

**Mayor's column for  
The Beacon  
Published on 1/12/06**

Happy New Year! On the morning of December 17 I was awakened by sirens, lots of sirens! By now you know that what I heard was the response to the large fire at Fifth and Walnut. Much has already been written about the fire, but I want to add some thoughts from a different perspective. Let me first repeat what I have heard over and over again, that our police and fire departments did a remarkable job in their respective areas of responsibility. No one was hurt and no additional structures burned. My thanks for their professional training, which allowed them to perform so admirably.

While a fire of such magnitude is being fought, there are many activities going on behind the scenes. Public works crews are called to duty to monitor water pressure from hydrants so that engines don't run out of water to fight the fire. When millions of gallons of water are being pumped into a burning building, an additional concern is: where is all that water going? Again, public works crews are brought in to make sure street drains are not plugged by debris so that streets and buildings don't flood. The next concern is whether the water being drained is going into our treatment plant and at what rate. Or is it being deposited in the Sound along with fire debris? Again, public works crews called into action. As an aside, that day brought an extremely high tide and a concern for backups into the city systems possibly causing manhole covers to pop open. My thanks to the public works crews for their tireless work.

Fire engines need fuel to continue to operate and personnel were called in to monitor that situation and keep the engines operational. As a former retailer, I was aware that Saturday, December 17 was the biggest shopping Saturday of the year. I was concerned for the welfare of the downtown merchants as I watched debris fly through the air being deposited on every city street. I also had a concern that we had cordoned off a significant part of town as a "fire zone." I called out our street sweeper to begin cleaning the streets and made sure that when possible we could shrink the size of the "fire zone." As the days went by, we continued to open more and more area for residents and shoppers.

Something that often gets overlooked by the general population is how we inform the public and press of developments at the scene. It seemed like only moments after the fire started that TV news crews with their satellite trucks were everywhere. City staff from several departments have taken training to become PIO's (Public Information Officers). When a major event happens, we turn over the duties of meeting with the press to those folks. In this case, we used police and fire personnel to fill the role and later added the PIO from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives as they joined the investigation. PIO's set times for updates to the press and basically try to keep them informed so that they don't try to infringe on the scene. It's a good system, and our PIO's did a great job.

A fire such as this one becomes a crime scene, and as such, needs to be protected 24 hours a day until the investigation is completed. Due to the holidays, many police officers were on vacation, and the city would have incurred an even larger overtime bill if we scheduled officers to guard the fire scene in the days after the fire. We decided to call the City of Lynnwood's Citizen Patrol and ask for their assistance. They were most accommodating and served us well. Again I offer my thanks.

We decided early on to ask the previously mentioned ATF to come to Edmonds and investigate the fire. They are the best in the country at what they do and they accomplished in

four days what may have taken us four months to do. It was absolutely amazing to witness their expertise. As you know, they made a preliminary finding that the cause was “undetermined.” They operate with a strategy to eliminate causes one by one. They are still investigating and examining evidence and will have a further report as time goes by.

So what happens to that building now? The insurance companies finished their investigations late last week, which were separate from the City’s, and they should have started demolition by press time. This process will take up to two weeks to complete and Fifth Avenue will be closed periodically. The building owner has expressed a desire to begin reconstruction as soon as possible. Since he has a valid building permit there is no need for any additional permits or public comment. We have learned a lot over the past year of construction-induced disruption to the residents and businesses in the area and are looking at changes in how reconstruction will be allowed to proceed.

Again, I wish you all a Happy New Year and offer my thanks to all city employees for a job well done at the fire scene.