

Dear Editor,

It was a hard decision to remove the Streetscape bond from the November ballot, but I believe the right one. Hard because of the years of dialogue, design, hope and outreach for a shared vision of a vibrant downtown, a community hub, a persistent idea that seeks a form and time in which to birth. And right because our Council underestimated the degree of opposition from local businesses for this particular bond. Because as Mayor Clark said, "They are a life blood of our community," as integral and valuable as our children, schools, parks and creative arts. In fact, one of the byproducts of their work, the "sales tax," makes up a big portion of our town's revenues. Shops and residents are interdependent. We cannot create a buzzing hub without them. They are us.

But that was not the only reason it was a thoughtful decision. One neighbor spoke of the hardships of our long economic slump: "A lot of people are hurting." Some right down the block. There was always some reluctance among Council with only two plans to leverage other funds for the Streetscape's infrastructure improvements. The elephant in the room was another "tax" -- a tough sell these days for any good cause. "It's just not the right time," one member summed up.

"I'm not sure where we go from here," another honestly concluded, "but it is the right decision." I believe that we must refind our middle way, that hopefully opened again last week when our Council agreed to reconstitute a new committee for downtown revitalization. We all know the way back -- to our mutual respect, open exchange of diverse views, creative thinking and consensus building, to the values which I proudly believe our Town Council, staff members, and residents promote. This way involves seeing the best intentions in community members, honoring their hopes in the streetscape vision of warm vibrant hub. This way is the best in us, our small town pitching in to improve our schools and parks; to reach our hearts inside and "think outside"; to greet one another on the trails, at the Post Office and in our stores; to shop local when we can, and to encourage businesses to provide incentives for local shoppers. The middle way is to create a friendly buzz in the Town of Ridgway, an alpenglow of Western slope hospitality, and then, at the right time, sidewalks, pavement and better drainage will come.

A healthy downtown is made of more than tar and gutters. It comes from the enthusiasm, cooperation and appreciation of people.

Jim Kavanaugh
Resident of Ridgway
Member of Town Council