

Dear Editor:

It is rare that a community like ours has the opportunity create a world-class river park. Yet here we are with just that opportunity in a town that boasts not one, but two world-class rivers. The Pan & Fork River Park proposal put forth by our friends and neighbors creates a great park with unparalleled access to the Roaring Fork River – the heart of Basalt as I see it.

As a photographer and writer who has documented the degradation of the Colorado River from its source to its dried delta in Mexico, I can attest to how important it is that we celebrate and protect our rivers. The Colorado River has been dammed, diverted and in many areas, completely industrialized to such a point the river runs dry.

Through my work, I have had the good fortune to witness rivers and their relationships with communities around the world. From the Ganges to the Amazon, I have seen that when communities embrace these flowing arteries and riverfront properties for the public good, shorelines explode with vitality and economic engines ignite. People love rivers, especially when offered welcoming, safe environs to engage them with.

I've also seen too often how communities turn their backs on rivers and/or develop them for the highest bidders, creating dead spaces that are ignored or only seen privately.

As a former Basalt Town Council member and longtime resident of our community, I see the Citizens Committee proposal as a way to create a large, useful public space where we can host events and develop a stronger relationship with the relatively pristine Roaring Fork River. The benefits would be exponential.

The Citizens Committee has also created an opportunity for a half acre of commercial development on the portion of the property in question between the new RMI building and the intersection with Midland Spur. It bars most residential development. I am not against development or high density housing, but it should not be along the river. It belongs somewhere like the old Clark's Market property, which needs to be part of the town's long-term version.

The problem with the 75,000 square foot condominium complex that has been proposed is that it will privatize the surrounding lands, *de facto*. People just don't walk into spaces that are perceived as somebody's back yard. All of the property around the condominium complexes will feel private, even if it isn't. I've seen this happen over and over in communities abroad and along our local Colorado River.

The petitions give us a chance to secure the property and allow for smart commercial development for \$3 million. With support from open space programs in Eagle and Pitkin counties, we could end up paying considerably less, for a song.

Please urge the Town Council to forward this smart citizens initiative to the voters in the upcoming April election.

Peter McBride
Pan & Fork River Park Citizens Committee
Basalt