Mayor's column for
The Beacon
Published on 4/6/06

Over the last two weeks I have visited four neighborhoods in Edmonds, and I am half-way through my schedule of visiting eight different parts of the city to listen to your thoughts, concerns, and suggestions. It has been very informative for me, and I hope for those in attendance as well.

The meetings have been unstructured and have never lacked for substance! While each neighborhood has had some concerns unique to their location, there have been some topics that transcend neighborhoods. Everyone is concerned about traffic, how much there is, and how fast it goes. Those neighborhoods that aren't fortunate enough to have sidewalks want them, and they want them soon! There is an undercurrent of dismay about the size of homes being built in their neighborhoods. The possible expansion of Paine Field flight activity drew some questions.

The move of the ferry dock was discussed at several meetings. That project has been around for many years and is tentatively scheduled to happen in 2012. A discussion of the City budget inevitably comes up as well. And, of course, a very popular question is, "When will the 220th Street construction be over?" We are near the end; the project is scheduled for completion this summer.

There is some pent-up frustration over citizens' lack of control over the "development" process. By "development" I mean new homes, new condos, new construction! Oftentimes a project appears as a surprise to neighbors, and when they finally have the opportunity to pay attention, it is too far down the pipeline to make any changes. Citizens feel like their concerns go unheard because no one takes any action. I can tell you that staff and elected officials hear your concerns, but most times—and I repeat, most times—when a project is planned, designed, and built to code, there is next to nothing that we can do about it. So, you may be thinking, what can I do?

There are three ways to "control" growth from a citizen's perspective. Whenever the City Council goes about their business of creating codes, they hold public hearings and only a few people show up. It's understandable; the topic sometimes doesn't catch your eye, or you think it doesn't apply to you or your neighborhood. So the Council does their best to create codes that they believe will best serve the community, and life goes on.

Then one day, you wake up to the sounds of a bulldozer clear-cutting the wooded lot next door and you learn that a 5,000-square-foot home is being built, five feet from your house. Now you're interested! So you contact the City and learn that it's already been approved and it meets the City's codes. And you wonder, how can that be? So you call a City Councilmember and they say the same thing. Your frustration level is running high. You are left feeling helpless and wondering what in the world is your government doing to you.

So, the first thing you can do is to pay attention to what business is coming before the City Council and give them your two-cents worth whenever you can. The second thing you can do, and it can be substituted for the first, is to elect people who you feel best represent your views. That goes for councilmembers and mayor. When it's election time, do your homework, study the candidates, ask them questions. Their decisions will affect you someday! You get a chance with each candidate every four years to decide if they still represent your views or not. The choice is yours.

The third opportunity for you to influence a proposed building project is, whenever there is a public hearing for the project, show up and testify. Let your voice be heard. Write letters, send emails! They all get read and considered. They become part of the record for the project and, if the approval of a project is subject to an appeal, then you will get notified of the appeal and have another chance to voice your concerns.

Growth and the accompanying traffic that it generates is not a localized problem in Edmonds; it's happening in every city in the county and maybe the state. But it affects us here, where we live, on a daily basis. Over the last couple of years, there has been a slow education process going on, but we have a long way to go. If you want to effect change, you first need to learn how we got to where we are, understand the process, and then work toward the change you desire.

I'm looking forward to the balance of my neighborhood meetings and learning what's going on in your neighborhood.