



C Street Commercial Historic District Plan

Physical Description & Boundaries

The C Street Commercial Historic District is located in the northwest corner of Sacramento's original 1848 street grid. The district is comprised of a collection of early to mid-twentieth-century commercial buildings that are situated along C Street between 12th and 13th streets.



Figure 80. A row of One-Block Commercial Block type buildings creates a cohesive grouping on the south side of C Street between 12th and 13th streets.



Figure 81. A former warehouse with a corner entrance faces the intersection of C and 13th streets.

Brief Historic Context

The C Street Commercial Historic District preserves a small row of brick buildings that reflect the commercial and industrial character of Sacramento's northwest corner in the first half of the twentieth century. 12th Street has long been one of Sacramento's principal transportation, communication, and commercial corridors. During the Gold Rush, it operated as one of the early routes from the city to the gold fields of the north.¹

C Street, meanwhile, developed into one of the city's industrial hubs. Early in the city's history, the 1200 block of C Street was part of Alkali Flat, Sacramento's oldest standing residential neighborhood. While the neighborhood initially attracted the city's elite residents, Alkali Flat became increasingly industrial toward the turn of the century due to its proximity to the Central Pacific (later the Southern Pacific) depot and railroad tracks. Many of these industrial businesses were located along the railroad tracks that formed the neighborhood's northwest corner along B Street. By 1915, the north side of C Street consisted of two grain and flour mills and warehouses that were used to store agricultural implements and wine.²

Alkali Flat's increasing industrialization and the resulting influx of laborers drove its affluent middle- and upper-class residents out to the newer residential neighborhoods that were developing to the south and east.³ Meanwhile, the automobile was becoming increasingly popular in the first decades of the

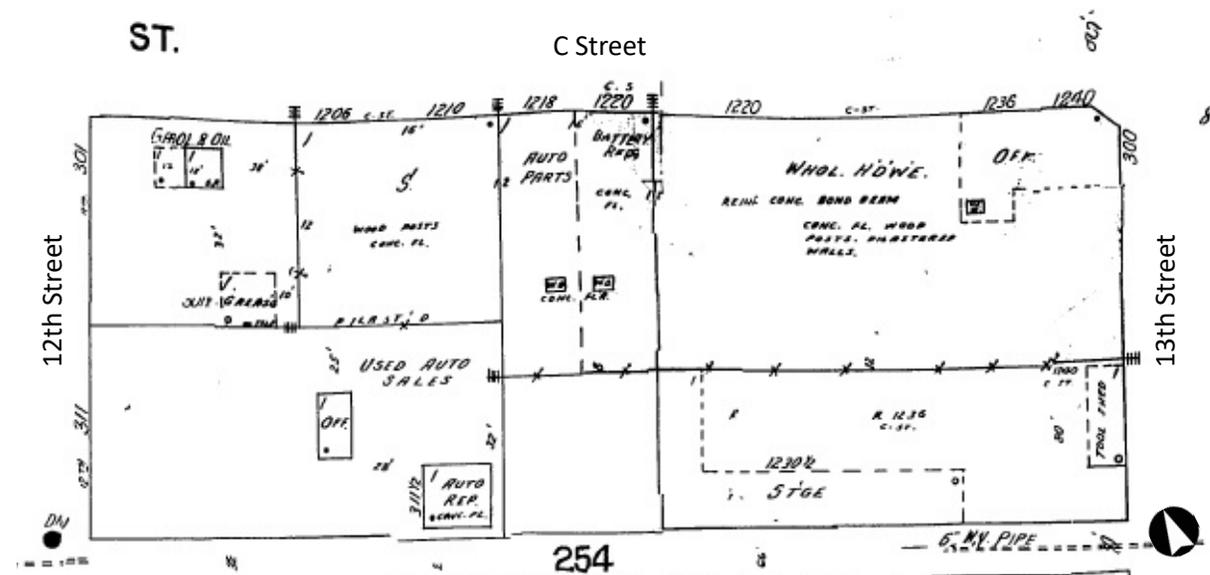


Figure 82. 1950s Sanborn Map Company map, showing the south side of C Street between 12th and 13th streets (ca. 1950). Source: Sacramento Public Library, edited by Page & Turnbull.

Interurban railroads also contributed to the development of C Street. In 1928, Sacramento's interurban railroads combined into a single entity: the Sacramento Northern.⁴ In addition to passenger service, the Sacramento Northern interurban railroad also carried freight on an industrial belt line that traveled around the edge of the city. A portion of this freight line ran along C Street from 18th Street to 31st Street to serve the industrial areas along the city's

based industries to those based on long-distance freight truck shipping.¹⁰

In the 1960s, a number of factors pulled transportation and shipping-related activity away from C Street. In 1963, a deep-sea channel opened at the Port of Sacramento, shifting trucking and shipping activity to West Sacramento.¹¹ Construction of a new system of interstate highways that circumnavigated the city

1 Evaluation Committee of Sacramento Heritage, Inc., "Phase I: Central City Historic Resources Inventory, New Identified Historic Resources" (Planning Division, Sacramento Community Development Department, 2000), 271.

2 *Sacramento's Alkali Flat* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 7.

3 Krissy Holt, "A walk in Alkali Flat is a step back in time," *Sacramento Press*, November 4, 2011, <https://sacramentoexpress.com/2011/11/04/a-walk-in-alkali-flat-is-a-step-back-in-time/>.

4 "Official Map of the Lincoln Highway," Lincoln Highway Association, accessed August 8, 2018. <https://www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org/map/>.

5 *Sacramento, California City Directory*, 1934, 1936, 1937; Sanborn Map Company, Sacramento, California [map], vol. 1, 1915-Jan. 1951.

6 William Burg, *Sacramento's Streetcars* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 75.

7 Burg, 85-86.

8 Richard Rodda, "Sacramento's Streetcars 1930," *Golden Notes*, Sacramento County Historical Society, 1987.

9 Burg, 8.

10 Sanborn Map Company, 1915-Jan. 1951.

11 Steven M. Avella, *Sacramento: Indomitable City* (San Francisco, CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 124.

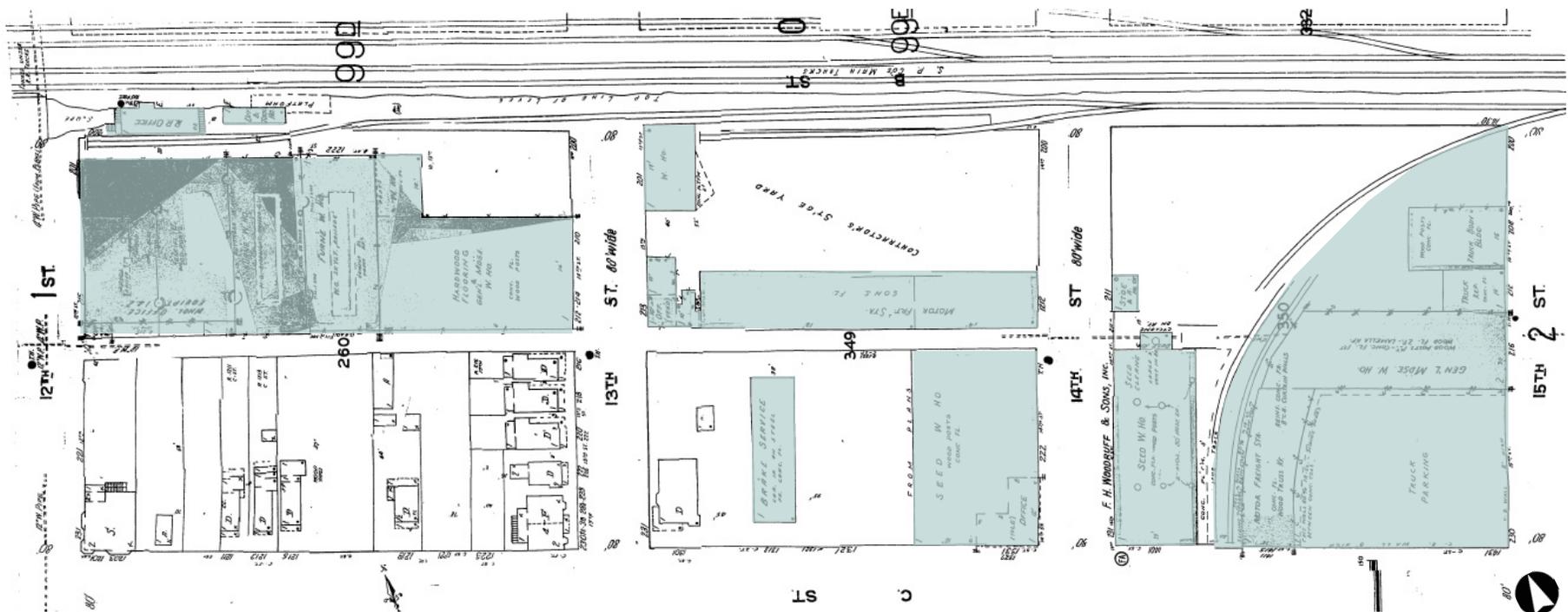


Figure 83. A 1950s map published by the Sanborn Map Company shows the concentration of industrial and automotive development along C Street between 12th and 15th streets (shaded in light blue). Source: Sacramento Public Library, edited by Page & Turnbull.

proceeded through from the 1950s to 1970s, pulling automotive and trucking traffic away from older transportation corridors through the city center.¹²

Although the industrial businesses that characterized the western portion of C Street in the first half of the twentieth century have closed, the area’s transportation and automobile-oriented use has

persisted into the twenty-first century. The 1920s-era brick buildings between 12th and 13th streets continue to be used for commercial purposes and include a specialty automobile repair and supply shop on the corner of 12th and C Streets.

¹² “General Plan Technical Background Report,” (report, City of Sacramento, 2005), 6.3-113; Avella, 122-123.

Significance

The C Street Commercial Historic District was designated for listing on the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources by the City Preservation Commission in 1985 in Ordinance #85-076.

The following table provides a current evaluation of significance under the requirements and considers the factors based on the above historic district context and the 2018 historic district survey. Additionally, this historic district relates to the Railroad Context Statement and the World War II, Transportation, and Redevelopment Context Statements of the city’s General Plan Technical Background Report.

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(1) Requirements	
(a)	The C Street Commercial Historic District meets requirement (a) for listing on the Sacramento Register, because it is a geographically definable area.
(b)(i)	<p>The C Street Commercial Historic District meets requirement (b)(i) for listing on the Sacramento Register as an area that possesses “a significant concentration or continuity of buildings unified by: (A) past events or (B) aesthetically by plan or physical development.”</p> <p>The C Street Commercial Historic District contains a continuity of buildings that are unified aesthetically by their development as transportation-oriented commercial and industrial buildings from the early- to mid-twentieth century. The buildings on C Street between 12th and 13th form a particularly cohesive grouping. Built in a vernacular One-Part Commercial Block style, these one-story brick buildings feature low pitched or flat roofs and minimal ornamental detailing, limited primarily to roofline cornices bracketed with simple parapets. The buildings have large windows on their principal C Street facades and central entrances.</p> <p>The design of these buildings also reflects their orientation toward automobile-based trades and services. With the exception of the property at the corner of 12th and C streets, the buildings occupy the front portion of each parcel, facing C Street, while the back portions along Chinatown Alley contain open parking lots. Garage doors on the front and rear facades would have given automobiles easy access to the buildings, either for service or to load and unload goods.</p> <p>The buildings display a general uniformity of age, scale, materials, and style and show minimal alterations. Together, they form a cohesive grouping that reflects the transportation-oriented character of the 12th and C Street corridors from the early to mid-twentieth century.</p>

Period of Significance: 1920-1930

The period of significance for the C Street Commercial Historic District spans the period in which the contributing buildings were constructed, from 1920 to 1930.

Property Types from the Period of Significance

- Commercial

Architectural Styles from the Period of Significance

- Vernacular
- Commercial Styles:
 - One-Part Commercial Block

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(1) Requirements	
(b)(ii)	<p>The C Street Commercial Historic District meets requirement (b)(ii) for listing on the Sacramento Register as an area “associated with an event, person, or period significant or important to city history.”</p> <p>The district is associated with the development of C Street as an automotive and freight transportation corridor in Sacramento from the early to mid-twentieth century. As with other industrial- and transportation-related corridors in the city, businesses related to the automotive and trucking industries were drawn to the street during this period because of the density of transportation routes in the vicinity, notably the main tracks of the Southern Pacific Railroad on the B Street levee, freight line of the Northern Electric interurban railroad, and the highway routes on 12th and 16th streets. Automotive and trucking activity remained constant along C Street until the completion of a deep-water ship channel and new highway system that circumnavigated the city center in the 1960s.</p>
(c)	<p>The C Street Commercial Historic District meets requirement (c) for listing on the Sacramento Register as it aligns with the goals and purposes of historic preservation in Sacramento, as well as the city’s other goals and policies. Per the Sacramento City Code, the preservation of the district enhances the “city’s economic, cultural and aesthetic standing, its identity and its livability, marketability, and urban character.”</p>
(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(2) Factors to be considered	
(a)	<p>Factor (2)(a) states that “a historic district should have integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship and association.” The C Street Commercial Historic District retains sufficient integrity to meet this factor for consideration as a historic district.</p>
(b)	<p>Factor (2)(b) states that “the collective historic value of the buildings and structures in a historic district taken together may be greater than the historic value of each individual building or structure.” The C Street Commercial Historic District meets this factor because its buildings and structures represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose collective historic value is greater when taken as a whole.</p>

Character-Defining Features

Element	Character of Historic District
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial businesses related to transportation industries
Mass & Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings one story in height • Simple, utilitarian architectural design with rectangular plans • Horizontal massing
Cladding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brick cladding
Roofs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flat or low-pitched gabled roofs
Entries & Doors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central, first-story entrances with transoms • Occasional diagonal corner entrances
Windows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steel frame picture and multi-lite windows • Transom windows • Large shopfront windows on first stories
Ornamentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Square or stepped parapets • Utilitarian design with minimal ornamentation • Features associated with transportation such as garage doors, driveways, and/or vehicular shipping docks and bays, often with rolling metal doors facing the street or alley and concrete tire guards at entrances
Property Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal or no property landscaping
Streetscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal or no street trees—those that exist are medium-sized • Minimal or no setback from sidewalk • Raised driveways leading to garage doors • Large paved areas for automobile or truck parking

Boundaries & Location

The following map shows the boundaries and location of the C Street Commercial Historic District.

To view the statuses of individual properties as contributing or non-contributing resources to the historic district, refer to the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources.



Figure 84. Map of the C Street Commercial Historic District. Source: City of Sacramento and Page & Turnbull, 2019.

District-Specific Standards & Criteria

Design Principle

Preserve and maintain the existing historic character of the C Street Commercial Historic District while encouraging rehabilitation and development that improves connections from 12th Street and surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Rationale

The C Street Commercial Historic District contains a collection of historic buildings related to the development of C and 12th streets as major transportation and light industrial corridors. The buildings share similar materials, features, and zero-lot-line siting that unifies the grouping. Due to its high integrity, continued use, and proximity to the 12th Street corridor and Alkali Flat and the Washington neighborhoods, the district has the potential to maintain its historic significance as a working example of Sacramento's commercial heritage, while providing opportunities to enhance connections to the surrounding neighborhood.

In addition to the Standards & Criteria Common to Sacramento's Historic Districts in Section 1, the following district-specific standards and criteria apply when planning a project in the C Street Commercial Historic District.

1. Rehabilitation of Contributing Resources

- 1.1 Make every effort to preserve, repair, and maintain any surviving steel or wood frame windows, which significantly contribute to the commercial character of the district.
 - Re-instate multi-lite steel or wood frame windows, where they have been removed, if there is adequate documentation and if feasible.
- 1.2 Avoid filling in or obstructing historic window or door openings.
- 1.3 Re-open historic window and door openings that have been filled in.
 - Use compatible new windows and door materials, types, and forms.
- 1.4 Avoid painting or applying new finishes on historically unpainted exterior masonry.
 - Consider removing paint or finishes from historically unpainted exterior masonry, using the gentlest methods possible, during exterior repairs or renovations.
 - Maintain paint on exterior masonry where likely to be the historic condition.
- 1.5 Maintain existing transom windows, skylights, roof monitors, or other features intended to provide daylight to large scale buildings, to the extent feasible.

2. Additions & Accessory Structures for Contributing Resources

- 2.1 Design additions with proportions that are compatible with the primarily single-story, horizontal massing of contributing buildings in the district.
 - Place additions on secondary rear and side elevations, to the extent feasible.
 - Where rooftop additions are desired, use step backs to maintain the existing street facade height of adjacent contributing buildings.
 - Avoid obscuring existing large window and door openings.
 - Minimize the effect of additions on symmetrical building facades or compositions.
- 2.2 Use durable, high-quality materials that are compatible with the materials of adjacent contributing buildings in the district such as brick masonry, concrete, steel, corrugated metal, and industrial materials.

3. New (Infill) Construction & Alterations to Non-Contributing Resources

- 3.1 Preserve the historic pattern of siting new buildings with a zero-lot-line setback from the street.
- 3.2 Consider using step backs on buildings that are taller than contributing buildings to maintain the existing street façade height of adjacent contributing buildings.
- 3.3 Align windows, doors, and variations in façade treatments to the extent feasible with that of adjacent contributing buildings in order to maintain the existing pattern of door and window openings found on the block face.
 - When not possible, utilize the average datum lines of contributing properties.
- 3.4 Consider using materials that are compatible with the materials of contributing buildings in the district such as brick masonry, concrete, steel, corrugated metal, and industrial materials.
- 3.5 Avoid off-street parking that abuts the public street right-of-way (Refer to Central City Core Design Guidelines).

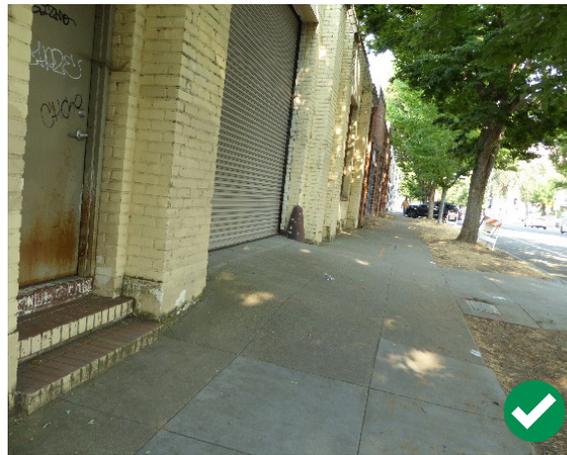


Figure 85. Contributing buildings in the historic district have a zero-lot-line setback.



Figure 86. The pattern of wide window and door openings facing the street is a key characteristic of the historic district.

4. Site Features, Streetscape, & Landscaping

- 4.1 Pursue a “complete street” approach that enhances pedestrian safety while preserving the historic district’s commercial character.
- 4.2 Encourage street lighting along C street within the district to be compatible with historic style street lighting in adjacent districts.