

Sallie and I were participants in the Mountain Top Art Show in Founders Park this past weekend. As in the past, the Rotary volunteers put on a delightful event that helps several nonprofits in the community. The money raised for these community groups is incredibly significant, and certainly not meager pocket change.

As we enjoyed this event in our beautiful park, I thought back to how the park came into being. Reflecting on the creation of Founders Park is informative in the context of all the changes now underway in town. Some view these changes entirely negatively, while others may see them, in some ways, as community enhancements.

I remember when the park property was the site of the Highlands Post Office that faced 5th Street. The west side of the current park was Zeke Sossamon's law office, and before it was a law office, I believe it was a hardware store.

When the post office moved to the current site of the Literacy Council, the vacant building on 5th remained unoccupied and fell into disrepair; the property remained vacant until it was torn down. The Sossamon law office continued to function.

Around 2004, someone had the idea of making the old post office property into a public storage facility. I was on the planning board then and led the charge not to recommend rezoning the property for a climate-controlled storage building. The town board rejected that request. Soon a group of citizens raised the money to buy the land for a town park.

Over several years, the property slowly developed into a venue for concerts and other events. Around 2013, Art Williams gave a sizable donation to develop the property into a park. That gift, along with many other donations, gave impetus to develop the current town park. At that time, the Sossamon property ceased to be a law office, and others such as Ms. Woodruff and again other committed community leaders helped buy the property. They bought the property to expand the park footprint.

Hank Ross designed the park as it is today. He created several design options for the community. The final design incorporated Pine Street as a part of the park's function for community events. The street would be rebuilt with pavers and closed for concerts and other community events like the car show. At the time, it drew significant resistance from some in the business community and from some commissioners. The worry was that the design was a pretext to eventually close Pine Street and create a grass area to expand the park. The concern was that losing parking on Pine Street would negatively affect the business district.

Fast forward to now, and Pine Street is a popular town venue. Hank's dual-purpose design for Pine Street and the park works simply fine. I do not think anyone would imagine anything different now.

My point is that as we move forward as a community, many of our immediate fears and concerns do not happen. After all the struggles and discussions about how to create a park that took place well over a decade ago, all is now well with Founders Park. That is not to say future improvements may take place, but the changes and transformation in the park over the decades have been assets to the community. Change does not always forebode negative outcomes; on the contrary, positive results most often happen. The community created a historical venue well into the future: Founders Park.