

**Mayor's column for
The Beacon
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The City Council and the Port of Edmonds held their second joint meeting a few weeks ago to discuss redevelopment of Harbor Square and the "old Safeway/antique mall" property. You may recall that I wrote a column a few months back about the coming redevelopment for that site.

When I held my neighborhood meetings last spring, one of the most-asked questions was, "When is the old Safeway property going to be redeveloped?" At each meeting where it came up, you said you wanted change there. You wanted to see the old go away and be replaced with new development. You didn't feel that there was anything historic there, nor any reason to preserve it as it was.

I also mentioned in my previous column that because of the water table and its proximity to the Sound, no underground digging would be possible. So parking would have to be aboveground. Surface parking would not only be unsightly, but also a terrible use of the land, making a parking garage a necessity. And, of course, building height will be an issue as well. A mixed-use development consisting of retail, office, condos, and open space that incorporates an "Edmonds feel" and ties into the downtown core will have to have some increased building heights to make it financially attractive and to give it some character.

So back to the joint meeting between the Council and the Port. The redevelopment committee consisting of Port and City officials and Councilmembers, made a thorough presentation to the Council and offered a plan to "get the ball rolling." The committee requested that the Council authorize the creation of a Redevelopment Plan, via Master Plan process, and that a private sector firm be selected to lead the planning effort. No action was taken by the Council that night as they were looking for more information.

The property owner and the Port decided to move on without waiting for more thoughts from the City Council. The redevelopment committee held an additional meeting while the Port and property owners continued to work on their own. The committee gave out assignments to its members. Mine was to write a column about the importance of redevelopment. The City, while not a property owner, clearly has a vested interest in the future development of such a large parcel in the heart of the city. In my mind, this redevelopment is far more important to our future than Highway 99 or any of the neighborhood centers.

Recently I have met with several interested parties who are willing to participate in the redevelopment efforts of these two large sites. Some are willing to partner with the property owners and some are interested in buying out the current owners and moving toward redevelopment on their own. The interest level is at an all-time high. I've asked anyone who comes my way to do some design work ahead of time, show us what it *could* look like, and then maybe we can once again go back to the Council for some guidance.

I envision development that looks typical to most other communities these days. Have you driven through Ballard recently? Or how about Mill Creek Towne Center? Of course, there is the inevitable comparison with University Village. And most of us have seen what the City of Everett is doing on their waterfront. I'm convinced that this type of architectural design can be incorporated into Edmonds with a design team that focuses on our history and our proximity to our greatest asset, Puget Sound.

I believe that the essence of Edmonds can be designed into modern-day architecture to allow for a much-needed redevelopment of these two properties. Once a design is put together, we can go back to the Council with a vision that will focus on the overall project and not just whether a building is 25 feet tall or 35 feet tall.

I urge you to become involved in this process and let the City Council and Port Commissioners know your thoughts about the need for redevelopment of these sites. I'm not talking about building heights or specific store requests; I'm just talking about the need to rid the city of aging, dysfunctional retail space and creating something for Edmonds residents and visitors to enjoy for many years to come. Let your voice be heard.