

Chapter 2

Community Character

The City of Salida is rooted in the railroad history from which the city was born but since the decline of the railroad the city has grown into a diverse multi-generational community that offers a safe, friendly and peaceful atmosphere for residents and visitors alike. Protection of our unique small town character is commonly identified as the most important priority for community members in discussions about the future of the city.

The history, heritage and surrounding natural environment of Salida exemplify the essential spirit of the community. Here, historic neighborhoods and development patterns are highly valued and there is a desire for new development to respect and respond to the existing historic character. At the same time, there is a strong desire to maintain, provide and improve opportunities for individuals and families of all backgrounds and sizes to reside within the community.

In this chapter we briefly describe the character that is unique to Salida touching on our cultural history, streetscapes, architectural style, natural environment and other important elements of the community character. This chapter is intended to reveal our history, quality of life and distinct elements that create Salida's sense of place. The chapter includes consideration of the strengths we see in the character that we would like to build upon, weaknesses we do not wish to continue and new trends that we want to utilize in the future. Map 2.1 Community Character highlights the location of these important places.

History

The Upper Arkansas Valley was a popular summer hunting and camping spot with indigenous peoples, particularly the Utes, due to its plentiful game, numerous hot springs, and mild climate. The area also experienced much activity during the period of Spanish and American exploration, serving as a natural

pathway to several mountain passes. Among those examining the region were Gov. Don Juan Bautista de Anza, Lt. Zebulon Pike, and John Charles Fremont.

The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad ("D&RG") bypassed the existing settlement of Cleora to establish Salida in 1880. Salida became a major division point for the D&RG, which erected extensive railroad facilities north of the commercial district on the opposite bank of the Arkansas River. The city developed quickly and became the hub of a prosperous mining and agricultural region within a decade of its founding.

Salida experienced devastating fires in its business district in 1886 and 1888, but rebounded to build a substantial commercial area consisting principally of two-story brick buildings. Although Salida did not become part of a direct line to Denver, it would become a major division point for six of the D&RG's branches. With employment opportunities available in railroads, the prosperity of mining, and the growth of agriculture, the city became the largest population center in Chaffee County.

Railroad activity began to decline in the 1950s and, in 1971, Salida ceased to be a division point for the D&RG. After the railroad declined many people commuted to Leadville to work in nearby mines until the mines started to decline in the mid 1980's. Tourism, recreation, and arts-related enterprises grew in importance during the second half of the twentieth



Salida 1884. Salida was platted in 1880



Lighting of Christmas Mountain USA.
Photo Courtesy of Kevin Hoffman

century. Through this transition the city has remained a regional shopping hub.

There are several detailed histories of Salida and the Chaffee County area. One can be found in the “Downtown Salida Colorado Historic Buildings Survey 2001-02” prepared by Front Range Research Associates and available on the history page of the city’s website.

Design of the Built Environment

The original town plat for Salida was filed on August 12, 1880. The plat showed Front (Sackett) through Fifth Streets, and D through L, an area reserved for the railroad, and a park between Fourth and Fifth from E to F streets (Alpine Park). Blocks were 325 feet square, with lots measuring 25’ X 150’.

The earliest Sanborn map of Salida, showing the location and use of buildings in the downtown area, was completed in September 1883. The map illustrates that the heart of the commercial district was found along F Street, between Second Street and Front Street, and First Street, between E and G. Single-family dwellings were scattered along the fringes of these business areas, with several multi-family boarding houses found along First Street.

The downtown area was largely established by 1920. Following several fires, most buildings were constructed or reconstructed as two story brick structures. Many of the buildings constructed during the early boom of the city are still in place today and make up the Salida Downtown District listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The architectural resources in the downtown are protected through the historic preservation ordinances of the city and the work of the city’s Historic Preservation Commission appointed by the Council to serve as an advisory committee to help safeguard historic resources in the community.

The historic downtown continues to be a focal point for the community. While the business district along Highway 50 provides most of the commerce in the city, the downtown is the gathering place for residents and visitors alike. Many events are hosted in the downtown throughout the year drawing the community together. Recent investment in downtown by the city, county and civic organizations include the redevelopment of Riverside Park and the SteamPlant Theater and Events Center and creation of the riverwalk and whitewater park. These improvements have helped to revitalize downtown bringing renewed interest and traffic by both residents and visitors alike.

The residential development pattern in the city was fairly consistent from 1880 through the 1930’s with a variety of housing types constructed throughout much of the early city. Residential construction included larger, more architecturally significant dwellings that represent architectural styles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as smaller middle class houses, two-story terraces, and workers’ housing built following a standard plan.

The early residential neighborhoods followed the original lot and block pattern with 60’ street widths running in a regular grid with shade trees planted along the right of way. This pattern included alleys through each block for infrastructure placement and access to the rear of lots. The 1950’s and later decades saw the introduction of larger lots, cul-de-sacs, ranch-style homes and other, more modern development patterns and architectural styles at the periphery of the grid.

The historic neighborhoods including the architectural character, streetscape patterns and neighborhood scale are highly valued by Salida residents. Along with the historic downtown, the historic residential areas help form what we value in the character of the community.

Development has increased in recent years including new construction, additions to existing structures and replacement of aging buildings. Some residents prefer the eclectic mixture of buildings that reflect the diversity and independent nature of the city. However, others believe that design standards should be implemented for buildings in the city. 2008 saw two efforts to bring design standards to different residential neighborhoods in the city. Design guidelines were adopted for the Sackett's Addition neighborhood while efforts to create a historic district for residential F Street failed.

Policy makers have been reluctant to create such regulations as they may interfere with economic development and create additional burden on city staff. Others argue that an increased aesthetic standard would eventually add to economic growth because higher quality development and unique community character attract more investment as well as tourists.

Natural Surroundings

The beautiful natural environment surrounding Salida forms the identity of the city and residents. Salida is located along the Arkansas and South Arkansas Rivers in a valley surrounded by mountains and high peaks. Recreation opportunities abound and like the arts, have attracted many residents and visitors in recent decades. The mild mountain climate, access to public lands, proximity to the river and pace of life all contribute to the local enthusiasm for recreation and enjoyment of the natural environment.

The heritage of Chaffee County and the City of Salida includes ranching and irrigation on the lands west of the city. The open lands, green fields and grazing cattle form an important component of the community identity. This is not an area of sprawling suburbs such as can be found in Colorado's Front Range, but

rather a rural area where much of the valley floor remains undeveloped and forms an uninterrupted foreground for views of the surrounding 14,000 foot peaks.

As ranching becomes less viable in changing economic times and the value of those lands for development increases, the community risks the loss of the asset that so many take for granted. The government of Chaffee County has struggled in recent years with balancing the desire to maintain the ranches and the economic expectations of private landowners. As citizens of the county and beneficiaries of the open ranchlands, Salida residents must be prepared to support the County in efforts to maintain ranches and irrigated lands if we are to continue to enjoy the benefits they provide.

Sense of Community

Salida's quality of life can be attributed to many tangible amenities, from beautiful surroundings to short commutes and tree-lined streets to friendly, familiar faces and considerate neighbors. People are attracted to this area for the unhurried lifestyle and cultural and recreational opportunities. The sense of community is palpable and residents demonstrate this when they come together in times of celebration or to willingly lend a hand in times of difficulty.



Ranching and agricultural lands are the scenic backdrop that defines the Salida region.
Photo Courtesy of Alan Robinson

The community is made up of a mix of life-time and long-time residents, young families, retirees, second homeowners, working class, recreation enthusiasts, conservatives, liberals, children and elderly all joined by the common thread of their community. The city reflects this diversity through the variety in the built environment from strong brick structures to whimsical art. It is further reflected in the capital investments made by the city in maintenance of streets and parks and improvements to facilities like the SteamPlant Theater and Event Center and the Hot Springs Aquatic Center.

Recent growth has meant changes in the city’s population characteristics. In the face of this change Salida seeks to protect its small town atmosphere, heritage and sense of community. Residents enjoy the casual atmosphere, the opportunity to raise a family, community events, and willingness of people to pitch in, volunteer and be engaged in their community. This chapter promotes strategies to continue fostering this civic spirit throughout the community.

Principles / Policies / Action Items

Principle CC-I. History

Preserve, enhance and promote the historic resources in the community.

Policy CC-I.1 – Preserve, enhance and promote the Salida Downtown National Register District and the city’s older residential neighborhoods.

Action CC-I.1.a – Maintain the HPC to advise City staff on the city’s preservation ordinance and provide education to the community about historic preservation and the associated economic benefits of preservation.

Action CC-I.1.b – Pursue grant funding and leverage city funds to inventory the historic resources in the community, particularly in the residential neighborhoods as identified in the 2001-02 survey completed by Front Range Research Associates.



Shriners saluting during the FIBArk Parade

Action CC-I.1.c – Actively review and work to implement the action items identified in the Historic Downtown Improvement and Economic Sustainability Plan adopted by the City Council in 2007.

Action CC-I.1.d – Work within the Property Maintenance Code to enforce maintenance of commercial and multi-family structures in the city.

Action CC-I.1.e – Create gateways to the Downtown along the major traffic corridors of the city.

Policy CC-I.2 – Maintain a connection to the history of the city and the railroad heritage that established the city.

Action CC-I.2.a – Provide interpretive panels along the riverwalk or future trail along the Arkansas, providing information about the railroad history adjacent to downtown.

Action CC-I.2.b – Encourage relocation of the Salida Museum and visitor center to the downtown area.

Action CC-I.2.c – Encourage public transit opportunities that simulate the railroad history.

Policy CC-I.2 – Provide options for local food production in the community.

Action CC-I.2.a – Review the Land Use Code to ensure it promotes and encourages backyard CSAs, local food production and local markets, and community gardens.

Principle CC-II. Design of the Built Environment

Maintain the valued structures and streetscapes within the city and allow new development that is compatible in design and also meets new goals for innovation and energy and resource efficiency.

Policy CC-II.1 – Encourage the preservation of buildings with historic character and design of new buildings that are compatible in scale and site design.

Action CC-II.1.a – With the support of neighborhood residents, investigate design guidelines that will determine appropriate height limitations, setbacks and other design elements for buildings in established residential neighborhoods.

Action CC-II.1.b – Local landmark designation for historic residential neighborhoods may also provide an alternative method for achieving the same goal as Action CC-II.1.a.

Action CC-II.1.c – Maintain the Salida Downtown Historic District as a Certified Local Government with the State of Colorado.

Action CC-II.1.d – Review the variance provisions of the Land Use Code to ensure adequate reuse opportunities for non-conforming structures in keeping with the neighborhood character.

Action CC-II.1.e – New development should be compatible with the traditional built neighborhood character and be subordinate in mass and scale.



Continue to provide wayfinding signage to the historic downtown

Principle CC-III. Natural Surroundings

Salida will sustain and enhance the beauty and health of the natural environment, working landscapes and provide multi-modal access to the many surrounding recreational opportunities.

Policy CC-III.1 – The Arkansas River should be maintained as a focal point of the community to be enjoyed from both the shore and in the current.

Action CC-III.1.a – Seek ways to improve or provide additional public access to the Arkansas River.

Policy CC-III.2 – Maintain the passive experience of openness in the rural lands surrounding the city that will accommodate ongoing agricultural use.

Action CC-III.2.a – Encourage agriculture and low density residential development in the open lands within the Municipal Planning area around the city.

Action CC-III.2.b – Actively participate in the Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board.

Principle CC-IV. Sense of Community

The city should strive to maintain a healthy and safe community that ensures opportunities for a multi-generational community to live, work, play, and raise a family.

Policy CC-IV.1 - Continue to promote the cohesive community of Salida which includes full-time residents, businesses, second homeowners, and a diversity of ages.

Action CC-IV.1.a – Continue providing cultural activities through the recreation department that engage citizens of all ages, particularly those programs which encourage participation of multiple generations.



Policy CC-IV.2 – Encourage the casual atmosphere of the small town lifestyle.

Policy CC-IV.3 – Promote an engaged citizenship that is involved with civic activities, long range planning and volunteer opportunities.

First Street in the Historic Downtown