

**Mayor's column for
The Beacon
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One of the questions I heard often during my "Neighborhood Tour" this spring was, "What's happening with the old Safeway site?" Also known as the "Waterfront Antique Mall," this large piece of property is privately owned and by all accounts is ripe for redevelopment. Harbor Square, now owned by the Port of Edmonds, is also a candidate for some revamping. There are other smaller parcels along that stretch that are privately owned as well.

All of this area is vital to the future of Edmonds. When the ferry dock is relocated, these parcels will provide key linkage from our downtown core to the new multimodal facility. In effect, the downtown area could double in size and provide additional shops, restaurants, offices, open space and some residential capability. While this area is tired, old, and outdated, it is hardly historical, and all of Edmonds would benefit from redevelopment of these properties.

You might be thinking, so what's the problem...get on with it! There are a couple of major issues involved with a redevelopment of this size. One is that there are multiple property owners and they should all be on the same page to accomplish like goals. The other major issue is that all of the land sits so close to Puget Sound that the water table is very high. It is not possible to do underground parking. And using surface parking would be a waste of prime land.

Then there is that old nemesis, building height. Within the Harbor Square footprint, buildings can be built to 35 feet tall, courtesy of a contract rezone years ago. The balance of the property is in the BC zone and presently limited to 25 feet in height. Without the ability to use underground parking and a 25-foot-height limit, any redevelopment would be severely limited in scope. So how do we proceed to create much-needed redevelopment when we are handcuffed by the water table and height limiting codes?

Without the ability to park underground, the choices dwindle quickly. Surface parking, by its very nature, would limit building development and frankly wouldn't look any different than it does today. So parking would have to be covered, either on a first level throughout the development or in a parking garage structure of some kind. Since either of those options is very expensive, a developer would need additional building space to lease to recoup his costs. That translates into increased building heights.

Height could be added for the entire area or only in selected portions of the area. Clearly a master plan would be necessary for this type of redevelopment. My hope is that the property owners can come together and formulate a plan that will show the benefits of redevelopment in this area for the entire city.

Any contract rezone or proposed height increase would require City Council action. I would hope that the citizens of Edmonds would see the need for this redevelopment and be proactive in the process. As plans unfold, if they indeed do, patience will be required. Citizen input will be requested and used to help design this valuable linkage to our waterfront and multimodal center.

I urge everyone to become involved. Another common theme I heard in my neighborhood meetings was that people wanted to get involved early in the process when it came to development. It's not too early now, especially when, as of yet, there really isn't a plan, only a need.

The need is real. I have heard it from many of you. You have asked for redevelopment of these properties. You just may get your wish, so don't miss the opportunity to help shape the future of your downtown.