

Chat Session

4/17/14

Pendleton Residence – Holland Hills

Is there already a plan for a town square?

Where was the former hotel proposal going to go?

Is the Community Development Corp. (CDC) parcel still for sale?

What's happening with Bob Ritchie's property?

What's happening with Clarke's Market?

The parking lot at Clarke's is a common element and all those businesses are part of an owners association. If any changes are made they have to get the OA's approval.

The biggest problem in downtown (DT) Basalt is parking.

There has to be a vision of what we want. Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) will be a major attraction when it's built. Also, fishing draws a lot of people to Basalt. Any plans need to incorporate these two elements.

Developers need to know what the town's vision is, too.

Basalt should have a water park on the river for tubing and convenient put-ins/take-outs for rafters.

Basalt also needs good trails along the river. In Steamboat Springs there is a great trail system that goes along the river and connects a bunch of parks.

Getting to the Rio Grande Trail from DT is very confusing for tourists. We need a better connection. It's "over the river and through the woods" to get there.

Maybe more directional signs would help people on bikes get into and out of Basalt.

The new Basalt signs on Hwy 82 are too wordy. You can't read everything on them when driving by unless you slow way down.

Basalt needs a winter attraction like cross-country ski trails or night skating.

What happened to the Town to Town event? That was a lot of fun!

We also need things for non-skiers to do so they'll come here, too.

Basalt is dead on Sunday during the winter.

Basalt closes down in the evening.

Restaurants are still open. Saxy's has music some nights. So does Heather's.

Basalt should also have a draw that's not a bar or restaurant.

The theatre community would love to see a performing arts center (PAC) in Basalt.

Teens (and adults) mostly go to Aspen or Carbondale for evening entertainment.

The stage and auditorium at the middle school are too small and falling apart and need to be replaced with a bigger and better facility; something like the District Theatre up in Aspen.

The director of the Messiah concert would love to bring the show to Basalt but there is nowhere with good enough sound or big enough for the audience it draws.

A PAC should be in the center of Basalt – like where Clarke's is now – or very close to the center so people have places to go before and after shows.

A PAC could also be used for film festivals and as a movie theatre to show independent films.

The Princess wrote about Basalt in her weekly column in the *Aspen Times* in which she wonders, "Why can't Basalt be cool?" and, considering its "picture-perfect little downtown...its rivers and its insanely beautiful scenery..." went on to ask, "Where the hell is everybody?" (see attached clipping)

My daughter and I went clothes shopping in Basalt recently and she said, "There's nothing here but Heirlooms."

We need hotels, hotels, hotels!

You've got to give the Aspenalt some credit; they've hung in here with Basalt through thick and thin.

A micro-brewery with outdoor seating would be nice to have.

Put in a couple of ice ponds – one for hockey and the other for free skating. We could have kids' tournaments on Saturdays and Tuesday night pick-up games. That'd bring people here.

How about a co-op place that offers shoe repair, Carharts, on-site dry cleaner, tools, and a good selection of art supplies? You can't find any of those things around here anymore. It's too expensive to rent commercial space for these types of dedicated businesses but if they could share space and split the rent in a central location that would be good for everyone.

Add onto that a place for artisans to live over their shops.

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.

All these ideas sound really good but if we wait much longer to decide what we want, Basalt is going to die.

I'm kind of hung-up on the idea of Bob Ritchie's building being turned into a hotel. Could the Town buy it to help out an owner? Could a hotel even go there?

Have there been any prospective buyers looking at the vacant spaces in Riverwalk?

Somebody suggested that Tad move his pharmacy up there so people could buy their guns and drugs in the same building. Ha, ha, ha!

Snowmass Village used to have a great gathering spot when the pharmacy, post office, grocery store, liquor store, and town offices were in the same place. It was a social event just going to pick up your mail. But, things have changed and it's not the same anymore.

Basalt is segmented and needs a gathering spot.

We visited a place that has a park on one side of the street and on the other is a line of Airstream trailers that have been made into mini retail shops and food vendors. It's funky and there's shade and a ton of seating. The place is packed!

It upsets me to see more and more empty retail spots around DT.

How can we get kids in their 20s stay here? We need younger people living in Basalt. Rent for a place that's even halfway decent is expensive and anything that's affordable is a dump.

The other thing is, what is there to do at night? The 7-11 is the only place that's open late around here. If we had a hotdog wagon type of place DT it'd be very successful, especially if it stayed open until 3:00 a.m. after the last bus comes through town.

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

This side of Basalt needs a small, well-stocked grocery store.

It's kind of a chicken and egg thing: we need something to draw people here and then small businesses like juice bars will start appearing.

If we had a good hotel and affordable housing in town we'd have enough critical mass to help create more economic vitality.

"Build it and they will come!"

We need to prioritize what's needed: 1) a good hotel; 2) Performing Arts Center; and 3) affordable housing in every category. The rest of town would fill in if we had those things.

My husband and I can't get into Pitkin County's affordable housing units because we don't work in Pitkin County (even though I work in downtown Basalt) and, oddly enough, we make too much money with our combined incomes to qualify for Garfield County's housing program. We'd love to stay in Basalt to raise our son and we need a bigger place now but can't afford what's available on the free market.

Basalt's affordable housing guidelines aren't working. We've got three units since the 1990s.

I think our priorities should be: 1) affordable housing; 2) a hotel; and 3) Performing Arts Center that's multi-use.

Teenagers can go to the Belly Up in Aspen for shows and to the PAC3 in Carbondale. We need a place with the same type of arrangement that allows teens.

The Belly Up's owner finances a lot of the bands that come to play there out of his own pocket. He basically does it as a community service because it brings people to Aspen.

We need to have easy river access in lots of spots. The Fryingpan River is mostly inaccessible in town because of private ownership along the banks. If we're advertising that we're a fishing destination we need to get some definitive access along the Fryingpan, too.

Basalt should have a fishing ambassador program like the SkiCo has for skiers. We have a lot of retired guys that could be the ambassadors.

One thing that could be done at the river park is to install some ponds and knolls for a 9 hole fly casting course. Orvis designed one for the Old Mill in Bend and it's very popular.

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

A hotel/conference center would have to be of the business-class variety.

People attending conferences in Snowmass Village during the off-season are coming to Basalt to eat because there's nothing available up there.

We need evening activities for visitors, like galleries being open so people have something interesting to see when they walk around town before or after eating dinner.

How soon could a hotel be built?

When will the Taqueria have to close? We want it to stay on this side of Basalt!

What is the next step in this process?

How soon could the changes begin?

What types of incentives could we offer to prospective businesses to locate in DT Basalt?

How can we change the affordable housing regulations so they'll work in Basalt? We need to have housing for middle-class people in our community.

What's happening by Stubbies?

We need a year-round preschool in Basalt that's within walking distance of the pool, library and bus stops.

Could Basalt become its own school district or join the Aspen School District? People who grew up attending the Aspen schools and now live in Basalt with their young families don't want to send their kids to the Basalt schools.

If you consider educational priorities, Basalt has more in common with the upper end of the valley than it does with Carbondale or Glenwood Springs.

I know of at least four families who rented their homes in Basalt and moved to Aspen so their kids can go to the Aspen schools.

Pedaling my way toward quality of life

Guess what! It was 65 degrees Tuesday in Basalt.

The grass is green. Our lilacs are starting to bud. I went for a road bike ride. I wore flip-flops to yoga. I had that distinct spring stink of sweat on top of sweat baked in the sun — so bad it's good.

Here's the thing: We have this thing downvalley called spring. After living at a higher elevation for over 10 years, I'd almost forgotten it existed.

This is the time of year when I feel like I know some kind of special secret. Pssst, guess what. If you want more space, if you want better weather, if you want to be able to go out to eat without spending half your weekly paycheck, if you want to go to Whole Foods or get an oil change and still be able to ski X number of days a week, you can. It's called Basalt.

I'll admit it's taken me almost two years to find my downvalley rhythm, to stop feeling like I'm missing out on something all the time. Part of that comes from the "grass is always greener" mentality that colors the minds of every spoiled child whose otherwise perfect, sheltered little life is tainted by wanting whatever it is he or she can't have. And part of it comes from a very distinctly Aspen mentality, this whole I-don't-drive-past-the-roundabout-attitude that makes you feel like maybe you

made a mistake.

Yes, it's wonderful to never have to drive a car. It's amazing to be able to walk everywhere, including from your front door to the gondola.

God knows I miss stumbling down Spring Street all blurry-eyed after an extended apres session at the Sky, more often than not stopping at City Market for a snack I normally wouldn't indulge in, something involving bread or cheese. I'd go home and either nap or shower up and down a quick espresso so I could head out for Round 2. Though, truth be told, I never was a good power drinker, and that's part of the reason we decided we'd probably survive without the whole drinking-all-day-and-all-night thing.

I struggled with leaving Aspen a lot more than Ryan did. He fell in love with the Fryingpan the second we got here and has announced, on more than one occasion, that he plans to die in this house. When we got our wood-burning stove installed (yes, you can still do that in Eagle County), he proclaimed, "Now that I have this stove, I never have to leave this house ever again."

It was harder for me. Clearly, my community is in Aspen. Whenever I'd meet someone new in Basalt they'd say, "Do



Alison Berkley Margo
The Princess's Palate

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you have any kids?" And when I said "no," their eyes would glaze over and their faces would start to crack with that frozen smile that said, "Oh well, then, I really have no use for you, then."

It took me almost two years to realize moving to Basalt doesn't mean leaving Aspen. What it means is that I'm fortunate enough to own a piece of paradise (and a river runs through it). So I have to drive my car along the river, past the big-horn sheep, a golden eagle or two soaring overhead. No one loves Highway 82, but there's something about coming out of Snowmass Canyon when the curtain of red rock and scrub oak opens and the upper valley reveals itself, a stage of high peaks and ski slopes that's kind of exciting every time.

I guess what I'm trying to say is, it's OK to love it all. I can't stand people who identify with one part of the valley and express disdain for the rest. It's like, you know that saying — "I'm a citizen of the world"? How about being a citizen of the valley? That's a pretty good start if you ask me.

Ultimately I came to this conclusion: Even if I achieved my dream of becoming a successful novelist, and someone bought my manuscript and optioned it for a movie and I finally saw that seven-figure paycheck, I still couldn't afford a place in Aspen. And while affordable housing is a great option for people who make that lifestyle choice, I have a hard time wrapping my mind around the fact that it's not really an option if it's your only choice.

There's something oppressive in that for me, the idea of being pigeonholed financially and having no potential for upward mobility or financial gain in real estate, especially when everyone else around me is sitting on pay dirt.

But here's the one thing I still struggle with: Why can't Basalt be cool? Every day when I drive through this picture-perfect little downtown with its old brick buildings, its rivers and its insanely beautiful scenery, I'm perplexed by how empty it is, considering we're sitting at the confluence of two mighty rivers in the heart of the valley surrounded by more wilderness than you could ever explore in one lifetime and we have Whole Foods, hello.

It's like, where the hell is everybody?

I know Willits is booming, but shouldn't that feed, not hinder, Basalt's growth? I feel like we have those long-standing signature downtown Basalt businesses that easily could anchor some new ones; they just need to be cool — like a tapas bar, a gourmet pizza place, a microbrew tasting room or (God willing) a juice bar. That would breathe some life into the place. Isn't this where all the locals live?

Maybe the hip factor will evolve over time, and maybe it won't. But when it comes to quality of life, all I have to do is pedal my chubby ass up the banks of the Fryingpan River in late March to remember I'm exactly where I want to be.

The Princess has already started working on her tan. Email your love to alisonmargo@gmail.com.