

Valley Springs Community Plan

Location and Community Description

Valley Springs is an unincorporated, quiet, historic Sierra foothill town in the western part of Calaveras County, at the junction of State Routes 12 and 26. Tree- and brush-covered hills rise to the north and west of town with flat and rolling grassland to the south and east. At an altitude of 660 feet, Valley Springs has an average annual rainfall of about 20 inches.

Valley Springs lies at the junction of roads leading to New Hogan, Pardee, and Camanche Reservoirs—the Tri-Dam area—and has become the main local supply for visitors using these lakes. Pardee Reservoir and New Hogan Lake are within 5 miles of Valley Springs, and Camanche Reservoir is a few miles farther. Besides providing water storage, these lakes draw thousands of weekend visitors and vacationers for boating, fishing, and camping. SR 12 also carries local and tourist traffic through town to higher parts of Calaveras County, including the Bear Valley-Mt. Reba area.

SR 12 serves as Valley Springs' main street through its commercial center, and is lined with stores and restaurants. The historic Valley Springs' 18-block street grid and residential neighborhood extends from this narrow commercial strip to the base of the hills north of town. The Valley Oaks Shopping Center and surrounding commercial, professional offices, restaurants, retail, and other services is distributed along SR 12 and SR 26. SR 26 leads south of Valley Springs to the Gold Creek and La Contenta neighborhoods, and is lined with additional businesses and services. The variety of well-kept buildings, architecture, and services conveniently located along the main highways through Valley Springs contribute to community pride and encourages local residents and visitors to stop.

History and Development

The Valley Springs town site was laid out in 1884 on an 18-block street grid with tree-lined streets named after flowers and trees. In 1885, the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad was constructed from Brack's Landing on the Mokelumne River to Valley Springs in the east, and eventually became the property of Southern Pacific Railroad. The historic Valley Springs train depot was constructed around 1885. The rail line was extended 13 miles east to Kentucky House near San Andreas in 1925 to service the Calaveras Cement Company. An additional line was laid to the Mokelumne River to deliver supplies for the construction of Pardee Dam from 1924 to 1929. Passenger service on the rail line ended in 1932, but freight shipping continued until the cement plant closed in 1983. Since that time, the tracks have been removed, and the former railroad right-of-way has been segmented into smaller parcels and sold.

At the intersection of State Highways 12 and 26 a plaque designating Registered California Historical Landmark No. 251, recognizes the historic significance of the railroad and train depot. The original train depot building is still standing, and is referred to by the Valley Springs community as the "Depot." The original Valley Springs settlement still contains the Valley Springs Elementary School, which serves students within town and from a broader area of western Calaveras County. The Jenny Lind Veterans community park and community hall are located adjacent to the Valley Springs Elementary School.

There are a number of historic buildings in the downtown area that relate to the gold rush era, the pioneers, founding families and the establishment of the community of Valley Springs. These areas add to the character of the community and the rural country lifestyle that draw residents to the Valley Springs area.

Development of areas along SR 26 to the south of the original Valley Springs settlement began in the mid-1960s when developers combined several large ranches south of Valley Springs to create the Rancho Calaveras subdivision, which is outside the Valley Springs Community Area. Other residential subdivisions were later developed north of Rancho Calaveras, including the La Contenta golf course subdivision and Gold Creek. The area now contains commercial shopping centers, the golf course, and

about one thousand homes. A number of other residential projects have been approved but not developed in this part of Valley Springs. Two citizens groups prepared separate versions of draft community plans, one based on a Calaveras Council of Governments grant and the other spearheaded by District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli. The vision and policies from both were combined.

Community Vision

Valley Springs will maintain a small-town rural atmosphere, framed by open space vistas, agricultural lands, mature oak trees and woodlands, rolling hills with tree-covered ridgelines, Castle Rock, Valley Springs Peak, and other unique and prominent natural features, and dark night skies. New Hogan Reservoir will flourish as a community attraction and recreation destination, along with Pardee and Camanche Reservoirs, and the Mokelumne and Calaveras Rivers. Wildlife will continue to inhabit the surrounding areas and coexist with local residents in peaceful, quiet neighborhoods.

Valley Springs' historic core will evolve into a prosperous, walkable mixed-use district, preserving and building upon its original 18-block grid and cultural heritage as a farming, ranching, and late-1800s railroad town. The Town Center will serve as a focal point for parks and recreation, tourism, commerce, public institutions, and public space for community interaction, while remaining a safe, attractive rural community. Large-scale industrial and retail buildings are not envisioned within the Community Area.

A diversity of housing types within and adjacent to the Town Center will support local businesses and provide homes for residents of all ages and a variety of backgrounds and incomes, including senior housing. To preserve community character, rural conservation subdivision design in new residential development will protect on-site, shared open space and buffer lands, and historic and natural site features and resources.

A safe and effective transportation network will provide pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists with complete and attractive routes that honor Valley Springs' natural surroundings, agricultural and ranching heritage, creeks and floodplains, and respond to surrounding community needs, from rural edges to residential neighborhoods to the Town Center.

Valley Springs Community Plan Policies

Land Use

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| CPVS 1.1 | Preserve view corridors along major roads with setbacks, landscaping, greenbelts, and minimum sign use. |
| CPVS 1.2 | Encourage open space or greenbelt buffers where practicable between subdivisions and external streets to protect open views to surrounding foothills and provide space for off-street trails, habitat conservation, and stormwater management. |
| CPVS 1.3 | Encourage conservation subdivision design concepts in new residential development. |
| CPVS 1.4 | Encourage parking areas to be located behind buildings where practicable to hide them from view along SR 12 and SR 26. Parking areas should be generously landscaped to screen from view when adjacent to residential uses, and to provide shade for cars making the area more attractive to visitors and customers. |
| CPVS 1.5 | Encourage the use of shared parking, pedestrian connections, and clustering of commercial development. |
| CPVS 1.6 | Incorporate into commercial development design, where practicable, trails and pedestrian paths, connections to community-wide trails, setbacks and open space for the purposes of storm-water retention, existing native trees and vegetation and viewsheds, |
| CPVS 1.7 | Encourage commercial signs to be consistent with the rural community character. |

- CPVS 1.8** Preserve, revitalize, and extend, where practicable, the original, unique gridded street system and historical buildings, including the 1862 Late House and grounds, and the railroad depot in the central core of Valley Springs.
- CPVS 1.9** Encourage historic architectural design features for new construction and redevelopment in the Community Center Historic land use designation including establishing building height limits to preserve the small-town character.
- CPVS 1.10** Encourage civic uses to locate in the Town Center and plan for civic space to allow for community events and informal gathering, including use as a farmers' market.
- CPVS 1.11** Plan for space for a community center/senior center building located in or adjacent to the Town Center near other amenities and provide bicycle and pedestrian paths to support walkability.

Circulation

- CPVS 2.1** Co-ordinate with Caltrans and the Calaveras Council of Governments to pursue design and construction of alternate routes for State Routes 12 and 26 that would shift highway traffic from the center of historic Valley Springs.
- CPVS 2.2** Incorporate traffic calming devices on roadways in the community plan area to slow traffic speeds in areas with high pedestrian activity.
- CPVS 2.3** Support the development of a community-wide trail system that connects uses within the planning area to each other and to the Hogan Reservoir and Mokelumne Coast to Crest trail systems and a community-based organization for development and maintenance.
- CPVS 2.4** Soundwalls and gated residential areas that impede emergency access and detract from the area's rural character shall be discouraged.

Economic Development

- CPVS 3.1** Expand Valley Springs' economic base and diversity with local businesses that provide shopping, services, and jobs in the Town Center that better serve the needs of residents and businesses.
- CPVS 3.2** Encourage co-operation and networking with the Valley Springs business community and recreation businesses to develop and promote the Tri-Dam area and the expansion of the recreational industry and identify unique natural resources and cultural or historic features within the Valley Springs Community Plan boundaries.
- CPVS 3.3** Support existing, and encourage new, visitor and local-serving tourism and outdoor recreation businesses; educational, professional, and medical institutions; and new service commercial and light industrial businesses in the Town Center.
- CPVS 3.4** Support the use of public, federal, state and water district/utility trail and parks, used by schools, clubs, organizations, tourists and local citizens for walking, hiking, biking and equestrian attractions.
- CPVS 3.5** Support continued development of the Coast to Crest Trail and other existing federal, state, water district/ utility and local trails and encourage co-operation and networking with volunteers and trail clean-up days to maintain the trails.
- CPVS 3.6** Encourage development of additional health services in the planning area, including medical clinics, which can serve residents routine healthcare needs.

Parks and Recreation

- CPVS 4.1** Support development of additional parks, trails, and recreational facilities near the Town Center for children, youth, vulnerable populations, and adults to safely and efficiently engage in both organized and spontaneous activities.
- CPVS 4.2** Create greenway and park spaces for recreational and trail use utilizing the Cosgrove Creek and Spring Valley Creek riparian corridors, wetlands, and flood areas.

Natural Resources

- CPVS 5.1** Limit development on steep hillsides to the north and west of the historic Valley Springs settlement to protect natural resources and scenic views that frame the area.
- CPVS 5.2** Prohibit development within the Cosgrove Creek floodplain to protect the natural resources, and public health and safety.
- CPVS 5.3** Encourage public awareness of certain features of the unique natural resources identified as California physical, cultural and historic features within the Valley Springs Community Plan boundaries. (Castle Rock and the Valley Springs Peak).
- CPVS 5.4** Encourage preservation of mature, heritage oaks trees in development design to preserve the community character.

Safety

- CPVS 6.1** Encourage the installation of street signage for the emergency shelter located at the Veterans' Hall throughout the Valley Springs Community.
- CPVS 6.2** Incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies for buildings in the Town Center and Community Residential districts.