

Author's note to Haines Planning Commission:

Due to the timing of your upcoming meeting, I'm sending this letter to you before it gets printed in this week's newspaper. Kindly distribute it to all members and consider the contents when discussing the fate of the property on Third and Main.

Thank You!

Call it Park Place, not a park

Recent interest in buying the undeveloped lot at Third and Main is understandable. It's arguably our sweetest piece of dirt downtown, overlooking open fields and the Chilkat Range and located at a busy intersection next to the town's newest buildings. For real-life Monopoly players, this might be seen as Boardwalk or Park Place -- just sitting there empty -- begging to be home to the next pizza parlor or used car lot.

But there's a hitch: the property is owned by the people of Haines, not by a private party. Which is why it should never be sold.

As the last remaining lot from the former Primary School Subdivision, it's also the last chance to snag the location's potential, not as a park but as a *downtown hub*. It doesn't take a degree in urban planning to conjure uses and direct benefits to both downtown merchants and the greater community in doing so.

A glimmer of that potential came earlier this summer when micro-merchants worked under a dazzling array of white tents lining Main Street on this very spot. Picture outdoor events and festivals, themed activities, shuttle drop-offs and tourist orientation against a stunning mountain backdrop -- all within sight and easy walking distance of core downtown businesses. This is the essence of downtown revitalization.

Postpone building the hub if you must but permanently designate this property for public use. Then watch as start-ups catch on to what's happening in downtown Haines.

Larry & Ellen Larson