

Chat Session

1/16/14

Kane Residence, 135 Riverside Drive

Bill Maron, Special Projects Coordinator with the Town of Basalt began the meeting by welcoming all those in attendance and thanking them for taking time to participate this evening. This is a process to envision the future of downtown Basalt. James Kent Associates has been contracted by the Town of Basalt to conduct neighborhood chat sessions, which are planned to be held bi-monthly, along with community discussions in a more formal setting facilitated by Paul Andersen, also hired by the Town.

Some of the questions to consider are:

1. What should the process involve?
2. How big should it be?
3. How do we see the downtown area developing?

Comments:

- It would be nice to include the Clark's Market area.
- Consider the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) relocation and the River Center to be built by the Roaring Fork Conservancy. These will have big impacts on levels of activity downtown; from visitors as well as employees.
- The Continuing Care Retirement Center will also affect downtown even though it will be built in South Side.
- What we have now on Midland Avenue looks good; old-fashioned, Western look.
- Parking is an issue and will continue to be.
- Where should the hotel be located?
- Build a parking garage where Clark's Market is located and put a plaza on top.
- Willits Town Center (WTC) is monolithic and looks like the major shopping center it is. It's not charming; lacks interesting nooks and crannies.
- What flavor do we want for downtown Basalt?
- Is there enough critical mass for retail? If not, what can we do to differentiate downtown from WTC?
- We shouldn't create an "us vs. them" (i.e. downtown Basalt vs. WTC) mentality. Both sections need the other.
- Downtown needs something for people to do, along with shopping and eating, like a performing arts center.
- Let's look at other successful small towns that rely on tourism for some ideas.
- Let's also consider cases where towns have shot themselves in the foot trying to be successful.
- What makes us special is that we're located at the confluence of two gold medal fly fishing rivers.
- We have little or no control over how some projects look.
- Is the recycle center being moved when RMI gets built?
- Foundational changes outlined
- Are there any projections on how many people could come for RMI conferences or to visit the River Center?

- How many hotel rooms will be needed?
- The RMI convening space will be about 20% larger than the community room at the Basalt library.
- RMI will have workshops for 20 to 60 people.
- The hotel should be within walking distance of the conference center.
- Hotel developer shouldn't depend solely on having an RMI customer base.
- Healdsburg, California has a hotel that is a focal point for the community; high school proms, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. are held there. It helped preserve the Town's character and boosted commercial activity.
- The downtown shops are about 1,500 to 2,000 sq. ft. Larger commercial spaces are available in WTC so that's why several businesses relocated over there.
- Hwy. 82 needs to be part of the solution.
- Challenge to downtown is capturing the opportunities.
- Hotel should have about 80 to 100 guest rooms.
- Basalt needs a design review process.
- Basalt hotel size could be compared to Hotel Lenado in Aspen.
- The Basalt Downtown Business Association (BDBA) uses Midland Ave. facades as its logo.
- Let's maintain the Western look and feel.
- Can anybody talk to the new gas station owner to see if he's interested in removing the red and white plastic exterior and remodeling it to look more like the general store at Willits?
- Is the owner going to remove the car mural on the side of the building?
- The RMI structure will be a draw itself to visitors because it will be state-of-the-art. It should be an example for all future development, including the hotel.
- Downtown should be unique and charming – something to be proud of.
- We need places for people to walk, meander, explore and sit. Avoid straight lines.
- Downtown needs stuff for kids to do, too.
- Ice cream stand, food carts.
- The downtown master plan can guide the town's development by stating the aspirations and wishes of the town's residents, for example, installing public art (via a 1% for Art Program) and providing accessibility for mobility-impaired.
- Challenge Aspen has between 400 and 600 people who attend their summer programs. At one time they were interested in moving their non-skiing HQ to Basalt.
- Downtown needs a grocery store but it can realistically only be ≈10,000 sq. ft.
- We need citizen input on architectural review.
- We don't need to reinvent the wheel. The Main Street Program has a good structure for creating master plans. The program approaches MP creation from four viewpoints: design; economic development; promotion/marketing; and organization.
- Timing is very important on several levels: financial investors are looking for opportunities before the market heats up too much; retail activity has been lagging but is on the upswing; be thorough and fast; building a hotel is critical.
- There are some places in downtown that need to stay the way they are, while other areas can be thought of as a blank slate [through redevelopment].
- Let's focus on the places that would be desirable as community assets.

- Is the town government going to be an ally or an adversary?
- Maybe the Town should hire its own architect to document what it wants to have regarding scale and mass.

- The community should tell the Town what it wants things to look like.
- We need to also be thinking in the longer term – at least 10 years out, if not more.
- Technology and transportation will be ever-changing.
- What do young people and senior citizens want to see downtown?
- The object of this exercise is to find out, synthesize the findings, and submit them to the Town.
- What is RMI's timeline for getting the project started? Best case – Sept./Oct. 2014.
- The last six years have been very tough financially. We've put all we have into our downtown commercial property and if things don't start improving we don't know what we're going to do. We certainly can't hang on for another six years.
- One solution for the parking problem is to work out an agreement with the school district to allow cars to park at the elementary and middle schools during the summer months and have a shuttle loop to bring people downtown.
- While RMI needs a hotel, the hotel needs other businesses, too. We need to plan carefully and not get carried away.
- The community should decide what it wants to see in the Clark's Market area before a developer dictates an undesirable plan.
- We need to set up sub-committees tonight.
- Important components to consider are: BDDBA; design issues; transportation needs; hospitality requirements; and affordable housing (AH).
- Could the Town purchase the Clark's Market parcel, thereby preserving it from some developer's undesirable plans?
- We need to associate housing and transit needs together.
- It's possible that we could see high density residential on the Roaring Fork Mobile Home Park parcel in the future. Lots of issues to resolve first, though.
- What options are available for the Community Development Corp. (CDC) parcel? Is there an opportunity for public/private partnership?
- Could we use Open Space (OS) funds to purchase an area large enough to become a central park?
- Is there still a performing arts center parcel available in WTC? (Answer was, "Yes.")
- The Town's OS funds could be leveraged for a \$5 to \$6 million purchase.
- The redevelopment opportunities now are Lions Park, CDC and Clark's Market properties (although technically, Clark's Market isn't actively for sale).
- Let's have a design charette and use local talent – there's a roomful right here.
- We can't rely on outside developers to finance town improvements – we found that out the hard way when the River Master Plan got bogged down and went nowhere for 10 years.
- Keep in mind way-finding and trails in future development.
- Key item is access to the downtown area from Hwy. 82. Visitors driving by on the highway have no idea that we're here.
- The Town is having a contest to create a noticeable entrance at the roundabout.
- The Master Plan needs to create a level playing field for developers.

- Now is not the time to drag our feet.
- Let's not get bogged down in details right now. We need a broader overview for starters.

- We need an interactive visioning process.
- I want fewer signs in Basalt, not more!
- We need a meeting where we can see what plans have been proposed for Basalt over the years so we can get an idea of what does and doesn't work.
- Design Workshop proposed some really high density plans that scared people.
- The big questions are what do we want to see and where do we want to see it?
- The downtown MP needs to be clear so developers don't feel uncertain about government rules.
- What task groups do we need to form?
- The next neighborhood chat session is in two weeks.
- Paul Andersen's first community discussion was supposed to be at the end of January but that's been pushed out a bit further. No certain date yet.
- Rawl Gawrys did some plans years ago for downtown Basalt in which he designed a different street layout. We should look at those, too.
- The Urban Land Institute (ULI) has a lot of great planning resources.