

**Mayor's column for
The Beacon
Published on 6/14/07**

Letters to the editor are a traditional way of expressing one's opinion. There is no law that governs their content to make certain it is factual and truthful. It is, after all, just one person's opinion. One recent letter caught my attention. It was about ongoing discussions about the possible redevelopment of a downtown parcel. Read on and you'll see how you can actually take part in the redevelopment process and not have to write a letter to the editor!

Over the past couple years, I have written about the old Safeway/antique mall property. In numerous neighborhood meetings I have been asked the status of that property. The unanimous, unsolicited opinion has been that what currently occupies the site is outdated and an eyesore, and that change is more than welcome.

The property owner, along with a neighboring property owner, have been meeting with Port of Edmonds officials (who own Harbor Square) in an effort to work together on a plan for future redevelopment of these prime properties. At their first meeting, they agreed on several common goals. They wanted public involvement in the process, they wanted to work together so as not to duplicate their efforts on adjacent parcels, they wanted to create an energy that served as a transition area between downtown and the waterfront, and they clearly wanted to study the feasibility of what could happen there that would be financially achievable.

The meetings have not been open to the public. The participants have the right to talk about what could happen on their own property in private. While the Port is a public entity and must involve the public if they intend to spend Port taxpayer dollars, they have the right and, in fact, the obligation to perform due diligence before going to the public. The private property owners have absolutely no obligation to involve the public in their preliminary discussions about their own plans. The City is, of course, a very interested party even though not a land owner except for some street right-of-way. The group invited a councilmember and me to sit in on their discussions. We were happy to do so and have offered our insight to the talks. And, in fact, the group appointed me as their spokesman during the early stages.

During these talks, the group has been working hard looking at opportunities and constraints in the area. They have accepted some ideas and rejected others. For example, no one is interested in having any sort of gambling establishment onsite. At last check, gambling was not allowed in Edmonds, and I don't see any change coming soon!

After coming up with a mission statement, which by the way starts out with "involve the public," they have used the following as guiding principles: create a mixed-use development that is pedestrian-friendly, has sufficient parking, that has open space and a skybridge over the tracks, that will not conflict with downtown but will complement downtown and the waterfront, and that will provide the property owners a return on their investment.

What will the buildings look like? How tall will they be? What retail or office uses will there be? When will this happen, if it indeed does? The answers to those questions are yet to come. The

group is working on its public outreach plan, which will go a long way toward answering those questions and more. After the public has weighed in with their thoughts and the group has fine-tuned the plan, it will be presented to the Planning Board and City Council for additional public comment. The public will have their say.

Watch for their upcoming public solicitation workshops coming in September. They want your input. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shape the future of downtown Edmonds. Don't miss out on your chance.

In the meantime, the Waterfront Redevelopment Committee is looking for immediate help. They are looking for about 25 interested Edmonds residents to help them design the public process and determine what the priorities of the design should be. This too, is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shape the future. If you are interested in serving on the committee, call the Port of Edmonds office at 425-774-0549 and ask for Chris Keuss, the Executive Director. You must be prepared to spend the last three Fridays in July in lengthy meetings to accomplish that task. The deadline for applying is Friday, June 22!