents is improvement of the intersection of Eagle River Road and Artillery Road. Involvement from Community Councils and the local Chamber of Commerce can influence AMATS priorities and funding for projects.

### **Recommendations:**

- *Establish a transportation committee within the Eagle River Chamber of Commerce or identify an individual to act as AMATS representative for the local community councils. This offers a means for local residents to participate in identifying local projects that are important to the community and follow them through the process. While progress is not always swift, steady community pressure brings results.*
- *Update the Chugiak-Eagle River Transportation Plan. Growth in the Eagle River/Chugiak area has outpaced projected growth identified in the existing plan. New residential development and retail development are being planned for Eagle River and the impact on the Old Glenn Highway is likely to be substantial.*
- *Conduct a Traffic Circulation & Parking Study focusing on the Central Business District. This study would provide a comprehensive pedestrian and vehicular circulation study for the entire road network within the core area of Eagle River.*

### **2. Establishment of a Town Center**

Eagle River is a city of 30,000 residents yet it does not have a place that is generally recognized as a town center. Much of what is identified as the town center is situated on private property. This area has already been developed to a large extent, but key links need to be created to fully integrate it into the community. The area offers the greatest potential for establishing a truly pedestrian core.

### **Recommendations:**

- *Obtain the necessary easements for sidewalk and promenade improvements in the town core area. This*

would be accomplished through an agreement between the property owner and the Municipality of Anchorage.

- *In the long term, acquire additional lands for ball courts adjacent to the promenade using park bonds as a revenue source.*
- *Construct a Community Center/Library/Boys and Girls Club. This facility would be funded from a variety of sources including the Municipality of Anchorage, Boys and Girls Clubs, and community bonds for the Community Center and Library.*

## **B. Old Glenn Highway Right-of-Way Improvements**

Most of the improvements identified for placement in the Old Glenn Highway right of way may be constructed as part of the Old Glenn Highway Rehabilitation Project. Some of the specific improvements, such as the gateway features and screen wall at Carrs, may have to come later. Screening for the MEA Substation will be jointly coordinated between the Matanuska Electric Association and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

## **C. Design Guidelines for Architectural Design and Signage**

The guidelines for architectural design and signage all relate to private property. The implementation strategy minimizes regulation and emphasizes incentives, education, and local control. Implementation strategies for design guidelines range from non-existent, where development is allowed to proceed without any community input, to strict regulations that deal with

even the smallest details. Based on the experience of other communities, an informal collaboration of property owners can successfully implement a set of design guidelines when there is a solid consensus in support of the guidelines.

Although no strong public sentiment in favor of enforcing a set of design guidelines was voiced during the course of the project, public sentiment may change as strong growth continues. Various members of the community have expressed concern about the types of businesses locating in the CBD and about the proliferation of large signs within Eagle River. One means for a community to take control of these types of issues is to establish an overlay district.

An overlay district is a commonly used method for communities to implement a set of design guidelines. Overlay districts are clearly defined mapped areas with restrictions beyond those in the underlying zone. An overlay district is a tool that can be used to establish guidelines for architectural design and signage.

If the community wishes to exert some degree of local control over development along the Old Glenn Highway it could establish a Main Street Overlay District, whose purpose would be to provide a set of development standards to be applied in this area. As an example, the district could be established in order to achieve the following objectives for the downtown:

- Generate pride and confidence in the downtown area.
- Create an attractive environment which is active throughout the day and evening.
- Maintain a consistently high level of design quality.

- Encourage pedestrian activity by creating a positive pedestrian experience.
- Protect property values through quality control.

The objectives above would be accomplished through development of design standards.

**Recommendations:**

- *The recommended design guidelines contained in this plan should be incorporated in the revision of the Anchorage Municipal Code, Title 21 - Land Use Planning.*
- *Utilize the design guidelines as an interim measure to be followed with Municipal-wide design standards.*
- *Establish an overlay district as a means of implementing design guidelines.*

**D. Establish a Business Improvement District**

A Business Improvement District or B.I.D. establishes a geographic boundary within which all of the businesses agree to abide by a set of guidelines or contribute toward maintenance and upkeep. A B.I.D. can be established for as minor a responsibility as sweeping and shoveling sidewalks. The B.I.D. in downtown Anchorage was originally established for the sole purpose of keeping the downtown clean and safe. Business Improvement Districts have a strong history of success for a variety of reasons. Following are several:

- Members of a Business Improvement District begin to make decisions that benefit the entire area and are able to compete more effectively.

- Establishment of a B.I.D. demonstrates to local governments and policy makers a commitment toward improving a specific area and improves the potential of government contribution toward that goal.
- Once individual property owners begin contributing monetarily toward the improvement of a specific district, they tend to become more involved in the decision making process.
- As the goals of a B.I.D. are achieved, there is generally positive reinforcement in the form of increased business and community support.

**Recommendations:**

- *Establish a Business Improvement District.*
- *Through the Chamber of Commerce provide educational opportunities to organize downtown property owners.*
- *Once a B.I.D. is established, the option of tax incentives and landscape easements should be pursued by the Municipality to encourage local participation.*

**End of Section**

