Downtown Area Advisory Committee Report

Submitted by moderator Paul Andersen

Introduction

The Downtown Area Advisory Committee was formed of ten citizen volunteers in October 2014 to further the "Our Town" planning process. They took very seriously the public trust invested in their efforts.

The ten members represented a broad cross-section of the Basalt community. Their often divergent views enlivened a series of moderated conversations that took place with respectful, open dialogue toward the challenging goal of rejuvenating downtown Basalt.

As the conversations evolved, committee members discovered common ground in their shared values for Basalt. What emerged was a common love for this town, its rural, small town intimacy, easy social pace, and beautiful natural setting. These values are reflected in this report.

Process

From the start, the committee acknowledged the "Our Town" input of hundreds of Basalt residents of all ages and backgrounds. Identified public goals were distilled into three core values:

- 1) Don't lose our Small Town charm
- 2) Bring the Rivers to the forefront of the Town's identity
- 3) Promote Vitality and Sustainability (Physical & Economic)

The committee agreed to form their conversations around a set of five guiding principles:

- 1) Connect the Town to the Rivers
- 2) Preserve significant physical and visual access to the Rivers
- 3) Improve Lions Park
- 4) Allow density to drive revitalization
- 5) Provide a "There-There" destination for residents and guests alike

Broad planning concepts emerged through mapping exercises and slide shows revealing how other communities with river parks, historic townscapes and commercial/residential developments have addressed similar opportunities.

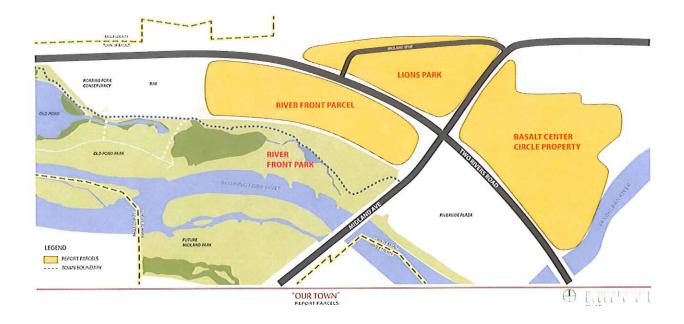
Toward the end of the process, Lowe Enterprises – a large, local resort developer – announced it had taken an interest in eventually owning the Community Development Corporation (CDC)

property on the Roaring Fork site with plans to build a "boutique hotel" and associated residences.

With free market involvement, the committee's role suddenly shifted from theory to actuality. Rather than mire in the minutia of design details the committee agreed to step back and offer broad brush strokes toward overarching development goals.

This report reflects those goals as preserving rural, small town values while accommodating economic development and social vibrancy. Keeping Basalt small, intimate and vital was the glue that held the committee together and gradually achieved a mood of consensus.

The Findings below reference the parcels shown in the diagram below:



Findings

Connectivity between downtown and the rivers through visual and physical access

A well-integrated townscape should provide easy and appealing connections between parks, rivers and commercial components of Basalt's historic downtown. These connections are critical so that each may benefit from the other. Downtown Basalt and the proposed new river parks should provide activities and amenities that complement one another and invite the flow of people between them.

Recommendations:

- 1. Preserve open view planes between downtown and River Front Park.
- 2. Link rivers and downtown with safe, easy trails for bikes, pedestrians, baby strollers, wheelchairs, runners, children, etc.
- 3. Include access to the Frying Pan River in trail linkages.
- 4. Consider small water features throughout town connecting the two rivers and integrating water as a community theme.
- 5. Keep Basalt pedestrian friendly for safe walking access to all amenities and integrate appropriate access features for people of all abilities.
- 6. Rethink and possibly reconfigure parking and roadways to encourage better integration between commercial, residential, parks, trails and open space.
- 7. Use directional signs and maps to orient pedestrians, cyclists, etc.
- 8. Maintain as much public green space as possible at River Front Parcel on the Roaring Fork.
- 9. Provide for active and passive recreation opportunities:
 - Fishing, boating, park play areas, Frisbee, biking, lounging, picnicking, live music...

Improve Lions Park

As a midpoint between historic, commercial downtown and River Front Parcel, Lions Park should provide an inviting transition between the two with open view planes and trail linkages. This could necessitate moving Town Hall, the Wyly Art Center, and the Chamber of Commerce caboose to new locations, and possibly bringing the ground up to street level. Lions Park could potentially absorb some development density from the CDC/Lowe's project at River Front Parcel. This could be achieved in a land swap between the developer and the Town as a way of maximizing the River Front's public green space and providing cross-street development dynamics with opposing structures along Two Rivers Road where it divides Lions Park and River Front Parcel.

Recommendations:

- 1. Lions Park should form a smooth transition between entertainment and passive & active recreation at River Front Parcel.
- 2. Designate any development density to the periphery of Lions Park along Midland Spur and toward the west end of Two Rivers Road, but not along Midland Avenue, in order to avoid blocking visual and physical access to River Front Park.
- 3. Seek mixed use development to benefit entrepreneurs and entice a younger demographic.
- 4. Improve the sharp intersection at Midland Spur and Midland Avenue to ease traffic flow, possibly with a traffic circle.

Allow density to drive revitalization

Appropriate residential and commercial density in Basalt's downtown core is necessary to attract people and make Basalt vibrant and economically viable. Density must not overpower Basalt's rural character and charm, but it should offer affordable housing opportunities that invite young families and eclectic "characters" into the social mix. Cultural amenities should be part of the dynamic by bringing a festival spirit to the downtown core.

Recommendations:

- 1. Provide a diverse package of low-impact municipal parking solutions within or near downtown which are visually pleasing.
- 2. Keep Town Hall, the Wyly, and the Chamber in or near the downtown core, but explore new locations for these important facilities.
- 3. Consider four stories in the Basalt Center Circle property as a peak elevation and density feature.
- 4. Residential development should be compact, affordable and multi-faceted.
- 5. Explore uses or repurposing for vacant downtown commercial/office spaces.
- 6. Include vitalizing activities downtown
 - Affordable and mixed housing
 - Performing arts and Wyly Art Center
 - Festival amenities/outdoor market
 - Social mixing places coffee houses, brewery, Turkish Bath House, etc.
- 7. Locate commercial development at Basalt Center Circle along Two Rivers Road to front the Riverside Plaza blocks.
- 8. Encourage a phased plan that includes coordinated redevelopment of the three critical parcels River Front Parcel, Lions Park and Basalt Center Circle.
- 9. Plan for multi-season uses and activities.
- 10. Create opportunities for social and cultural diversity
- 11. Protect the rural, historic character of old town Midland Avenue.
 - Reduce vehicles and street parking.
 - Promote a funky, eclectic style.

- Maintain Basalt's authentic western atmosphere.
- Respect Midland Avenue's period architecture
- 12. Review the CSC Zone District to determine if it could be modified and used to implement some of the findings in this report.

Putting the "There There"

The "There There" is a matter of individual taste and style. Some call it "pride of place" or "sense of place." Others refer to it as "heart and soul" or the "integration of life and spirit." Basalt's "There There" is an aggregate of funkiness, down home comfort, authenticity, surprise, discovery, identity, irreverence, and vitality.

These enlivening values are best realized through an organic evolution of community influences that conspire, serendipitously, to bring people together within a unique social and physical context. The sum of the experience should be attractive, fun, inspiring, unique and memorable.

Recommendations:

- 1. Promote accessibility and pedestrian prominence, rather than cars, on downtown streets and throughout public and commercial gathering places.
- 2. Establish an entrepreneurial atmosphere rather than a tourist contrivance, building on RMI's innovative community buzz.
- 3. Place an emphasis on natural landscapes and features rather than confining downtown with looming, overshadowing structures.
- 4. Make Midland Avenue a conduit for the flow of the "There" at the east end of Midland Avenue and the "There" at River Front Park.
- 5. Encourage and recognize diversity in every walk of community life and every commercial enterprise.
- 6. Make Basalt a place where memories are formed and shared as a unique community that resonates with visitors and locals.
- 7. Keep Basalt's identity attached to rivers, mountains and Western ambiance.
- 8. Identify Basalt as "The River Town" by providing artful connections between the town and the rivers.
- 9. Invite an entrepreneurial spirit by keeping open opportunities for creative selfexpression and community vibrancy.

Conclusion

Looking at Basalt holistically has given the committee a rare insight into their community. Honoring their findings requires decision makers to look anew at their town and explore it with a fresh sense of adventure, possibility and collaboration.

Concept Map

The Committee created a conceptual map showing in bubbles general development guidelines for the Our Town Planning Area.

Vision Boards

The following vision boards show a variety of development themes and amenities the Committee identified for the Our Town Planning Area.

