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necessary element
in 1989*

~~SCENIC
HIGHWAY
ELEMENT
OF THE
FERNDALE
GENERAL
PLAN~~

circa 1978

SCENIC HIGHWAY ELEMENT

The purpose of the Scenic Highway Element is fourfold: (1) to inform the city of the State Scenic Highway Program including identification of state and county roads that are, or could be, designated as scenic routes under the state program (2) to develop standards and criteria by which a local scenic route system can be developed and maintained (3) to make recommendations on (a) whether a local scenic route system supplementing the state program is feasible and desirable (b) whether other scenic amenities in the community deserve protection or enhancement, and (4) to facilitate coordination between the city and the county regarding scenic routes traversing both jurisdictions.

The State Scenic Highway Program

A State Scenic Highway Program was established in 1963. This program includes standards, guidelines and a Master Plan map showing which state highways are eligible for official designation. The state role in implementing the program includes the preparation of a corridor study at the request of the local governments having jurisdiction over land use in the scenic corridor, and they review and approve the local scenic corridor protection plan and install the "poppy" signs along the officially designated route. The corridor study suggests scenic highway corridor boundaries, identifies scenic values and defines the relationship of the right-of-way to its surrounding environment. It also notes the scenic and aesthetic elements that should be preserved and potential locations for roadside rests, vista points and areas for information sites. This report is for the use of the local jurisdiction in the development of the local scenic corridor protection and enhancement program.

The local protection plan and program must include as a minimum: (1) Regulations of land use density or intensity of development (2) Provisions for review of site planning on proposed developments (3) Control of outdoor advertising (4) Control of earth moving and provisions for landscaping cuts and fills and (5) Control of the design and appearance of structures and equipment. Citizen involvement during the corridor study and development of the local program is stressed.

Once the local protection program is in effect the local jurisdiction can request official designation. If the Director of Transportation approves the program the state then proceeds with placement of the signs and other efforts to identify the route.

In addition to state highways, county roads may be officially designated as scenic routes if the county has designated the route in the scenic highways element of its general plan and adopted a protection program that meets the criteria for state highway protection programs. The state does not perform the corridor study, but they are available to provide technical assistance.

Although the program would appear to have much appeal very few portions of the eligible state routes have been designated. Those that have been are mostly segments within state and federal parks where public ownership of the land makes implementation of a protection plan almost a formality. Resistance to adding more land use controls within the scenic corridor, and concern about increased tourist impacts on the roadway corridor and adjacent communities are two reasons that more segments of eligible state routes have not been designated.

Although Highway 1 from Fernbridge to Ferndale is a State Highway it is not shown on the State Scenic Highway Master Plan and therefore is not eligible for designation as a State Scenic Highway. If such designation is desired, the City and County could request that the Legislature amend the map to include Highway 1. The fact that it is a short, dead end segment of highway might weigh against favorable consideration, although its scenic character cannot be disputed.

Scenic Route Criteria and Standards

In order to be considered scenic, local roads should exhibit many of the following characteristics:

1. A definable scenic corridor.
2. Quality in scenic view of natural, improved or historic areas.
3. A variety of terrain and landscape.
4. Conformance with open space and conservation objectives.
5. Accessibility between areas of recreation, parks or historical interest.
6. Routes of adequate design and safety.
7. Control of development within the scenic corridor to prevent obstruction of important views or development of unsightly land uses.
8. Screening or relocation of existing unsightly land uses.
9. Complements the land use and circulation elements of the General Plan.
10. Opportunity for development of vista points, roadside rests, and other amenities.

In addition to criteria which suggest the desirable character of the scenic corridor, there are standards which can be utilized to insure that road improvements themselves do not detract from the scenic quality.

1. Where any portion of road is reconstructed, the natural grade should be followed as much as possible - minimizing cuts and fills.

2. Scenic roads should be designed for moderate travel speed.
3. Improvements related to the scenic route system, such as route location and directional signs, roadside rests and vista points, should be provided where possible, and be attractively designed to blend with the scenery.
4. Natural landscaping, particularly on cuts and fills, should be provided for scenic improvements and erosion control.

Local Scenic Roads

The drive into Ferndale, up to Main Street and looping back on Berding Street is a scenic treat in itself. The pastoral setting coming into the community and the attractive early California architecture in town make the diversion from Highway 101 worthwhile for county residents and tourists alike. Because of the unique character of the community Ferndale has become an attraction to tourists who come in increasing numbers each year. Local arts and crafts shops cater to this clientele. Maps are available at local stores and at the visitor information center showing the location and age of historic buildings in the community. But there are also scenic drives leading from Ferndale west to the ocean beach, south to Petrolia and Bull Creek Redwoods State Park on Wildcat Road, and east on Grizzly Bluff-Blue Slide Road to Rio Dell. Any of these roads could also be included in a county scenic highway program.

Is A Scenic Route Program Desirable?

When questioned about the desirability of designating the scenic routes in and around the community some local citizens responded favorably but many others had reservations or were opposed. Those in favor noted that tourists miss these routes and shouldn't have to stop and ask where they are. They felt that tourism was important to the economy of the community and should be encouraged.

Those that opposed scenic route designation generally felt that present tourist influxes were all that the town could handle and that the scenic route signs would just attract more visitors. They noted that tourists could stop and ask for directions or the routes could be better identified on the locally available maps. The danger of driving Wildcat Road in a large recreational vehicle was mentioned and encouraging tourist use of this road was questioned. Some frankly wondered if the scenic highway program wasn't more bother than it was worth. Removing the few billboards along Highway 1 seemed less worth the effort than taking steps to ensure that no new billboards were allowed.

Along these routes there are very few instances of garish signs and unsightly land uses. In town there are land uses which do not fit in with the architectural theme but they are an accepted and integral part of the community. Efforts are continuing to relocate distracting power poles behind Main Street buildings.

Recommendation #1. Due to the significant negative reaction to the designation of local roads as scenic routes it is recommended that the community pursue other ways of better informing tourists of local scenic opportunities. Using local information sources avoids the potential for attracting additional tourists that

might occur if signs were placed along the routes - particularly at the Highway 101 turnoff. Should these approaches be ineffective, or if the community decides that tourism should be encouraged, the possibility of developing a scenic route program should be considered.

Recommendation #2. The Ferndale Planning Commission should review the provisions of the zoning ordinance to be sure that outdoor advertising, or unnecessarily large or garish advertising by local businesses is not permitted along Highway 1 (Main Street). Since several historical buildings are located on north Main Street beyond the boundary of the Design Control District in the Zoning Ordinance, the Commission should consider expanding the District to include all land uses on both sides of Main Street to the city limits. This would provide control of advertising and give the community the opportunity to reject new land uses and structures that would not be compatible with historical buildings.

Recommendation #3. The city should encourage the county to assign special maintenance priority to scenic county roads. If the road is narrow and winding, signs advising drivers of these conditions should be posted at the beginning of the route. Center line striping, road edge markers, warning signs, adequate paving width and frequent turn outs should be provided to make these roads as safe as possible for visitors.

Recommendation #4. The county should study the possibility of providing a vista point-community overlook along Wildcat Road. The community setting for Ferndale is particularly attractive when viewed from an elevation above the town.

Environmental Assessment. *Installation of a vista point involves the commitment of materials for surfacing, guard rails, signing, and the impacts normally associated with construction activity. Increases in littering, air pollution and noise levels are expected long term environmental impacts. Social impacts could include increased vandalism, loss of privacy for adjacent property owners and increased opportunity for social interaction and enjoyment of scenic amenities.*

Recommendation #5. The city should encourage the provision of street trees and landscaping in new developments, and should consider ways that street trees, landscaping, sitting areas and rest rooms can be provided in the design control area. Open areas between older buildings can serve as a fire break and be used to provide additional off-street parking and mini-parks.