

# Design

Design takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in downtown by directing attention to all of its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, landscaping, merchandising, displays, and promotional materials. Its aim is to stress the importance of design quality in all of these areas, to educate people about design quality and to expedite improvements in the downtown. At the forefront of the design effort is the restoration of historic buildings which helps provide the backdrop for downtown's sense of place.

**Observation:** There is no combined vision for the social, economic, and physical improvements of the entire commercial district.

**Recommendation:** Capture the vision of the Cliffs' Commercial District. Westcliffe and Silver Cliff have a very unique situation in that together, these two towns function as the region's economic center, the "downtown" for Custer County and the Wet Mountain Valley. Town residents envision the commercial district as the heart of the community. As such, both communities need to work together to gain consensus on a cohesive vision for the social, economic and physical improvements of the entire commercial district to ensure long term vitality and sustainability in the long term. It's our understanding that both towns are in the initial stages of updating their Master Plans respectively. Key elements of each community's Master Plan should solidify the vision for the community and address growth, image and design, housing, economic development, transportation, public improvements, resources and environment, cultural, historic, education, and human services opportunities. Each town should capitalize on this unique opportunity to work cooperatively to make sure that the commercial district becomes that desired community-gathering place attracting visitors, new residents, and growing businesses with year round activity while preserving the rural, small town character of both communities and enhancing the existing qualities of the area. The two towns should work together to create a sub-area plan for the Cliffs' commercial district as an element of each towns Master Plan. The Cliffs' Commercial District Strategic Plan should address land use, parking, infrastructure improvements (including storm drainage), signage, design guidelines as well as include an in-depth market analysis to assist the towns in understanding the market, trade areas, demographics, visitor data, consumer spending potential, business retention and expansion, etc. It should also clearly define the commercial district boundaries, goals and objectives, organizational mechanisms, enhancement programs, design related improvements, promotion and provide a clear set of supported and actionable strategies and actions that can guide the decision making and prioritization of next steps into the future. A key aspect of the plan should include a combined streetscape design for the whole district.



## Community Engagement

As with all planning efforts, public outreach, collaboration, consensus building and ownership of the Plan is the key to its ultimate adoption and implementation. Facilitate a community engagement process for a Commercial District Strategic Plan. The towns should consider the following community engagement strategies to ensure that issues, aspirations, and concerns are consistently heard, considered and feedback is provided on how public input influenced decisions:

- Identify your leaders - form a Mayor appointed Cliffs' Task Force. Their role will be to represent each town's interests, provide guidance and community insight throughout the development of the Commercial District Strategic Plan to ensure community ownership and support of the adopted document.
- Foster participation of elected and appointed officials (find a respected champion from each community). Facilitate joint meetings with Town Board and Planning Commission representatives.
- Gather public feedback about community desires for the district (utilize community surveying, visual preference surveys, workshops, stakeholder interviews, etc).
- Provide a transparent process for how public input is used. Be transparent and inclusive.
- Utilize the town's website, direct email notification and social media tools (i.e., twitter and facebook) to provide information about the project including background materials, draft documents, meeting summaries, as well as notification of upcoming community meetings and upcoming events.
- Conduct community outreach events (i.e., car shows, festivals, mining days,, etc)
- Partner with the Chamber to facilitate a Downtown Revitalization Education Program with the school as well other non-profits. Use the program to teach students about planning, downtown revitalization, the Main Street Four Point Approach, and historic preservation for use by the Town Boards and staff.
- Publish articles in the Wet Mountain Tribune.

**Recommendation:** Update Land Use Regulations and town policies in each town for consistency with the newly adopted Cliffs' Commercial District Strategic Plan. In order to implement the vision of the commercial district strategic plan element, the land use regulations in each town need to be updated for consistency with the new vision. Code revision can range from simply adding overlay zones to address infill challenges to rewriting particular zone district designations. The following are possible code amendments that would ensure successful implementation accordingly:

1. Facilitate a community engagement process, but be sure to collaborate with service providers, Round Mountain Water and Sanitation District and public works staff (Town Man) up front and test the regulations with developers, business owners, and civic associations as well.
2. Adopt a commercial district overlay zone or consider a new commercial mixed-use zone district.
3. Set forth an administrative review process (Town Manager approval) for projects in the commercial district mixed use zoning or overlay zone district.
4. Set forth an alternative compliance process within this overlay zone or zoning district. Upon request of an applicant, each Planning Commission may approve an alternative

approach that may be substituted in whole or in part for a plan not meeting one or more of the development standards contained in the standards. This approach provides flexibility to meet the development standards in the ordinance and should apply in circumstances in which an alternative approach would provide a result that is equal to or superior to that which would be provided by the standards in this ordinance.

5. Provide a "How to" sections and include graphics to convey intent of the regulations.
6. Establish criteria for accessory dwelling units.
7. Establish density bonuses and expedited approval for residential development in the commercial district.
8. Examine the palatability and ease to proactively rezone properties with the Commercial District (Legislative Rezoning of the District), or to provide incentive for incremental rezoning to new mixed-use zoning district(s).
9. Restrict inappropriate uses such as auto-related, outdoor storage adjacent to the street) and drive-through facilities.
10. Identify parcels off of the commercial district corridor that would be appropriate for light industrial district designations.
11. Consider adopting a Cliffs' Commercial District Development Handbook that includes flowcharts, checklists, submittal requirements, application forms, illustrations, resources (technical assistance and sources of funds) and incorporates the various code requirements for the district(s) or overlay(s) zone into a single document for ease of use by property owners, business owners, developers, citizens, and town staff(s).

**Observation:** The Cliffs' Commercial District appearance doesn't impart the feeling of pride reflective of the citizens' attitudes.

**Recommendation:**

- Capitalize on Community Pride. Throughout the focus groups, there was great pride in the unique attributes of each community as well as the stunning natural beauty of the area. Although many people value the physical beauty of the areas and the friendliness of the people, they voiced concerns about the first impression of the "downtown" area due to dilapidated buildings, random storage of equipment, junk, trash/litter, abandoned cars, etc. Sidewalks, curb-and-gutter, landscaping, street furniture, signage, and inviting building facades will promote a "downtown" that visitors can recognize as some place the towns of Westcliffe and Silver Cliff are proud of. Through the community engagement process of the joint planning efforts, the Cliffs' Task Force should challenge the Cliffs' Commercial District to develop a pride statement. The purpose of declaring a pride statement is to promote, as a matter of public policy, the preservation, protection and enhancement of those buildings, properties, structures, sites and incidental appurtenances within the commercial district, in the interest of prosperity, civic pride and general welfare of the both communities and to prevent blight by:

1. Providing a mechanism to preserve, protect, enhance, and perpetuate those structures, properties, sites, buildings and incidental appurtenances within the commercial district;
2. Fostering civic pride and respect in the community's future;
3. Maintaining and improving property values;
4. Protecting and enhancing the community's attraction to tourists and visitors;
5. Promoting such structures, property sites, buildings and incidental appurtenances for the general welfare of the community;

6. Fostering and encouraging preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of structures, properties, buildings, sites and incidental appurtenances thereby preventing blight.

- Adopt a Pride, Health and Safety Ordinance. There is a direct correlation between a community's image and its economic well being. Adopting a pride, health and safety ordinance in both communities is the first step. Build in processes and tools to identify and abate blight conditions. The Cliffs' Task Force should help develop mechanisms for property owner improvement or for acquisition, clearances, and disposition. Blighted properties should not be limited to unsightly conditions, but should also include properties burdened by legal and illegal subdivisions, floodplains, or other physical or legal conditions. Consider the following action items to promote redevelopment and improvement of the appearance of properties within the commercial district.

1. Adopt a definition of blight conditions and nuisance.
2. Perform an inventory of blighted properties and develop comprehensive lists of property owners, blight conditions present and preliminary actions to be taken.
3. Develop and adopt forms, checklists, and formal proceedings to declare properties blighted.
4. Develop programs to afford maximum opportunity to the rehabilitation or redevelopment of any property deemed blighted.
5. Explore funding mechanisms and grant opportunities for purchasing or rehabilitating blighted properties.
6. Require registration of all motor vehicles.

- Facilitate public education efforts. The Towns' should take the lead in educating the residents, business owners, elected and appointed officials, as well as staff on the adopted Pride, Health and Safety Ordinance, Cliffs' Commercial District Strategic Plan, Town land use regulations, policies and code enforcement by facilitating a Citizens' Planning Academy. The Academy's ultimate goal would be to foster an understanding of the relationship and interaction between citizens and government bodies. It is also intended to educate citizens about all aspects of the planning and development review processes in the Commercial District and to stimulate citizen interest in implementation of the community plans, town regulations, policies, standards, and guidelines as well as continuing interest in the planning process over the long term.

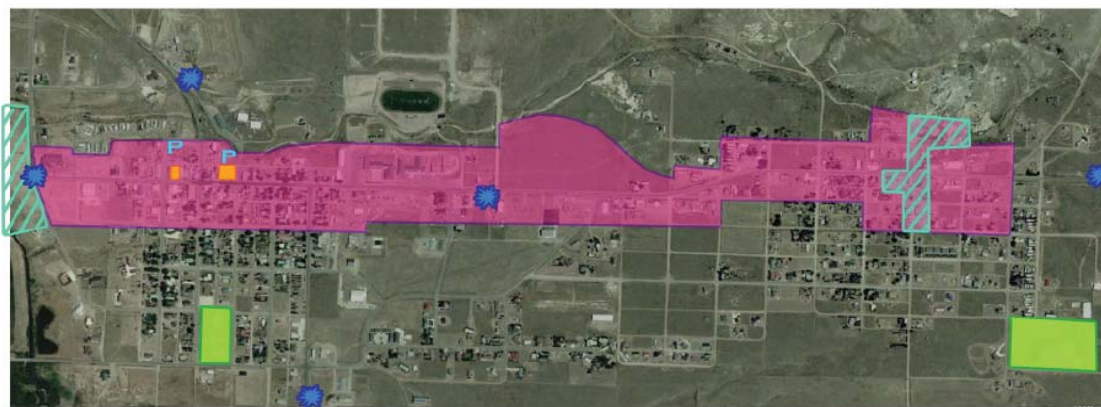
- Establish a process to consistently enforce town regulations. The benefits of code compliance are realized community-wide in that compliance can reduce vandalism, deter crime, maintain property values, and prevent deterioration of properties and structures. Small town living presents challenges in code enforcement due to the political environment, traditional public expectations and minimal support resources.

The first step to addressing these challenges would be to establish a process to consistently enforce town regulations and ordinances to ensure high quality design and clean and safe properties. Collaborate with other town entities including the Police Department to discuss enforcement strategies and abatement of chronic properties. Devote space on the town's website to inform citizens and prospective citizens about code enforcement and the benefits of code compliance. At the top of the page provide a picture of an "Honor Roll" property beside a picture of a property that needs improvement

(non-compliance). Include information about common violations, enforcing the ordinances and solutions and procedures (abatement actions). It is also nice to post some “frequently asked questions” page and provide responses to educate the public on code enforcement, processes, etc. Frequency asked questions could include: “Why do we need a nuisance ordinance?” “How does the public nuisance ordinance work?” “In case of rental property, who is responsible?” “I’ve heard my neighbor could get my property in trouble over a few frivolous complaints. Is this true?” After getting a violation notice, what would the property owners need to do?” Lastly, provide informational links to assist citizens in compliance e.g., provide a link to Colorado Weed Management Association, etc.

- Embark on community-wide beautification projects. To continue momentum, the Cliffs’ Task Force should identify affordable beautification techniques such as installing banners, flower boxes, etc. Consider implementing an “Adopt-a-Pot or Planter” program. Planters are adopted on an annual basis by individuals, families, businesses, or organizations to be displayed around the Commercial District. The planters should include weatherproof plaques to recognize the adopting individual, family or organization. The program is also a great way to engage commercial district volunteers to maintain the planters, plant the flowers and spruce up the main street for minimal costs. Be sure to enlist a champion to educate a team of volunteers to assist with maintenance and planting. Reach out to the school kids and non-profits to assist in development of a window display program. Kick off a contest for the kids to design historical scenes to be displayed in the windows instead of “for lease or sale” signs. Research and pursue grants for façade improvements.
- Host the Cliffs’ Clean Up Days. Clean streets, swept sidewalks, fresh painted signs, pruned trees, washed windows, and manicured landscaping (planters, etc), will promote a downtown that visitors can recognize as some place Westcliffe and Silver Cliff are proud of and want to show off. The Towns should host Clean Up Days. The objective is to improve the curb appeal of Commercial District just as one would do if they were selling their home. This could be done every spring and summer as a community event celebrated with a party at the end of the day.
- Utilize creative design and visual merchandising to get buyers through the doors. There is no better way of grabbing someone’s attention than at the first instance and a well dressed window display does just that. Sell business owners on the importance of attractive window displays. Elect a local creative person to work with merchants monthly to change window displays regularly. Consider hosting a window treatment training for competition for current businesses as well as a competition for vacant buildings.

**Observation:** A Cliffs’ Commercial District that includes the Main Street corridor in Silver Cliff and Westcliffe needs to be identified and delineated. This is the area where revitalization of the downtowns should be emphasized. We have provided the figure below as an example of what the Cliffs’ Commercial District might include.



-  Signage
-  Town Park
-  Commercial District
-  Activity Node
-  Pocket Park
-  Additional Parking

Aerial Map illustrating the Cliffs' Commercial District: Figure showing the proposed commercial district boundary, event/activity nodes, trails, entry signage locations, and parks.

**Observation:** There is a need for designated pedestrian connections throughout the Cliffs' Commercial District from Main Street to area parks, trails and historic resources.

**Recommendations:**

- Identify and designate pedestrian connections from Main Street to area parks, trails and historic resources. These connections could be existing sidewalks, but they should all be clearly signed as a connection and what feature or features they are connecting to.
- There are no provisions for pedestrians along Main Street in Silver Cliff. Improvement plans need to be formalized and funding acquired for the installation of sidewalks, curb and gutters, street trees, and pedestrian level street lighting for this section of Main Street.

**Observation:** Silver Cliff needs an event and commercial node that can serve as the eastern anchor of the Cliffs' Commercial District.

**Recommendations:** Propose that the town facilitate the removal of the former cement plant facilities and other adjacent blighted structures to provide the land for a mining interpretive park at the base of the Silver Cliff mine. Using a private/public partnership, the Silver Cliff Mine Interpretive Park features could include:

- An amphitheater for events and attractions such as: melodrama, smaller scale (than the Bluegrass Festival) music events, dances, etc. These attractions would bring more people and revenue into the town of Silver Cliff and the entire Cliffs' Commercial District.



Amphitheater Graphic: Figure showing the proposed amphitheater at Silver Cliff Interpretive Park.

- The park could also serve as the southern terminus of a new commercial/activity node located along Mill Street that could extend from the park on the north side of Main Street to a couple of blocks south of Main Street. Architectural guidelines should be developed for this new area that would reflect the mining history of the area, such as shown in the figure below.



Mill Street Graphic : Figure showing typical commercial building façades for the new Mill Street commercial/activity node.)

**Observation:** There is a lack of public gathering spaces within the Cliffs’ Commercial District that encourage people to stop, eat, and play there.

**Recommendations:**

- A second possible commercial/activity node in Silver Cliff has been identified in the vicinity of Hermit Lane and Main Street. There is a large, currently undeveloped parcel on the north side of Main Street that could be used for this second node. This site is adjacent to the Family Dollar store and near the school. It is also close to the Silver Cliff/Westcliffe town boundary and could provide an improved transition from Main Street Westcliffe to Main Street Silver Cliff.
- The festival site at the west end of Main Street in Westcliffe and the proposed Silver Cliff Interpretive Park at the east end of Main Street in Silver Cliff should be designated special event nodes. They would provide activity anchors for both ends of Main Street and attract visitors to both communities.
- Identify and develop strategically located off-street parking lots within the Cliffs’ Commercial District that are within walking distance of the two special event nodes

(i.e. behind the 4th Street pocket park and at the vacant lot on the southeast corner of 2nd and North) in Westcliffe. People attending events at the festival sites would have to walk through the commercial areas to get to the festival site and then back again to their vehicles, giving the commercial district merchants opportunities to capture additional business.

- The parking in the large lot on Rosita, just east of the Westcliffe festival site, should be reserved for large RV vehicles during large events (i.e. the Bluegrass Festival, 4th of July, etc.). These vehicles are self contained and their owners are less likely to visit local restaurants and shops. By requiring the owners of regular vehicles to park “in town” they will need to walk back and forth through the commercial districts.
- Enhance the existing Westcliffe pocket park on Main and 4th Street by constructing a retaining wall and leveling out the north edge to create more usable space. This would provide enough space for the construction of a small gazebo or shelter that could be used as a venue for smaller entertainment events, etc. that would attract people to the commercial district. Some of these smaller events could be satellite to larger events such as the Bluegrass festival.
- Explore opportunities for other small pocket parks or other community gathering places located in both towns where small events or small groups could gather. For example, there is a small open space between two buildings on the north side of Main Street, just east of 2nd Street in Westcliffe where there is enough room for some landscaping and 2 to 3 checkers/chess tables could be located. This area would attract people looking for a rest area – some place to just sit and relax; or a location for couples who would like to have a place to meet and play a game of checkers, chess, or cards as shown in the figure below.



Pocket Park Graphic: Figure showing conceptual pocket park.

**Observation:** The image of the Cliffs’ Commercial District is inconsistent.

**Recommendations:**

- Develop a “brand” for the Cliffs’ Commercial District that should include appropriate graphic signage for the entry gateways on Highways 69 and 96, pedestrians and vehicles directions for facilities and attractions, and parking. While consistent in general

appearance (materials, lettering style, shape and colors), the signage should distinctly highlight the character of each town.

- Where space allows provisions should be made to allow businesses in the Cliffs' Commercial District to utilize sidewalks and street rights-of-ways adjacent to the face of their building for business expansion (food, drink, sidewalk sales, etc.).
- The Main Street makeover should include streetscape and façade improvements. The streetscape improvements could include landscape plantings; uniform sidewalk paving treatment; uniform pedestrian-level street lighting that would improve pedestrian safety, while embracing and protecting the dark sky initiatives; information kiosks; and coordinated street furniture including benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, etc. Façade improvements could be as simple as a fresh coat of paint up to a complete renovation of the façade. However, any façade improvements should consider and incorporate architectural features that reflect the character and history of each town.



Typical signage examples. Cohesive signage would assist in finding parking, businesses, gathering spaces, and other amenities.