At the Community Coffee With the Mayor last Friday, Hank Ross, the president of Friends of Founders Park and the park's designer gave a brief history of how the park came about. His presentation made me have flashbacks of how the community, at times, stumbled but preserved to make the park a reality. Founders Park is a point of community pride today because so many citizens committed to make it a reality.

My flashbacks were before the park and during its creation. Hank presented a wonderful narrative of how the park came about and what Friends of Founders Park does to enhance its ongoing operation. We can all agree the park is truly a community treasure, but that was not necessarily the collective view in the past.

Flashing back, I remember relocating to Highlands in 1999 and seeing a derelict building, the old post office building, on the current park site. The building and site looked like something from a decayed metropolitan area, not a site for a small mountain community. Eventually, the building was removed.

Flash forward to around 2005, and I am on the Highlands Planning Board. A distinguished and legendary realtor came before the board—well, actually, he was on the planning board also. His client proposed buying the post office property and building an interior, climate-controlled storage warehouse on the site. The only problem was that the property would have to be rezoned to allow a storage facility.

The planning board was presented with detailed drawings, and the proposed owner and realtor assured everyone that it would be a wonderful project. I sat there with apprehension and finally said I was against the rezoning because a storage building just didn’t fit the site and surrounding businesses. Larry Gattenbien, the storied zoning administrator, informed me I had to give specific reasons. I did my best to amplify my concerns. Other board members chimed in and agreed, including the realtor, who was also a sitting of the planning board. The proposal was DOA, and the rest is history; Founders Park eventually became a reality.

My point is that, as a community, we need to be very mindful of how decisions are made about land and development. A bad decision can have long-lasting impacts. By the way, that climatized storage facility was eventually located on a corridor site and has been very successful.

The other flashback I had was of a political nature. As the town board weighed into the park approval process, concerns were raised about Hank Ross’s design, where Pine Street would be paved with pavers and closed for special events. Some folks thought this notion and design was a Trojan Horse and that eventually Pine Street would be closed and absorbed into the park. A previous town manager even thought the pavers would be destroyed when our snowplows cleared Pine Street. After a decade, neither prediction has happened. It's funny how our fears and predictions sometimes do not materialize.

At the coffee, Commissioner Brian Stiehler also gave an update on the proposed playground at the recreation department. It, too, is an ambitious project like the park was decades ago. I can't wait for the playground to become a reality. Like the park, it will serve the children, parents, and grandparents for years to come.

MAYOR PAT