



Poverty Ridge

Historic District Plan

Physical Description & Boundaries

The Poverty Ridge Historic District is located within Sacramento’s original 1848 street grid and is roughly bounded by 21st Street to the west, S Street to the north, 23rd Street to the east, and W Street and U.S. Route 50 to the south. The district also incorporates the block bounded by 20th, 21st, S, and T streets.

The district contains a collection of houses in a variety of architectural styles that were part of one of Sacramento’s wealthiest and most prestigious neighborhoods in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The district’s largest and most elaborate houses are arranged around two north-south streets, 21st and 22nd streets, while several smaller houses are concentrated along the district’s southern and eastern borders.



Figure 270. The former Charles McClatchy residence at 2112 22nd Street, now the McClatchy Library. Many houses in the district, especially those planted on the “ridge” that gives the Poverty Ridge Historic District its name, have sloped lawns and low masonry retaining walls.



Figure 271. Houses on 21st Street, such as this Italianate house at 21st and U streets, were constructed on generously-sized lots.



Figure 272. The Roan-Didion House at the corner of 22nd and T streets. The largest and most decorative houses in the district are often located on street corners.



Figure 273. The district contains a variety of architectural styles, including Colonial Revival.

Brief Historic Context

The Poverty Ridge Historic District preserves an area that was considered to be Sacramento's wealthiest neighborhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The neighborhood is located on a slight rise in the southeast quadrant of Sacramento's original 1848 city limits. Because it was one of the only elevated areas within the city, residents often fled to this area for safety during the floods that periodically devastated Sacramento in the nineteenth century. People camping out on the ridge looked so poor that locals nicknamed the area "Poverty Ridge."¹

Despite the area's advantageous location and its reputation as "the most beautiful eminence in the city," Poverty Ridge remained sparsely populated until the late nineteenth century.² Burns Slough, which ran between 18th and 19th streets, often turned the blocks between the ridge and 14th Street into "an almost impassable quagmire," preventing potential residents from reaching the area.³ Beginning in 1868, the city carried out several projects to address the issue of flooding around Burns Slough, initially strengthening levees and later redirected through a system of underground sewers and drainage tunnels.⁴

Residential development began in Poverty Ridge in the late nineteenth century. By then, increasing industrialization, the influx of low-income workers, and the expanding impact of the Southern Pacific Railroad on the environment and local politics had



Figure 274. Residence of John Stevens, president of the Pioneer Box Factory, at 2115 21st Street (ca. 1890). Source: California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

turned the city's downtown core into an overcrowded, polluted, dirty, and crime-ridden area. Seeking quieter, cleaner, and safer places to live, Sacramento's affluent middle- and upper-class residents began to migrate to new neighborhoods, such as Poverty Ridge, that were emerging on the city's undeveloped tracts to the south and east.⁵

Poverty Ridge became the neighborhood of choice for Sacramento's wealthiest and most influential citizens. Residents included Buffalo Brewery founder Herman Grau, Pioneer Box Company president John Stevens, and *Sacramento Bee* editor Charles K. McClatchy, among others. In 1893, developers attempted to

rebrand the neighborhood as "Sutter Terrace." An article in the *Sacramento Daily Union* reveals the attitude of some local residents toward the proposal:

The resident property-owners in the high district bounded generally by Twentieth and Twenty-third, P and W Streets are getting to be aristocratic in their notions, and from their hights [sic] are inclined to look down patronizingly on the balance of the city. They have about come to the conclusion that the names "Poverty Ridge," "Nob Hill," etc. are entirely too common, and that hereafter these names shall be relegated to the "days of '49," and the hights [sic] in question known as "Sutter Terrace."⁶

The new name did not stick, and the neighborhood continued to be known as "Poverty Ridge."

Poverty Ridge's principal blocks between 21st, T, 23rd, and V streets featured generously sized lots on which large, single-family houses could be built. Many of the houses on these blocks were designed by highly-regarded local architects and reflect the most fashionable architectural styles of the time. Charles McClatchy's Beaux Arts style house at 2112 22nd Street was built in 1910 and designed by distinguished local architect Rudolph Herold. In 1940, the McClatchy family donated the house to the City of Sacramento, and it remains in use as a public library today. Next door at 2100 22nd Street, Herold designed his own house in the Prairie style.⁷ More modest houses and apartment buildings for middle-class residents were built on smaller lots around the periphery of Poverty

1 Shawn Scarborough, "Poverty Ridge Corridor: O Street Through Broadway," in *Sacramento's Midtown* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 85.

2 A Resident, "The Cross Levee Once More," *Sacramento Daily Union*, January 14, 1868.

3 Ibid.

4 "City Intelligence," *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 11, 1868; Rick Bettis, "A Brief Overview with Historical Vignettes," Sacramento Area Creeks Council, March 8, 1998, <http://saccreeks.org/know-your-creeks/>.

5 Nathan Hallam, "The Evolution of Sacramento's Central City Street Grid," (master's thesis, Sonoma State University, 2003), 63-64.

6 A Resident, "The Cross Levee Once More."

7 Jose Esparza, "Poverty Ridge Walking Tour," (brochure, Sacramento Heritage, Inc., 2018).



Figure 275. The McClatchy Library, formerly the Charles McClatchy house (1951). Source: Center for Sacramento History, Frank Christy Collection, 1998/722/1366.



Figure 276. Sacramento City Lines streetcars traveling along 21st Street on their route between the Southern Pacific Railroad depot and Oak Park (1944). Source: Center for Sacramento History, CITY, SAMCC Gifts to Share Collection, 2006/017/039.

Ridge.⁸

Like many of Sacramento's turn-of-the-century residential neighborhoods, proximity to streetcar lines was one of the qualities that attracted residents to Poverty Ridge. Streetcars ran through the neighborhood down 21st and T streets, allowing residents to easily travel to their places of work downtown. After World War II and as automobiles gained in popularity, however, residents of neighborhoods within Sacramento's central grid, such as Poverty Ridge, began to relocate to newer, more modern suburbs outside of the city. The demand for streetcar service declined and finally ended in January 1947.⁹

Nevertheless, Poverty Ridge retained a prestigious reputation, thanks in part to the people who lived there. Internationally celebrated author Joan Didion lived in two houses in the neighborhood, including the Roan-Didion House at 2000 22nd Street, during her adolescence in the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰ In the 1960s, several houses in Poverty Ridge were demolished as part of the construction of U.S. Highway 50, which borders the district to the south.¹¹ More recently, infill projects that were halted during the economic recession of the early 2000s have been completed. The largest recent urban infill project is Tapestry Square, a housing development of single-family

townhouses that borders the district on the east side of 21st Street.¹²

⁸ "Poverty Ridge Historic District," (Ordinance # 85-076, Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources, July 30, 1985, updated May 2014), 2.

⁹ William Burg, *Sacramento's Streetcars* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 56.

¹⁰ William Burg, "Historic Home Tour in Poverty Ridge Neighborhood," *Sacramento Press*, September 10, 2012, <https://sacramento.press.com/2012/09/10/historic-home-tour-in-poverty-ridge-neighborhood/>.

¹¹ Cyrus G. Brown Maps and Aero Views Commercial Artists, "Map of the City of Sacramento" [map], 1923.

¹² Burg, "Historic Home Tour in Poverty Ridge Neighborhood."

Significance

The Poverty Ridge 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 of the city’s General Plan Technical Background Report.

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(1) Requirements	
(a)	The Poverty Ridge Historic District meets requirement (a) for listing on the Sacramento Register, because it is a geographically definable area.
(b)(i)	<p>The Poverty Ridge 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 district is significant for its concentration of large, single-family houses that were constructed as part of the development of the Poverty Ridge neighborhood, one of Sacramento’s wealthiest and most prestigious residential neighborhoods in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The grandest houses in the neighborhood were built primarily between 1870 and 1915 on broad lots along 21st and 22nd streets. Many were designed by highly-regarded local architects, who were hired to design houses that would reflect the homeowners’ wealth and status. Corner lots often featured the largest and most impressive houses in the neighborhood. In the 1920s and 1930s, smaller houses and multi-family apartment buildings were constructed on lots around the neighborhood’s borders, where pressure from industrial development was greater. This variation in housing scale and patterns remains apparent in the historic district today.</p> <p>The variety of architectural styles that are visible within the Poverty Ridge Historic District are representative of the styles that were most popular during the neighborhood’s primary period of development from the late nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century. The buildings range from elaborate Queen Anne and Italianate Victorians; to Beaux Arts, Classical Revival, and Prairie style houses; to smaller Craftsman style bungalows. The size, style, quality, and setting of the buildings reflect Poverty Ridge’s past as one of Sacramento’s wealthiest and most fashionable neighborhoods at the turn of the twentieth century.</p>

Period of Significance: 1868-1947

The period of significance for the Poverty Ridge Historic District begins in 1868, when city projects addressed flooding around Burns Slough and allowed for residential development to begin in the area, and concludes with the end of streetcar service in 1947 as part of the postwar migration of city residents to new automobile-oriented residential suburbs outside Sacramento’s historic urban core.

Property Types from the Period of Significance

- Residential
- Civic/Institutional

Architectural Styles from the Period of Significance

- Italianate
- Queen Anne
- Shingle
- Folk Victorian
- Colonial Revival
- Classical Revival
- Tudor
- Beaux Arts
- French Eclectic
- Mediterranean Revival
- Italian Renaissance
- Mission
- Spanish Revival
- Monterey
- Prairie
- Craftsman
- Classic Box
- Art Deco
- Minimal Traditional
- Vernacular

(B) Listing on the Sacramento Register – Historic districts	
(1) Requirements	
(b)(ii)	<p>The Poverty Ridge 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 streetcar suburbs on previously rural, agricultural land of outlying areas within Sacramento’s original street grid. Much of Poverty Ridge’s development is related to the expansion of streetcar lines to the area on T and 21st streets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Until this period, development in Sacramento had been primarily concentrated in the central business district downtown, where the commercial waterfront, railyards, industries, and state government offices were located. The availability of employment opportunities attracted large numbers of people to the downtown area who not only worked in the businesses downtown but often lived in the immediate area. Poverty Ridge became an attractive neighborhood for residents seeking to live away from the noise and dirt of the city center. The streetcar enabled workers who were employed by businesses downtown to live further from the city center, resulting in the establishment of Sacramento’s first residential subdivisions and the beginning of an exodus of residents from the downtown area that accelerated after World War II.</p>
(c)	<p>The Poverty Ridge 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 Poverty Ridge 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 Poverty Ridge 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"> • Historically single-family residences, some converted into multi-family units or commercial businesses • One civic building, constructed for the Sacramento Fire Department • Parking and auxiliary uses located along alleys
Mass & Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generous parcel sizes on 21st and 22nd streets with plentiful space between houses • Small, one-story single-family houses generally located on the blocks along the district's south border and increasing in height and overall scale to larger, two- to three-story houses as the blocks proceed to the north • Largest, most elaborate houses are frequently situated at street corners and on the elevated areas of the ridge • Some houses with Delta-style high basement and raised first story
Cladding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominately wood siding (typically three- or four-lap siding or shingles, most commonly on upper stories), brick, and stucco, or a combination of these materials • Brick or clinker brick often on first stories
Roofs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low hipped roofs with wide overhanging eaves, front- or side-facing gabled roofs, often with a centrally placed dormer • Brick or clinker brick chimneys
Entries & Doors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delta-style configuration with staircases leading to primary entrances above a high basement • Central or offset front doors framed with side or transom windows • Wood or terrazzo stairs
Windows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood-frame double-hung windows
Porches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prominent full-width or wraparound porches accessed by a staircase • Brick or clinker brick porch bases

Element	Character of Historic District
Ornamentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Italianate and Queen Anne details, including incised brackets under roof eaves; decorative, carved woodwork around windows and doors; slender, turned porch posts and balusters; turrets; patterned shingles on gabled ends; rounded windows; and stained-glass windows, especially on transoms over primary entrance • Classical Revival details, including Tuscan columns and dentils along cornice • Craftsman details, including exposed rafter and purlin tails, wooden braces, and tapered square columns
Property Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space between and in front of houses often filled with large, grassy lawns or gardens • Sloping lawns with shallow steps and landings in front of houses located on the ridge • Brick or masonry retaining walls built around properties at the base of the ridge • Use of vegetation as fencing or privacy screens
Streetscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rows of mature, evenly spaced, deciduous street trees—most often sycamore or palm trees—planted in a parking strip • Concrete upping stones engraved with family names • Iron hitching posts and evidence of removed hitching posts in the form of L-shaped concrete strips next to the street curb • Generous setback of approximately 30 to 40 feet from the street to the primary, street-facing house facades • Wide parking strips (approximately 15 feet wide) along east-west streets; narrower parking strips (approximately 7 feet wide) along north-south streets • Varying sidewalk widths • Many houses constructed toward the end of the period of significance • Wide north-south streets (21nd and 22st streets), with enough space for two cars to easily pass and sometimes with small medians or dividers in the center • East-west streets (U and V streets) are generally narrower, particularly toward the southern end of the district

Boundaries & Location

The following map shows the boundaries and location of the Poverty Ridge 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.

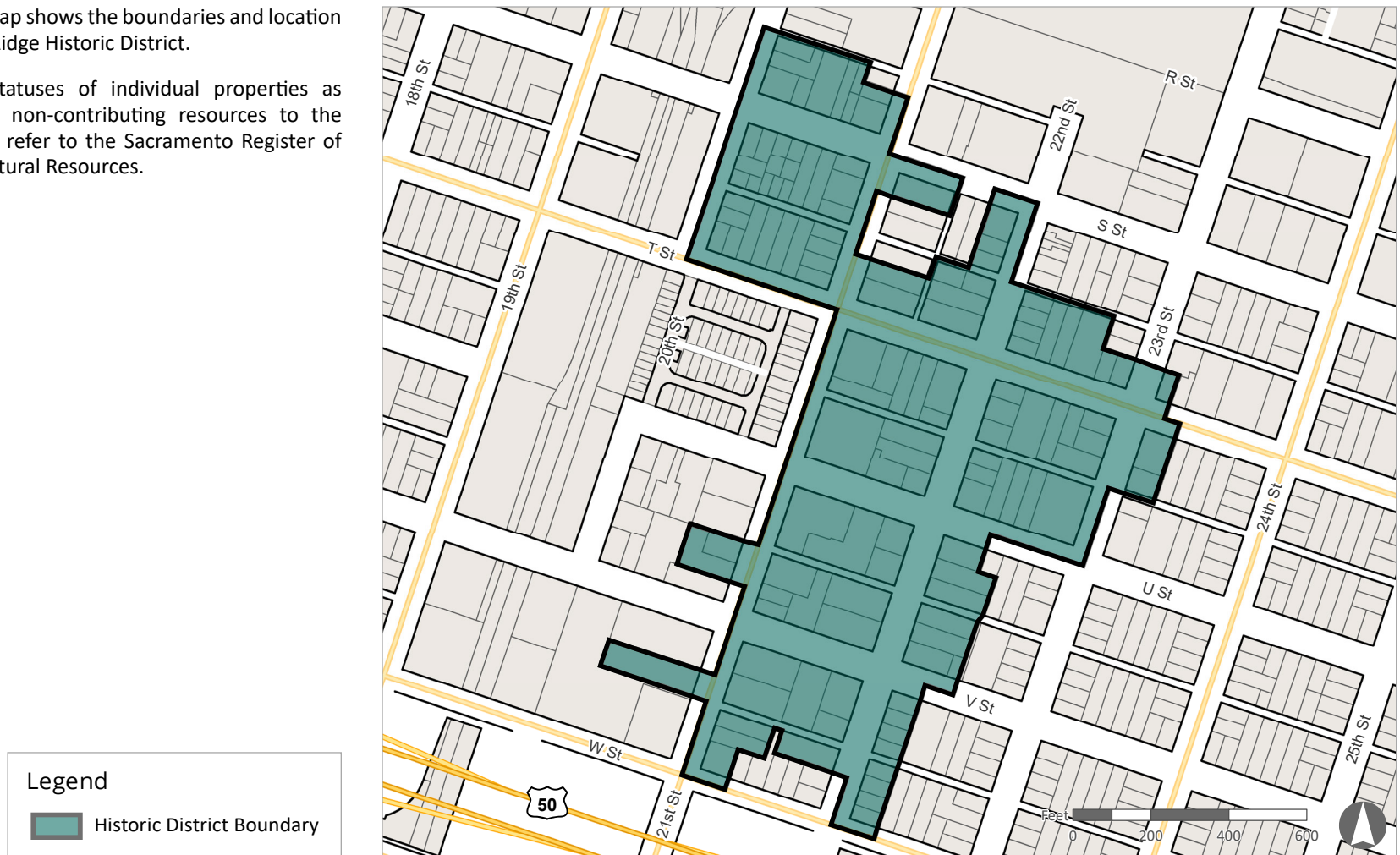


Figure 277. Map of the Poverty Ridge Historic District. Source: City of Sacramento and Page & Turnbull, 2019.

District-Specific Standards & Criteria

Design Principle

Projects in the Poverty Ridge Historic District must result in minimal visual impacts that will not disrupt the highly cohesive architectural character and significant streetscape design of the historic district.

Rationale

While the north and west boundaries of the Poverty Ridge Historic District have been impacted by modern infill development, the majority of the historic district retains a remarkable level of integrity. Continuous rows of stately houses with deep setbacks and large front lawns create a sense of visual uniformity, even as the architectural styles vary from block to block. As indicated by the historic district's name, topography is also a significant character-defining feature of Poverty Ridge. The neighborhood's elevated topography contributed historically to the presence of sloped lawns, retaining walls, streets, and alleys, which create a streetscape environment that is unlike any other in Sacramento.

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 Poverty Ridge Historic District.

1. Rehabilitation of Contributing Resources

- 1.1 Maintain, preserve, and, where necessary, repair and restore historic elements associated with the Delta style of residential architecture, especially historic staircases, porches, bay windows, and doors.



Figure 278. Wood, brick, and terrazzo are common materials used in historic architectural features in the historic district.

2. Additions & Accessory Structures for Contributing Resources

- 2.1 Avoid additions that make contributing buildings constructed in horizontally massed or box-like architectural styles, such as Craftsman or Classic Box, more vertical or that make vertically massed Victorian-era buildings more horizontal.
- 2.2 Avoid additions that cause a contributing building's height to exceed 150% of its historic height.
 - Use step backs to maintain the existing street façade height.
 - Buildings with a wider floor plan or taller height may be appropriate at street corners where there is a historic precedent for siting larger buildings.

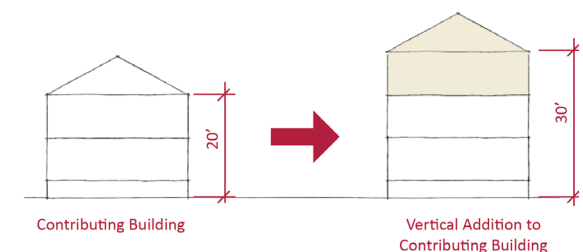


Figure 279. Additions should not cause a building's height to exceed 150% of its historic height.

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

- 3.1 Design the scale, massing, and proportions of new construction to be compatible with those of adjacent contributing buildings on the same block.
- Where additional height is considered, the height of new buildings should be no more than 150% of the height of surrounding contributing buildings.
 - Consider using step backs for taller buildings to maintain the existing street façade height of adjacent contributing buildings.
 - Buildings with a wider floor plan or taller height may be appropriate at street corners where there is a historic precedent for siting larger buildings.
- 3.2 Site new buildings to generally align with the setback of adjacent contributing buildings to maintain the district's deep setbacks (approximately 30- to 40-foot-wide) and wide front lawns.
- 3.3 Preserve the historic pattern and articulation of large parcels and open space, wherever possible.
- Consider breaking down the massing of large infill developments into smaller masses that reflect the historic lot pattern.

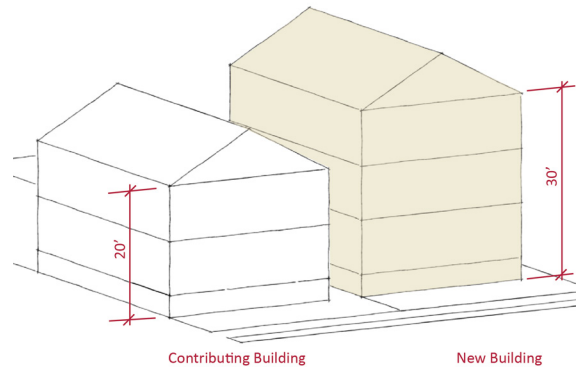


Figure 280. The height of new buildings should be no more than 150% of the height of surrounding contributing buildings.



Figure 281. Deep, uniform setbacks; wide, planted park strips; and upping stones contribute to the distinctive streetscape of the historic district.

4. Site Features, Streetscape, & Landscaping

- 4.1 Preserve and maintain the historic open, planted character, size, and grade of front lawns.
- Avoid paving front or side lawns.
- 4.2 Preserve and maintain features associated with historic sloping front lawns, including the historic property grade, brick or masonry retaining walls, and shallow concrete or terrazzo steps and landings.
- 4.3 Avoid adding fences or screening features in front of properties where fencing did not exist historically.
- If privacy is desired, consider using vegetation as a screening feature along property lines.
- 4.4 Preserve and maintain the size and planted character of wide park strips.
- 4.5 Where street trees consist of a row of trees of the same species, such as palms, replace removed or diseased trees in kind with the same species or a compatible species at regular intervals in order to maintain the historic tree planting pattern.
- 4.6 Preserve and maintain the historic pattern of wide north-south streets and narrower east-west streets.
- 4.7 Avoid the addition of new curb cuts on 21st and 22nd streets.

- Locate parking and service access along alleys, and use landscaping features to screen it from the public right-of-way, wherever possible.

4.8 Preserve and maintain historic hitching posts and upping stones in their historic locations.

4.9 Preserve historic property, street, and alley grades.

5. Alley Infill

5.1 The height of alley infill should be no more than 150% of the height of surrounding contributing buildings.



Figure 284. Shallow steps and landings are common in front of properties with sloping front lawns.



Figure 282. Poverty Ridge's sloping topography contributes to the unique character of individual property landscaping and public streetscapes.

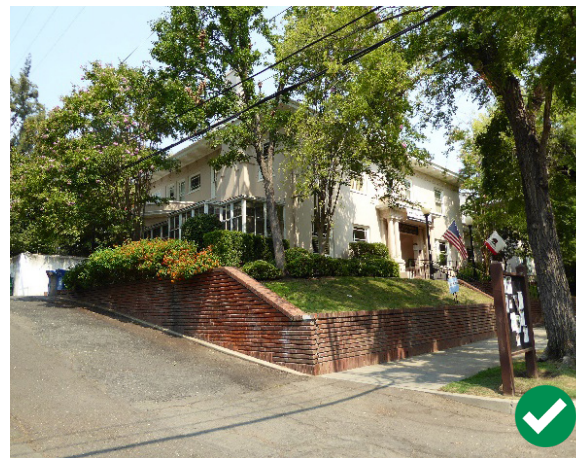


Figure 283. Historic brick or masonry retaining walls may be found in front of many contributing properties.

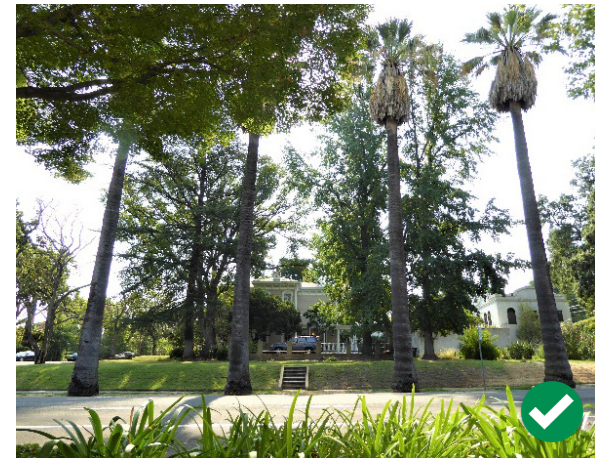


Figure 285. Rows of palms contribute to the historic district's streetscapes.