Downtown plaza will be for all, not just for downtown

As a downtown business owner I have, of course, been interested in the pros and cons regarding the construction of the downtown plaza.

The arguments against it have possessed varying degrees of validity, relevance, and rationality; people have raised points that needed to be discussed, but there has also been the inevitable component of knee-jerk negativity. What I would like to address here is one of the more nonsensical objections, which is that the project would "only benefit downtown."

Downtown is one of our town's most heavily used areas; patronized by local, regional, and tourist demographics for dining, shopping, entertainment, and various services. In addition, Central High School, Dakota Middle School, The Dahl, and the Library, as well as numerous churches all contribute to the beehive of activity that is downtown Rapid City.

Downtown does not exist in a vacuum; it is an integrated part of the community, and because there are so many people doing things here, there needs to be a place where people can gather, sit down and rest, and not least, find a public restroom.

The question isn't: "Should it be done?" The question is: "Why wasn't it done sooner?"

To have tourists wandering around wondering why there are no public restrooms is embarrassing; most of the smaller towns in the Hills recognized and solved this problem decades ago.

The restrooms are a side issue, though, mainly we're looking at the pros and cons of the plaza as a gathering place and recreational facility. For the sake of argument, let's grant the (absurd) idea that this facility would only benefit downtown. Let's extend that logic and state that the recent makeover of Canyon Lake only benefits the neighborhoods within, say, a half-mile of the park. Let's say that the Sioux Park pool only benefits its immediate vicinity, and that Parkview pool only benefits Robbinsdale. Let's say that the Star of the West complex only benefits the east side of Rapid, and the Roosevelt Park Swim Center and Ice Arena only benefits a small portion of North Rapid.

Here's my question: Even if we grant the flawed proposition that these facilities only benefit their immediate vicinities, why should downtown be excluded from the list of areas to benefit in this way? Considered as a neighborhood, isn't downtown at least as important as any other part of town? Is there some reason why downtown should be left out when it comes to the distribution of parks and recreation?