



Our Town Planning

A Report on Informal Networks

Basalt

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Introduction

Facing the redevelopment of a large, key parcel along the Roaring Fork River and adjacent to its downtown, the Town of Basalt realized that it could benefit from a master planning effort that would also revitalize the downtown core. In addition to working with existing formal groups, it was decided to recapture and engage the citizen energy generated by the Roaring Fork River Stewardship Master Planning effort in 2002 and the Pursuit of Goals study of 2004.

In every community, organization is necessary for people to function. We are familiar with formal organizations such as town and county governments, service organizations and chambers of commerce. These formal organizations are vertical in their structure; that is they are hierarchical, with established membership and leaders, chains of command, formal communication and publicly-noticed meetings.

There is, however, another type of community structure, the informal system, which forms the bedrock of any community. This horizontal system is comprised of the myriad connections and social networks that exist in every community. This is the grassroots level of decision-making that shapes everyday life and has existed since the first communities were formed. It is here that one finds the stories of people and place and the issues that really matter to them. These informal networks support individuals in predictable ways, have flexible goals, use word-of-mouth communication through daily routines and gathering places, and have respected informal leadership.

This report focuses on the activities of the Citizens' Center Team, headquartered at Clasen's Corner 174 Midland Avenue, which engaged people from the Basalt area in a variety of ways to elicit their thoughts and ideas about possible redevelopment scenarios. Chat sessions were held in homes throughout Basalt's neighborhoods, scheduled one-on-one conversations took place in gathering places and ideas were discussed with the many visitors that dropped in at the center to voice their opinions and draw their ideas for the town. Having a physical center conveniently located downtown was a key decision for this planning effort. Walk-in access and large display windows and walls provided easy opportunities for citizens to participate in the process. Providing tools such as maps of the subject area (particularly the ones with the parcels in question shown as blank) encouraged townspeople to participate and take ownership in the concept of change.



PREDOMINANT THEMES FROM CITIZENS

1 The Frying Pan and the Roaring Fork Rivers and their confluence are the most important natural asset of the Town of Basalt and their enhanced use is seen as essential to the vitality of the downtown.

Citizens overwhelmingly support the idea that our location at the confluence of two gold medal fly fishing rivers is what makes us special and creating more access to them is a priority. River trails, kayaking, river parks, restaurants on the river and signage/awareness of public fishing access were often mentioned in discussions.



“Basalt is its rivers.”

“The rivers are Basalt's biggest asset to attract locals and visitors. In addition, we have two of the coolest things, people and place.”

“We need to have easy river access in lots of spots.”



“The Frying Pan River is mostly inaccessible in town because of private ownership along the banks. If we are advertising that we are a fishing destination we need to get some definitive access along the Frying Pan too.”

“We need a kayak park in the middle of town.”



“Do you know how many people would love to have a river going through their town, much less two rivers? Some places have rerouted rivers just to make sure they have that attraction.”

“Need a little river play area for kids with places for parents to sit and watch. Might not be right on the river but a small river diversion area next to the river.”

2 Citizens want a centrally located town square and diverse, creative use of park lands.

A town square (village green) would provide a place to gather, linger and interact with the whole community. Town squares serve as public spaces that accommodate the need for civic and cultural life and highlight a community's unique values. A town square was the most commonly proposed use of the available parcels shown on citizen drawings. Such a place in Basalt would have green space, places for kids to play, food courts, places for pets and public art. There were many creative recommendations for the configuration and use of the Pan and Fork property. It also was recommended that smaller town parks, such as Confluence Park be cleaned up and upgraded for use by the public.

“Has anybody yet suggested building a central square for old duffers to sit around drinking coffee or wine by a fountain?”

“Could Midland Avenue become a pedestrian only plaza? It would be a great gathering place. Restaurants could spill into the streets.”



“We need a central park in the middle of town that has a skating rink in the winter and mini-golf in the summer.”

“Could we remove the portion of Two Rivers Road between Lions Park and the CDC parcel to create a larger park?”



“If we built a playground and put in a fountain downtown, people would come here.”

“Has the government considered relocation sites for its offices if Lions Park is changed?”



3 There is concern that many of Basalt's assets from trails to street alignments to connectivity from Old Town Basalt to Willits and Southside do not function to benefit the community.

Basalt needs to establish a sense of arrival at each of its entrances. Recreational trails used by visitors, locals and commuters do not connect and are not clearly marked. Universal accessibility for all the town's future planning projects is a clear added value for social and economic viability. There is strong sentiment that the new town development should be pedestrian based with an integrated connection to transit. Young professionals support car-free living downtown.

“A 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 current trail system is confusing, especially for tourists.”

“Connectivity is important. You need to be able to walk in all directions. A pedestrian bridge across the Roaring Fork River would provide a connection between the core and the library parcel. I never walk to the library.”



“No matter how you are trying to get to town on a bike and ride between East and West Basalt, it's convoluted.”

“Create a roundabout to connect Midland Ave. by the post office to Southside Drive with pedestrian/bike access underneath.”

“We need to think of people's needs when they are in wheelchairs, on crutches and pushing strollers.”



“Make access 'just flow' so everybody can use the same entrance and special ramps are not needed. Accessibility for everyone needs to be built into everything, everywhere.”

“We need free shuttle service between East and West Basalt.”

4 The people of Basalt are beginning to see density as an alternative to sprawl and downtown density as a generator of vitality.

People expressed a desire for housing for all segments of the population in and near downtown. The thoughtful increase of building height limits could be seen as a useful tool to increase density. The repurpose of existing buildings could be another means to address the density issue.



“It would be important to create a balance between greater height and period buildings so as not to minimize the charm of the town.”

"Take some aggressive action to recruit a developer to repurpose the Riverview Plaza building and turn it into something the market demands, e.g.. condos, hotel."

"Density equals vitality; people equal vitality."

“Make attainable housing a priority.”

“My kids are done with college and would like to live in Basalt but they can't afford to buy anything here.”

“There are between 8-10 developable acres on the Jadwin/Stott parcels. If they were turned into a residential development all those people would revitalize downtown.”

“It doesn't make sense to just allow two-story buildings downtown. Allow more stories that are stepped back on the top. Those upper floors would open up more views.”

“Multi-story residential units for aging in place with each unit as its own floor (on one level). This type of housing is lacking in the valley.”



5 Art, both performing and visual, is a core value of the citizens of Basalt.

This is reflected in the desire for the Wily Art Center to remain in a prominent location in downtown. The Wily Art Center and a performing arts building were the most common facilities shown on citizen drawings and were frequently mentioned in chat sessions. Public art, sculpture gardens and art parks/walks were highly valued as well.

"How about building a Wily community arts campus? That would be unique."

"The downtown master plan can guide the town's development by stating the aspirations and wishes of the town's residents. For example, install public art (via a 1% for Art Program) and provide accessibility for the mobility-impaired ."

"Let's get some pop-up art on the streets."

"The empty storefronts around town could be put to use by putting visiting artists from the Wily or Anderson Ranch in them with an open door policy so people could walk in and see what the artists are working on."

6 A broad range of events and activities would greatly enhance civic life

There is a lack of interesting things to do keep people from considering downtown Basalt as a destination. It is clear that additional leadership must be provided to capitalize on citizen energy. Having a fly fishing ambassador program, movie nights, climbing walls, winter snow sculptures, fire pits, boat pull-outs, food carts / street vendors, and wedding venues are a few of the many activities that people suggested.

“We need a ‘mom and pop’ theater (like the Crystal)in Basalt.”

"The town used to have annual events, but they have all slipped away. We need annual events to draw people here."

"Basalt needs something really cool to draw people here like a great brewery or unique park. If we built a playground and put in a fountain downtown, people would come here."

“I see a lot of women walking around town pushing strollers. There’s no place for them to go with their kids. Put in a playground at Lions Park!”

"There is nothing for teenagers to do in Basalt! It would be nice to have a youth center with both planned activities and a place for teens to just hang out."

“Fryingpan Road is gorgeous – it’s like driving through a national park. That road would be great for a marathon from Basalt to Ruedi.”





7 Downtown Basalt needs additional hotel and hospitality services.

The general consensus was that more hotel beds for varied market segments and a conference facility would be beneficial for the vitality of the downtown core. The hotel building should be of good quality and fit with the downtown character. It was suggested that repurposing existing buildings for hotel use is an option for gaining hotel beds for immediate use. Large group venues for events such as weddings, family reunions and other celebrations are desired.

"A decent hotel would draw skiers who don't want to, or can't afford to, stay in Aspen."

"This side of Basalt needs a nice, upscale hotel - something different from what is planned for Willits."

"The top floors of the Total Merchant Services space should be turned into a hotel. It would be quicker to retrofit than to start from scratch."

"If we had a good hotel and affordable housing downtown, we would have enough critical mass to help create economic vitality."

"Basalt could put itself on the map with a really great conference center."

"A hotel near the river with fishing right out the back (door) and a conference center that could accommodate fishing-related events and industry shows would draw a lot of people here."

8 Continued economic viability depends on a diverse business base that offers products and services for all income levels.

People made it clear that in order for Basalt to remain a viable community they want smaller scale community based retail choices such as a grocery store (Trader Joe's was mentioned often) pharmacy and a sundry items store. Affordable commercial space is seen as essential for local businesses to thrive. The parking situation in downtown is untenable; creative solutions must be incorporated into all future development. Establishing public /private partnerships would be beneficial for projects such as infrastructure upgrades, parking structures, a performing art center, recreational gathering places, and other large capital items.

"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."

"The first thing that needs to be addressed downtown is parking. Then work on the pedestrian connections and view planes to the river."

"The Basalt pharmacy needs to stay downtown. Tad and Heidi are fixtures and they help everybody, no matter the time."

"RMI will be a draw to visitors because it will be state-of-the-art. It should be an example for all future development, including a hotel."

"Are we doing everything we can to keep the TAQ here?"

"Basalt could really benefit from having a business incubator. The idea has been tried in Aspen. But monthly rent for a desk alone was \$800! That's not affordable commercial."





8 (continued)

“The Rocky Mountain Institute and the Roaring Fork Conservancy River Center will have big impacts on the levels of activity downtown; from visitors as well as employees.”

“Create a Basalt Boardwalk with food trucks and push carts leased to vendors with the town in control of the venue.”

“Childcare options in downtown Basalt are not available. Infant care is especially needed!”

“Put in a senior center with daycare downtown.”

“We could use another form of grocery store such as a food hub with a commercial kitchen and indoor farmers market.”



CONCLUSIONS

There has been an overwhelming response to the Our Town Planning process. People have been appreciative of the opportunity to express their thoughts and ideas. A citizen-based process that honors neighborhoods and includes a public outreach center is essential to maintain the excitement generated by making the process accessible to everyone. The inclusive nature of Our Town Planning has created a sense of ownership in the governance of Basalt.

“People need to know that this planning process isn't just smoke and mirrors!”

"I have seen a 180 degree change in attitude with this process. People have a chance to buy into the coming changes instead of having things shoved down their throats."

“We need to capture the energy of this process and keep the momentum going until we get a plan for what we want as a town.”

"Create an international model for energy, water, agriculture, development to showcase to the world how responsible development can create trade and economic prosperity."

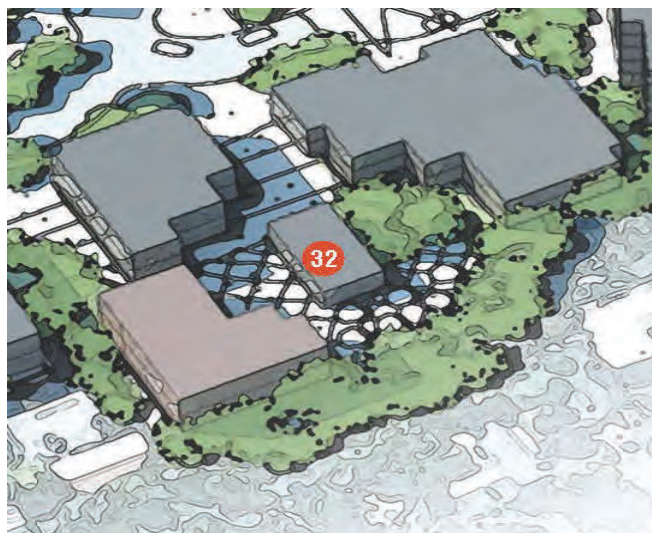
“We are sitting on some nice dirt.”

"Thank you for taking the time to 'do it right' and seeking the town's voice from the citizens. I look forward to a reinvigorated Old Town Basalt and enjoying it for many years to come."

Low Hanging Fruit Projects for Downtown

Low hanging fruit projects are those that can be done in the near future with current community resources.

- Continue to honor individual initiatives.
- Connect existing bike/ foot paths in a clear way.
- Install street, path and town entrance lighting.
- Establish a fly fishing ambassador program.
- Stock the river with trophy sized fish.
- Permit street vending of all types.
- Allow temporary commercial use of parking spaces.
- Hold outdoor movie night.
- Re-create annual events:
 - Battle Of the Bands
 - River Days
- Expand existing trail along the Fryingpan River.
- Provide the zoning support for Nick Aceto's plaza proposal for the "Hot Mama's" area.
- Promote pop-up art spaces in empty retail locations.
- Encourage the repurpose of empty commercial spaces as residential / hospitality uses.
- Create public skating rinks in the winter.
- Establish a public outreach location downtown.
- Nurture neighborhood-building activities.
- Allow and find temporary uses for the old grocery store building.
- Provide way-finding signage from the highway to downtown.
- Create a visual connection from the highway to downtown.



Low Hanging Fruit Projects for Downtown (continued)

- Provide free or reduced rate return bus passes for rafters, kayakers and cyclists from Aspen, Carbondale, and Glenwood Springs.
- Provide giant chess pieces for outdoor games and movable chairs and tables.
- Support theatrical teens and adults in creating “Our Town: The Musical.”
- Have the clock tower (at the Korologos Gallery) chime at unusual times, e.g. 4:20 pm., to call attention to late afternoon activities.



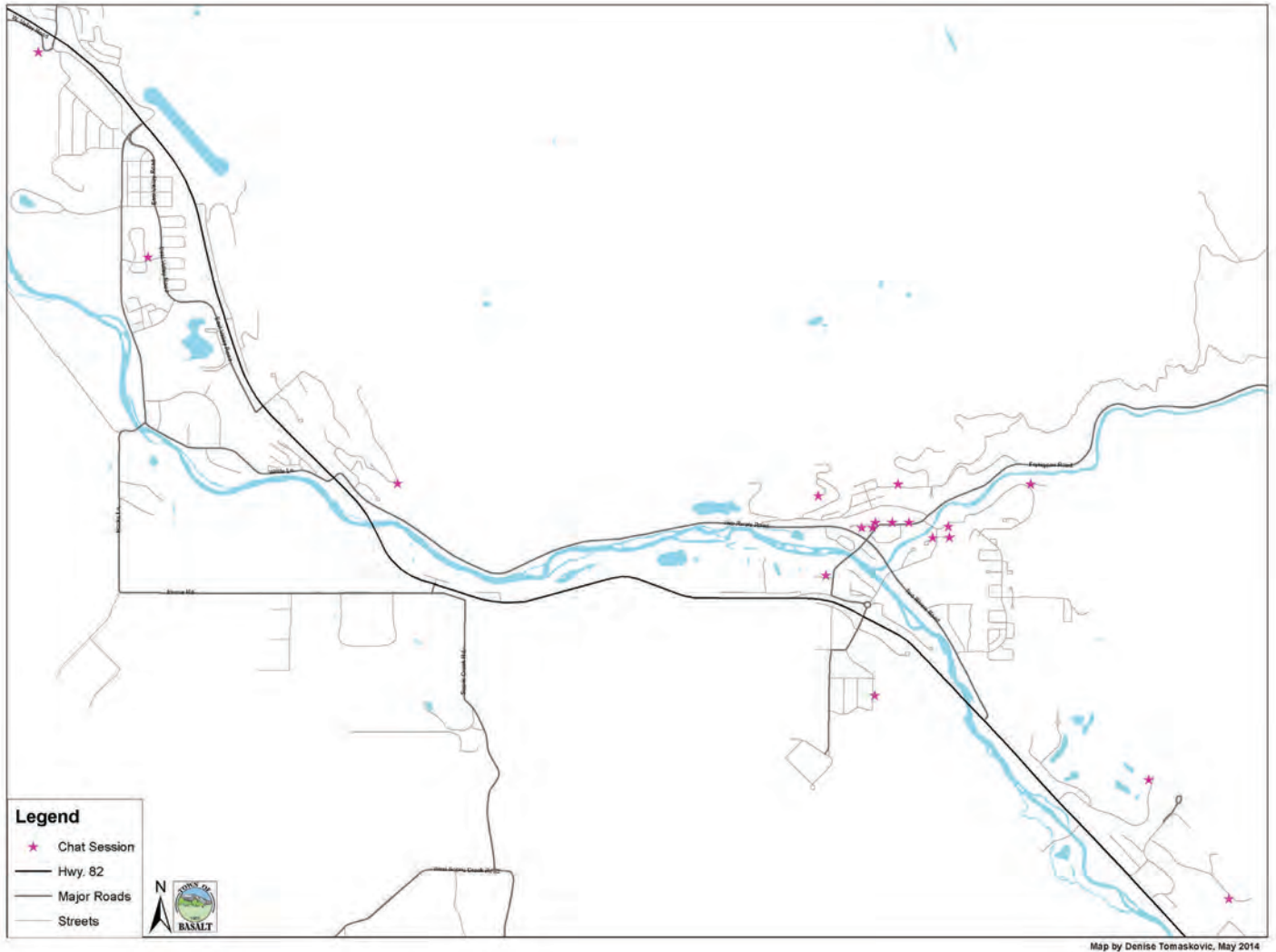
Interesting Outliers

Following are some ideas that could not be incorporated in any of the predominant themes presented on the previous pages but are worth considering:

- Turkish bath.
- Museums– Basalt History: Rivers, Ranches + Rail; Colorado Volcano; antique cars; kids interactive.
- Lounge chairs on rollers (railroad) tracks.
- Fly Casting Course.
- Old-fashioned diner or dining car as a restaurant.
- Laser tag course.
- Reflexology path at river park– have children gather the rocks.
- Two-deck driving range with food and drink service.
- Foot path beneath Two Rivers Road bridge at the Frying Pan river with a window wall to watch the river go by.
- Future re-development of the Roaring Fork Mobile home Park.
- Work out an agreement with the school district to allow cars to park at the schools during summer months with a shuttle loop to downtown.
- Toboggan run.



Chat Session Location Map



Detailed notes from the Chat Sessions are available on the web site: Ourtownplanning.org. The quotes used in this report were taken from these notes .