Truckee Planning Department
10183 Truckee Airport Road,
Truckee CA 96161

Historical Design Review &
Certificate of Economic Hardship findings

Dear Planning Director and Staff,

This letter of intent accompanies a formal application following a previous informal review and recommendations from HPAC as well as town staff recommendations from the pre-application and subsequent historical documentation to illustrate the history of the cottages.

Per guidance from town planning staff (Laura Dabe), the applicant is requesting Demolition Review approval by addressing the findings for a Certificate of Economic Hardship in order to relocate and revitalize the existing cottages per Section 18.77.060 (Certificate of Economic Hardship) of the Truckee Development Code.

Overview:
The project proposal has a common sense approach that is intending to protect, preserve and enhance (through relocation and revitalization), not demolish. We see this as a unique circumstance requiring a unique finding. It is the applicant’s ultimate goal to revitalize and uphold the historical resource’s integrity so as not to jeopardize its loss due to substandard foundations and lack of structural integrity. Additionally the project seeks to address currently compromised public safety issues for pedestrians on W. River Street and add to the much needed housing stock in the town/region. The scope of the project (as outlined in the pre-application) is to serve not only the above mentioned goals but to add significant improvements to site conditions that align with development code standards and will revitalize and positively impact the downtown core on three street frontages.

The applicant is looking for consideration to move forward on this project in the most efficient way possible, acknowledging the unique circumstances/context that do not place it squarely into defined procedures outlined in the town’s Historical Design Review.
process/Demolition process. The applicant team also asks the town consider, in their review, the design intent presented in this application which illustrates thoughtful and thorough responses based on the pre-app, HPAC feedback and the applicant’s effort to meet the town’s Historic Design Guideline Checklist. Additionally, the applicant team is making every effort to abide by reconstruction requirements set forth in the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (per 18.83.040).

Findings and Decision (18.77.060, part E) Following a public hearing, the review authority may grant a Certificate of Economic Hardship with or without conditions, only if all of the following findings can be made:

Historic Design Review:

1) The denial of the demolition request or the Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work, or compliance with any conditions of approval, will cause an immediate extreme hardship because of conditions peculiar to the particular structure or other feature involved;

The site as is in a state of blight and has been unsatisfactory and unusable for many years. The relocation (not demolition) of the cottages are intended to revitalize this area of West River St. by creating opportunities for adequate parking per town standards as well as much needed improvements to the site, infrastructure, landscaping and the revitalization of the units themselves:

Qualifications:
The following summary of items illustrate the applicant’s due diligence to meet potential requirements from the pre-app response from June 8, 2017, regarding infrastructure and site improvements (refer to landscaping plan and tentative map):

- Landscaping plan which was not in the pre-app is now included.
- Existing utility poles will be moved underground
- Proposed site/landscaping improvements:
  - 6’ wide sidewalk plus curb and gutter is proposed on W. River St. and Mill St. which will transition to a 4’ walking surface on Riverside Dr.
  - On site snow storage meets the 50% requirement
  - Number of on-site parking requirements per development standards have been fully met through the relocation of the cottages to meet current inadequate tenant parking.
    - Each cottage will be supplied with a bear-proof solid waste/recyclable materials enclosure at the carport.
  - Relocated and aligned cottages set further back from W. River St.:
• Allows for greater solar opportunities for all units.
• Repositioning the units further back allows for long term road parking and sidewalk improvements on W. River St., whereas the current cottage location may impede improvements that would otherwise protect public safety.

With regard to the informal review of conceptual plans and elevations from HPAC on April 26, 2017, we have considered and incorporated feedback including:
(Refer to material exhibits, plans and elevations in application for additional information)

- Maintaining cottage similarity from unit to unit by using the same materials and colors for each cottage
- Maintaining current roof pitch
- Create a functional site (per above site/infrastructure list) which align with town development standards.
- Follow design guidelines in Historical Design Guideline Checklist
- Adaptive reuse is potentially OK:
  - South facing decks which respect the cottages original historic character and style, have been added with double doors to capture solar opportunities and create connection to the landscaping, common areas, and social interaction away from the impacts of the traffic on W. River St.
  - Relocating units allow for mostly modernizing to code compliancy while preserving the historical resources aesthetic qualities:
    - Foundations
    - Insulation
    - Lateral force resistance (wind and earthquake)
    - New plumbing and electrical
    - Energy efficient windows, water heating, and space heating
    - New roof structure and roofing material that is structurally sound and maintains historical skip sheathing and galvanized metal roofing aesthetic
    - New siding and water resistant barriers to replace hazardous asbestos shingles.
    - Re-use of existing materials as feasible
    - Modernizing of the interiors

Additionally Considerations:
There is significant evidence (through historical research and investigation of the existing structures) to demonstrate the cottage’s evolution of use, materiality, color, structure additions and location. This evidence could call into question, the
credibility of the category B resource designation. Though the proposed project is not seeking or challenging the categorization of the resource, the evidence does show the properties’ narrative as being changeable in nature.

For example, a new historical document with photos surfaced after the pre-app was submitted that states the cottages were relocated to W. River St. from its original location and used as part of the former “Donner Trail Camp” (hotel in operation from the 20’s to the 50’s) near what is now the road to Tahoe-Donner. (See exhibit A, attached). The roof pitch, skip sheathing and structure size and scale is consistent with the historical photos but since the cottages were relocated, they have evolved with different uses, siding, exterior colors, roofing material, and exterior additions. In reference to the historic photo, (exhibit B, attached) it appears that the relocated cottages do not contain the W. River St. facing additions that are currently part of the existing structures.

Additionally HPAC, in their review, stated that the cottages tell a story that is less about the purity of the structures and more about the narrative of worker housing (see exhibit C) in an industrial town, hence the uniformity of color, simple design and porch evolution, etc. Exhibit C, though not the cottages themselves, show a similar example of the worker housing in the region being transported to another location and the simplicity of design. HPAC also stated that the existing porches could be enclosed and roof extended to the rear to create covered decks.

The proposed material selections consider the evolved history and additionally are looking to respect the Historic Review Guidelines. Since the cabins were relocated and evolved from their original location as part of Donner Trail Camp, a minor relocation on the same site with the intent to protect and preserve the resource, is a common sense and reasonable request.

2) *The denial of the demolition request or the Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work will deny the property owner all reasonable use of or return from the property; (In this context, personal, family, or financial difficulties, loss of prospective profits, and neighboring violations are not justifiable hardships.)*

The property is not usable in its current state of blight. Any reasonable return on the property is dependent on bringing it into compliance per building code, per town development standards and per the revitalization of the blighted cottages.

3) *The denial of the demolition request or the Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work will diminish the value of the subject property so as to leave substantially no value;*

See responses from item #1, 2 above.

Kurt M. Reinkens, Kristin E. Thompson, Architects
11165 Brockway Rd, Truckee, CA  96161
phone: 530.587.6257
fax: 530.587.0761
www.mwa-truckee.com
4) **Sale or rental of the property is impractical, when compared to the cost of holding such property for uses permitted in this zone;**

   Rental of the property is not feasible in the blighted condition it currently is in. Additionally any future property owner would be faced with the same challenges.

5) **An adaptive reuse study has been conducted and found that utilization of the property for lawful purposes is prohibited or impractical;**

   The intent is to revitalize the cottages as a category B historical resource. There is no intention to use the property in any other way than its original use type and to add much needed housing stock to the town/region. Our goal is to give the property a much needed rebirth and extended life that is consistent with the town’s governing documents.

6) **Rental at a reasonable rate of return is not feasible;**

   See responses to #1-4 above.

7) **The denial of the demolition request or the Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work would damage the owner of the property unreasonably in comparison to the benefit conferred on the community;**

   The site in its current state is damaging to both the community and the owner of the property. The proposed project is simultaneously a benefit to both when considering the combination of improvements listed above in response #1. This is a win-win.

8) **All means involving Town-sponsored incentives, such as transfer of development rights, tax abatements, financial assistance, building code modifications, changes in the zoning ordinance, loans, grants, and reimbursements, have been explored to relieve possible economic disincentives.**

   N/A. Applicant has not requested any help/incentives from the town. The project proposal actually benefits the town by giving up land on the north and south of the property to create onsite parking as well as safe pedestrian routes which currently don’t exist. Additionally, this project is following guidance provide through the process by HPAC and town planning staff.
9) **In the case of a proposed demolition, the designated resource cannot be remodeled or rehabilitated in a manner which would allow a reasonable use of or return from the property to the property owner.**

N/A. The proposed project is not proposing a demolition. This highlights a flaw in the town’s governing documents in requiring a demolition review for a project that does not include demolition. Perhaps a new pathway can be created in the governing documents for future similar projects so there is a better alignment between process and intent, rather than causing undue hardship through project delays.

**Conclusion:**
We hope the town can see the merits of this unique project proposal and the desire to find win-win solutions. The intention to protect and preserve the resource and public safety while re-vitalizing and modernizing part of the downtown core illustrates the integrity, due diligence and thoughtfulness behind the project.

Respectfully,

Karin Johnson  
Associate Project Manager
History of cabins at 10199 West River St.
Receive from Chaun Owens-Mortier, TPAC

Data and Pictures: Dana Scanlon. *Please note pictures are not to be reproduce for any purpose.

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Location of Data: Facebook, Dana Scanlon Page

Continuing with the theme, the History of the West End of West River St, I will tell a "how it came about story". I suspect most, if not all, are unaware, that the last group of cabins on the west end of West River St, have a history. They did not start life in that location. They actually started life as cabins for one of Truckee's best known motels of the 20s - 50s, "Donner Tail Camp", located across the street from the high school bus garage, near what is now the road to Tahoe-Donner. Those cabins made their way down that dirt road, West River St (previously posed), to the location they occupy today.

Though still nice at that time, by the 1950s the cabins of "Emigrant Trail Camp" were dated, were no longer able to compete with Cozzi's Motel, or the other motels that had sprung up along Donner Lake. So it was about 1957, maybe 58 I think it was, that the cabins were offered for sale. Since housing had always been an issue for single mill workers, my father purchased those cabins as housing for them. It was a perfect fit, as they had a lowboy (truck), and lift trucks that could easily facilitate the moving of those cabins.

Some of the cabins were placed on that last lot on West River St, just east of the old County Barn. Some were placed at the "Chicken Ranch" off old hwy 40 (Glenshire Dr). And a number of the were taken to the sawmill at Blackwood Creek (Tahoe). So there in lies the story of what happened to the old "Donner Trail Camp". It would be interesting to know, who might have stayed in those cabins back in the day. "Donner Trail Camp" was at one time advertised as a ski lodge.
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