Mayor's column for
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It seems like enough has been written about the now-famous redevelopment efforts along Railroad Avenue between Main and Dayton Streets. There must be nothing left to say. Right?

Lots of work has been accomplished—in particular by the Port of Edmonds. Many, many public meetings have been held. Yet, no one is happy! The Port has pulled back; they appear to be creating their own master plan for Harbor Square. The Edmonds Shopping Center Group has dropped off the face of the earth. And Bob Gregg, new owner of the Skippers site, appears to be moving ahead with plans to develop his location.

So what happened? How did the well-intended goal of creating a master plan for the area fall apart so badly? There are a number of reasons in my mind, but when I look back, I can point to a very specific action that took place that doomed whatever followed no matter how hard the Port worked to revive it.

After working cooperatively for months in a group setting, some well-intentioned concepts came out of the property owners' sessions. These concepts were well thought out, talked about and studied, and were ready to be rolled out for public viewing. This was not an application for a project, it was not a conceived plan, it was far from finished, it was work in progress. The group wanted to hear from the public about the idea, about the concept.

While a City Councilmember and I were present during most of the discussions, we did miss one meeting. Up to that point, the discussions were based on a foundation that a development at 25 to 30 feet in height and with surface parking was not desirable because of the "strip mall" appearance that it would have. With direction from the group, concepts were presented that showed options of four- to six-story buildings. The assumption was made that the development that currently existed on the site would not be acceptable in the future, nor would a similar type development, and that it was fair to show the public the four- to six-story option.

What wasn't on the table at that meeting was anything taller than the four- to six-story option to show the public. Yet when we returned for the next meeting, a 10-story option had appeared. The Councilmember and I questioned the wisdom of that addition being shown to the public. It was not an option that either of us could support, and we felt it would be detrimental to the overall discussion to even talk about it. The group decided that they wanted the public to see all the options, and it stayed.

Why in the world show the public an option for something that had no support politically and would only sway public sentiment toward an unsavory taste about the entire study? Needless to say, it was all downhill from there. That 10-story option allowed the naysayers in town—yes, there are some—to easily badmouth the process. They were able to say, "Look at what these property owners are trying to do!" Months of hard work washed away by the addition of one alternative that frankly had the support of only two people.

So, in the aftermath of all that, I still believe that what currently exists along that stretch of ground between Dayton and Main, particularly what sits in the middle, is an eyesore to our fair city. I realize there are many views, opinions, and thoughts about what eventually should be built there. I would urge all of those who are involved in the makeover not to go back to square one with the process. Good work was done by the group. It’s a good starting point. Take it and shape it to your liking. Starting over would be an exercise in futility.