

# Bridgeport Multi-Agency Office and Visitor Center

## Project Concept Working Draft Version 3 Spring 2013

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## Context & History

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The concept of a visitor center in the Bridgeport Valley/Bodie State Historic Park vicinity dates back to a community issues report developed by the Collaborative Planning Team in 2000, which first proposed locating the facility in the Bridgeport community. Previous to this report, the Bodie State Park planning documents envisioned a visitor center at the park. Since that time, critical partners have not necessarily been in agreement about where the visitor center should be located and the purpose it should serve, and no single project idea has gained enough momentum or support to be viable. Around 2004, the Mono County Tourism/Film Commission authorized the *Bridgeport Visitor Center Feasibility Study* by the Strategic Marketing Group. The study concluded a visitor center in Bridgeport or the surrounding area is feasible, evaluated several site options, and suggested a two-phased development.

Today, supported by recent Main Street planning efforts by the community and multiple agencies, interests appear to be better aligned and the participants are enthusiastic about a new effort to move forward an old concept. The 2004 study was used as baseline information, and the applicable information was carried forward into this document and integrated with new ideas.

# Project Information

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## Project Goals

- Enhance the **visitor experience** through education and services connecting travelers to north county attractions.
- **Promote, interpret, share, and protect** the unique north county natural resources and destinations in keeping with agency missions.
- Spur **economic development** by encouraging travelers to stop and explore local communities, and fostering repeat visitation.
- Provide **shared agency offices** to support effective operations, public service, and collaboration.
- **Support local communities** by contributing to the vitality and activities within the townsite.

## Project Assumptions

A successful visitor center will include the following:

- A location in the Bridgeport townsite between Emigrant Street and the East Walker River Bridge, and on US 395 (e.g. Main Street);
- Perspectives of multiple agencies, multiple cultures, and the community;
- Sufficient parking that is easily accessible;
- Parking for recreational vehicles, trailers, and trucks;
- Public restrooms;
- Financial feasibility;
- Venues for the arts such as music, living history, artist in residence, etc.;
- An area for pets;
- Retail images of north county scenery and vistas; and
- A conference room, potentially a conferencing center that can attract small events.

## Phase I: Complete

Phase I, as defined in the 2004 feasibility study, was completed in 2010 with the opening of a small visitor center in the Mono County Senior Services building on Emigrant Street. The visitor center provides basic visitor information through brochures and a continuously running video, but is not staffed. The community should recognize this visitor center as an accomplishment while continuing to strive for Phase II.

## Phase II: In progress!

Phase II describes a more detailed and involved visitor center with the following components:

- Meets project assumptions,
- Is located in the Bridgeport townsite and housed in either an existing or new structure,
- Provides extensive visitor interpretive and educational exhibits,
- Includes staff to provide visitor use assistance,
- Includes retail sales,
- Includes joint facilities such as multiple agency offices, and
- Includes conference room(s).

## Site Criteria

Besides being located in the Bridgeport townsite on US 395 between Emigrant Street and the East Walker River bridge, the visitor center site should be able to meet the following criteria:

- Enough space to meet programming needs for agency offices and conferencing;
- Enough space to accommodate RVs, trailers, and big rigs<sup>1</sup>;
- Easy access and sufficient parking;
- Highly visible from the US 395 thoroughfare;
- Be available from a willing seller or renter; and
- Have broadband capacity.

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<sup>1</sup> Accommodating the USFS's warehouse, vehicle storage, and fire equipment was mentioned, but further discussion with the District Ranger clarified that Main Street would not be appropriate for these uses. If these uses are considered, the space programming information is available, and sensitive site planning and mitigation would be required.

# Conceptual Programming

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## Summary

Detailed space program numbers are from a previous request for proposals flown by the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and have been modified but not verified for this project. Therefore, these numbers should be considered to be conceptual only.

### **Conditioned office and support space = 7,619 sf**

Space total includes the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest programming defined below, plus 436 sf for one BLM office and one State Park/floating office. A conference room and retail/reception/staff space meeting ESIA's needs are included in the USFS programming.

### **Conditioned medical clinic space = 1,500 sf**

Space total could be reduced to as small as 1,000 sf and includes three exam rooms, an office for providers, and small spaces for administration and a nurses' station. Restrooms and waiting room could be shared public space, although design should be sensitive to privacy concerns raised within the community.

### **Parking = 37,692 sf**

Space total includes the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest programming defined below, one parking space each for the BLM, ESIA and State Parks/floating, and 6 spaces for the medical clinic (total addition of 3,240 sf). This number assumes all parking is accommodated on site and includes a 20% allowance for parking access and driveways (per Federal requirements). Additional parking space for big rigs is NOT included in this number.

### **TOTAL SITE REQUIREMENT = 59,626 sf (1.4 acres)**

This site total includes a 10% allowance for landscaping (per Federal requirements) but does not include big rig parking. This space does not include provisions for meeting land use designation development standards, such as setbacks, maximum lot coverage, etc.

A secondary option could be to split the visitor center from the USFS office. While not ideal, this option would dramatically reduce space needs to approximately 1,850 sf of building space, or 2,700 sf if the conference room is included. A maximum of 9,000 sf would be needed for parking, but could be reduced if the number of spaces is reduced. The total site requirement for visitor center, conference room, and visitor parking would be 11,700 sf (0.269 acres).

A third option could be to include the warehouse, wareyard and fire/field vehicle storage for the USFS. Space programming for these uses are not detailed here, but are available. The site requirement would increase to 165,421 sf, or 3.80 acres.

## Bodie State Historic Park (SHP) & Bodie Foundation

Although undetermined at this time, the Bodie SHP and Bodie Foundation could be interested in office space and providing visitor use assistance staff.

## Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bishop Field Office

The BLM prefers to integrate office space into the USFS's programming and arrange a financial agreement that allows BLM personnel to use the space. Up to two office spaces could be needed, with one seasonal staff on location June 1 to Sept. 30 for 40 hours/week. The seasonal staff could provide visitor use assistance 20 hours/week. Storage space for restoration project materials and supplies would also be needed.

Space requirements:

1-2 offices + support/storage/conference space @ 218 sf/person = 436 sf maximum

## Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association (ESIA)

ESIA could provide a part time retail sales and visitor use assistance staff person for 2-3 days/week during the summer, and one day/week during the off-season. At least 100 sf of retail space, plus cash register/reception space and backstock storage would be needed.

## Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (USFS)<sup>2</sup>

### *Conditioned Space Use*

	<i>Square Footage</i>
Private and shared office space for a minimum of 34 personnel	2,280 sf
Support space (break, copier, supply, janitor, mech rooms; restrooms...)	1,715 sf
Large conference room	750 sf
Large conference storage room	100 sf
Reception area	320 sf
Retail sales area (accommodates ESIA's need)	160 sf
Public restrooms	200 sf
Office & support space sub-total	5,525 sf
Building infrastructure space (circulation, etc.) = 30%	1,658 sf
<b>OFFICE SPACE GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>7,183 sf</b>

### *Parking Spaces*

	<i>Square Footage</i>
15 visitor parking @ 405 sf each	6,075 sf
1 visitor ADA parking @ 675 each	675 sf
3 visitor RV pull through @ 750 sf each	2,250 sf
24 employee parking* @ 405 sf each	9,720 sf
2 employee ADA parking @ 675 each	1,350 sf

<sup>2</sup> Specific programming information (e.g. square foot per type of office, number of offices, etc.) is available.

20 seasonal employee parking* @ 405 sf each	8,100 sf
Visitor + employee parking sub-total	28,170 sf
Parking access and driveway allowance (20%)	5,634 sf
Parking + access sub-total	33,804 sf
<i>Site Requirement Total</i>	<i>Square Footage</i>
Parking + office space sub-total	40,987 sf
Landscaping allowance (10%)	4,099 sf
<b>GRAND TOTAL SITE REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>45,086 sf</b>
(1.04 acres)	

\*Employee parking was reduced from the USFS numbers to reflect exclusion of the warehouse and wareyard.

### *Specific Requirements*

The USFS would need to develop a specific set of space and site requirements to be flown in a public Request for Proposals (RFP). The requirements from the last RFP are on file; the main programming concern would be to ensure a design that allows after-hours use of the large conference room for public meetings. Public access during these times must be limited to the conference room, public restroom, public drinking fountain, reception area, and foyer. All other office areas and the retail merchandise shall be secured from public entry. The same design considerations may be needed to separate any federal offices from non-federal office space.

### **Mammoth Hospital**

A location on US 395 is preferable to increase the visibility of the clinic to capture increased business from travelers and tourists, which would benefit the County by reducing the support the County provides to the clinic and eliminating the use of a very inefficient and high-cost building. Concerns raised over this relocation include privacy and confidentiality issues if patients are visible to general passersby and proximity to the helipad on Twin Lakes Road. Another option could be to leave the clinic in its present location, but add signs to US 395 to increase visibility.

To address concerns raised, combining the clinic with multiple uses on site could help protect patient privacy in such a small community as one could be at the facility for a variety of reasons. A back, screened entrance to the clinic or a common entrance with the offices/visitor center should be considered in building design. According to Mammoth Hospital, proximity to the helipad is not a concern.

A new facility for the hospital should include the following:

- Three exam rooms, 8' x 10' minimum up to 10' x 10';

- An office for a medical provider;
- Small administrative/check-in station, likely with some room for medical records (although a complete conversion to electronic records is in progress);
- Small nurse station;
- Small waiting room (which can be shared with the visitor center if privacy concerns can be met);
- Public restrooms (which can be shared with the visitor center if privacy concerns can be met);
- Parking spaces for three staff and 3-4 patients.

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## Potential Locations

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The 2004 feasibility study offered a list of potential sites, which was then considered by the participants and community. New sites were suggested, and the list was then evaluated. The Buster's Market site, located on US 395 at the western end of Bridgeport, between Kirkwood Street and Emigrant Street, appears to be the most viable site. The benefits of the site include the size, a good view, access from two streets, opportunity to frame the entry to the community, opportunity to direct visitors into town, and potential to install a gateway monument sign. This site is comprised of six parcels with varying land use designations (and therefore varying permitted uses), as follows:

- Two commercial (C) parcels:  $0.673 + 0.246 = 0.919$  acres
- Three multi-family residential – low (MFR-L) parcels:  $0.276 + 0.240 + 0.867 = 1.383$  acres
- One agriculture (AG) parcel = 5.566
- Total = 7.868 acres

Other sites considered and rejected for the full project scope are listed below:

- Bryant House (east of Bridgeport Inn): The current Multiple Listing Service (MLS) real estate listing describes only the front 0.41 as available for sale, which is not large enough to accommodate this project. The entire site is 0.93 acres; the southern portion on Kingsley Street houses the community garden.
- Bridgeport toy/RV storage (Burger Barn parcel): This property is not currently listed for sale, and is not large enough at 0.9 acres including the Burger Barn.
- North town open lot (east of Redwood Motel): This site, with an expansion onto the adjacent gas station lot, was explored at one time for a build-to-suit for only USFS offices, and was deemed too small (<0.4 acres + gas station acreage).
- Pink House (west of Bodie Hotel, across from Courthouse): No longer pink, this property currently houses a thrift store, is not listed for sale, is not large enough, and would not be able to accommodate parking needs.
- Mono County Courthouse: The Courthouse is currently occupied with not much opportunity to relocate the tenants; plus, the downstairs would likely need to be remodeled/reconfigured, which can be challenging with a building on the national historic register.
- Mono County Museum: The museum is not located on US 395.

In addition to these individual sites, a variety of lot assemblages on US 395 were brainstormed. Specific parcels are not identified as some of these properties are not for sale and property owners were not approached at this stage. These are included only for the sake of completeness in the review of potential locations, and any future acquisitions would be on a willing seller basis.

- South side assembly: consisting of two small properties listed for sale and one property not currently listed but research indicates may be available, the maximum assembled acreage could be 1.089. Consolidating the two listed properties with a different unlisted property could result in a maximum acreage of 1.072. If all of these parcels are

assembled, the maximum acreage could be 1.6 with frontage on both US 395 and Kingsley Street.

- North side assembly: consisting of one parcel with a for sale sign, and two parcels not currently indicated for sale, the maximum assembled acreage could be 1.426 acres.

## Circulation Suggestions

Providing for good non-motorized circulation and mobility is a paramount concern, and will need to be addressed carefully when a site is chosen. The Main Street Revitalization Project final report extensively considers connectivity throughout the community and should be cross-referenced. In addition, the following ideas were raised in this visitor center discussion:

- Open the fencing between the 1881 Coffee House and the park to enable access to refreshments for park users, and spur food sales for 1881.
- If the project moves forward at the Buster's site, investigate the potential to create a walkway between houses on Kirkwood Street to connect the visitor center to the park/museum, such as permission for a six foot wide pedestrian easement through vacant lots to the southwestern corner of the park.

# Potential Ownership/Partnership Options

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## Appendix A: Agency Interests

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### Bodie Foundation

- Very supportive of an interagency, multiple purpose visitor center.
- Want to promote Bodie State Historic Park as a destination in the area.

### Bodie State Historic Park

- The Park's governing planning document includes a visitor center in the Bodie Hills, but BLM has environmental concerns.
- Current Park Administration whole-heartedly supports a visitor center in Bridgeport – there is a void of visitor services in the north county.
- A VC would promote every agency currently at the table, and would benefit the local community.

### Bridgeport Indian Colony

- Interested in educating the public about the local Native American culture and protecting historic sites.

### Bureau of Land Management

- Managing sensitive lands in north county (Bodie Hills, Travertine) is a challenge with no local office space; staff must travel to and from Bishop with no support facility.
- Interested in a contact point with the public to provide education and share the story of the area, educate travelers about the unique natural resources, etc.
- Teach people about the importance of the resource, both natural and cultural; include Native American participation.

### Caltrans

- Legislation and funding no longer provide for active participation in visitor centers like in Lone Pine. Maintenance stations in Sonora and Bridgeport can probably provide most office space needs, although may have needs during construction season for resident engineers.
- Main role is probably to assist with site planning to ensure adequate access to and from US 395, and approve encroachment permit.

### Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association

- Visitor centers can have significant positive impacts on communities, e.g. in Mammoth Lakes, the visitor center has become a hub and center for the community. VCs are an opportunity to provide an interpretive experience and help tell the local story better, inform and educate visitors, and help people be “better” visitors.
- Interested in staffing the visitor use assistance and retail functions.
- Collaboration is critical in today's reality – no one is going to do this on their own anymore. Partnerships are the only way this will happen.
- Pioneering model with Inyo National Forest for a private non-profit to manage government facilities.

### Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

- Looking for new office space and would like to grow beyond current space, willing to lease within federal government provisions. Most recent effort to build new offices was not successful because construction was too expensive.
- Interested in a joint facility and combined office space with BLM, and dovetailing with County and community needs.
- Willing to support a visitor center with staff and expand ability to interpret local resources. Current Bridgeport Ranger District office south of Bridgeport serves as the visitor center but that was not necessarily the intention of the original facility.
- Office space needs to be locked off from public spaces, prefer to be physically connected to the VC and conferencing space.

### Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center

- Provide information and support the effort.

### Mono County

- Collaborate and communicate better with other state and federal agencies in the area.
- Provide consolidated visitor/traveler services for a one-stop shop where all local information is available, increase the limited visitor services and fill the gap in north county, and enhance the visitor experience.
- Spur economic development by encouraging travelers to get out of their car and explore the community and local attractions, and foster new and repeat visitation.
- Reviewing current County facility needs and needs of partners, such as the health clinic, and considering the need for: new facilities, reconfiguring/renovating old facilities, and configuration/location. The results of this review could dovetail with an interagency facility.
- May be willing to build/finance a facility and rent the space, but would not staff a visitor center.

### Yosemite National Park

- Could be interested in expanding the Park's presence in the Eastern Sierra.
- Opportunities to provide information to travelers on US 395 and promote connections from a regional perspective such as transportation, logistics, tips for places to visit, etc.
- Degree of participation undetermined.