

Dear Basalt Town Councillors,

I think that most of us appreciate and even crave community. Community satisfies our social need for connection. It provides us with a support mechanism when we face difficult times. It adds significance to the milestones we celebrate. It provides the stage upon which our lives are played out. But what creates and sustains a community?

My husband and I are recent arrivals to the Town of Basalt, although I have lived in the upper valley since 2004. We built our home in the summer of 2014 and we are now enjoying our second year of full time residence at Aspen Junction. As we prepared to build our home, we spent several months directing Basalt High School's musical, "Children of Eden." We worked with the outstanding students of this town and were astonished to learn that our talented kids are relegated to perform in an auditorium that is run down and technologically antiquated. This dilapidated auditorium, in fact, is the only auditorium in the entire Basalt school district. In my role as Music Director of Aspen Choral Society, I have been searching for a mid-valley location for rehearsing and performing. The only gathering places that I have been able to find are churches--most of which are reluctant to give up their spaces on a regular basis.

Aspen and Carbondale are perceived by many as thriving communities and worthy destinations in which to live, spend an evening, or an entire vacation. What do these communities have that Basalt doesn't? Well, Aspen has The Wheeler Opera House, Harris Hall, The Music Tent, The District Theatre, The Black Box Theatre, Paepke Auditorium, The Red Brick Art Center, an Art Museum, Belly Up, Theatre Aspen, and more. Carbondale has TRTC, Steve's Guitars, The Crystal Theatre, Third Street Center, etc.

Communities grow around gathering places: Schools, churches, bars, restaurants, art establishments, etc. Music concerts and theatre productions are excellent builders of community. Take Aspen Choral Society for example: People from all over the valley meet mid-valley once a week to rehearse music. We are there for each other. Then when we perform, an audience enters the picture. Audience members typically call their friends and invite them to attend the concert. Before or after the event, they will meet socially for dinner and drinks. In all of these activities, a sense of community is created and nurtured and local businesses are frequented and supported.

I am enthusiastically supporting the Basalt River Park because I **believe** in community. The first step is to secure this valuable land. The second step will be to create much-needed indoor and outdoor spaces for community groups and performances. When I see the beautiful library in Basalt, I am made aware of what is possible when people work together. Just imagine the possibilities if we created a beautiful auditorium with adequate stage, seating, dressing rooms, fly space, lighting and sound equipment to host major music and theatre productions. Picture this artistic indoor space transitioning naturally into a beautiful riverside park--perhaps featuring a showcase xeriscape garden with local plant specimen. Picture something similar to Theatre Aspen, only winterized for year around use. You could go to a performance and during

intermission, walk the trails by the river. Stunning. In addition to theatre and music performances, the outdoor space could be home for a Weihnachtsmarkt (Christmas Market) and an addendum to our already successful farmer's market.

I have spoken with many of my peers and know for a fact that school bands, choirs, and theatre productions, Aspen Choral Society, Hudson Reed Ensemble, Theatre Aspen, String Ensembles, Local Bands and solo acts, Aspen Music Festival, and Symphony In The Valley would all clamor to perform in such a space. In addition, Touring Productions would also find a home to perform their art. Picture the impact this would have on downtown Basalt, with each event drawing people that go to restaurants, browse the local stores and stay overnight.

I personally see this as a critical turning point for Basalt's core. In my opinion, the two options for the Basalt River Park point to one of two outcomes: We can continue to evolve into a bedroom community for the towns around us, or we can create outstanding spaces and events that draw people into our own community and breathe life into the downtown core of Basalt. This is the question which must be decided by the Voters and Town Councillors of Basalt. A big idea like this calls for leadership and vision. I am calling all of us in Basalt to work together to create **the** jewel auditorium and park space of the valley.

Thank You for your time and consideration. In the last 18 years, I have directed and produced countless musical and theatre productions, performed with local ensembles, administered the Snowmass Village Winter Concert Series, started two community theatres, and done everything from programming lights to printing programs, building websites, helping to design performing spaces, printing and selling tickets. If there is any way that I can help with this process or if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me. I feel lucky to live here and want to do what I can to strengthen our community.

~Paul Dankers (970) 309-8565
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