

Chapter I. Foreword

The following foreword was written by Elizabeth Tenney, Planning Commissioner and member of the Downtown Neighborhood District Plan Focus Group

In the late 1970s, Mammoth Lakes' Main Street, a non-pedestrian-friendly gash through the center of our community, was to be the first leg of Trans-Sierra Highway 203. After Red's Meadow packer Bob Tanner took then Governor Reagan into the back country and asked, "You really want to put a highway through this?" the plan was scuttled.

The Trans-Sierra Highway idea may have been abandoned, but today Main Street/203 remains a highway of strip malls, unfriendly to pedestrians and struggling transit users. Its 200 foot of right-of-way is piled high with dirty snow banks that block retail for nearly eight months of the year.

Individually, heroic efforts have been made to improve the appearance of Main Street. Some businesses have remodeled and upgraded their signage and lighting. The Town, with support from Caltrans, built a pedestrian promenade between Old Mammoth Road and Laurel Mountain. New no-glare street lighting and banners were installed. Segments of the trail system have been added. A very attractive fire station was built. Several crosswalks were striped and lighted.

While a number of attempts have been made over the years to "fix" Main Street, consideration of a comprehensive makeover for all of Main Street has not met with success until just recently.

In the 1990s, a series of Main Street public workshops was conducted, but some vocal business owners were opposed to any change that didn't permit parking at the door. A Redevelopment Agency was explored but citizen opposition stymied that.

Mammoth's Main Street was even used as a case study at a two-day Sierra Business Council workshop in Truckee in 2002. A group of architects, traffic engineers and designers studied an enlarged map of Main Street and, using tissue overlays, sketched in many good ideas. With the Mammoth Lakes community still bogged down in the General Plan Update, those ideas weren't pursued.

Enter Mammoth Mountain CEO Rusty Gregory and Snowcreek Investment Company's Chuck Lande in 2009 as the economy was plummeting. "We need to be ready when the capital comes back. We need to be prepared for reinvestment," said Gregory. Rather than developers coming to town and telling us what they plan to do, we need to tell them what we want and then work together to fit project proposals into our community's plan. Acting on that good idea, Gregory and Lande each put

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up \$50,000 to hire Hart Howerton, a noted planning firm in San Francisco and Denver, to develop a comprehensive plan for all of Main Street. Hart Howerton designers, not very familiar with Main Street and its history, were able to study it from a fresh perspective. The results were novel, innovative, and creative. The Hart Howerton Plan was also unsettling to many locals who grumbled about but were accustomed to the status quo.

The Hart Howerton Plan, while by no means a home run, was the push the community needed to engage in developing a consensus vision for change on Main Street. The 2007 General Plan requires district planning for certain key areas of the community. A Neighborhood District Plan for Main Street and the Shady Rest Site, in conjunction with the existing planning work already completed for North Old Mammoth Road, was next on the to-do list. Mammoth Mountain Ski Area and Snowcreek Investment Company had thus jump-started the District Planning Process for Main Street.

The next step was to involve the community. A broad-based focus group of 15 interested citizens representing nearly every demographic in Mammoth was formed in October 2009. The focus group members were key because they “knew the territory.” They spoke their minds. They knew what could work and what couldn’t, yet they were open to new ideas. At the first meeting, the Hart Howerton Plan was studied closely and the opinions flew. Lists of likes and dislikes, “possibles” and “will never work” were compiled.

With the Community Development Department staff serving as the “planning consultant” for this Downtown Neighborhood District Planning (DNNDP) study, over a series of five focus group meetings and two community workshops, Main Street makeover options and alternatives were developed and refined. This report presents that process.