

“Working together” drives Port planning for Harbor Square

By Bob McChesney, Executive Director, the Port of Edmonds

A heartfelt “thank you” to everyone that attended the Port’s recent public input session on the future of Harbor Square.

The purpose of the gathering was plain, unvarnished and twofold: to share the Port’s criteria for redeveloping Harbor Square and to hear the public’s thoughts and ideas on the topic.

It was encouraging that the attendees largely abstained from being critical and, instead, stuck to the task at hand—helping us chose the direction that future Harbor Square redevelopment might take.

It would be difficult to overstate the value that the Port of Edmonds places on public participation in decisions affecting our community. Each of the Commissioners and I feel strongly that measured public input not only makes our job easier, but also contributes greatly to the ultimate success of the endeavor.

At the meeting we presented some conceptual illustrations solely as “idea starters,” not as proposals. I believe we were successful in persuading those in attendance that we had no preconceived plans, that all ideas for what, when and how the property should be developed were welcome and deserving of consideration.

We had only one proviso—whatever was proposed had to be doable. Meaning it must be economically feasible and there must be a way to finance it.

One of our professional speakers spoke about creating legacy projects that could serve the community well into the future. The best projects, he said, come from a lot of community support, with stakeholder participation and creative minds working together for input.

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It is the idea of working together that drives our emphasis on public participation. The aura of cooperation was clearly evident at this recent meeting and will underscore every similar gathering we have in the future.

One of the main areas of accountability that everyone agreed must be considered is the environment. Whatever is ultimately done at Harbor Square—bordering as it does on the precious Edmonds Marsh—must actually enhance the environment, not merely protect it.

This public meeting was the second in a series of gatherings on the topic. We will have as many sessions as necessary to obtain adequate public comment. When that will be or how long it will take I have no idea, but whatever it takes, we will do it.

As one of our participants said: Edmonds is one of the most unique communities in the Northwest. We have an opportunity to do something of dynamic proportions here both economically and environmentally.

There will be more such meetings where your input will be sought to help us make a better Harbor Square development. Watch this column for an announcement of the next meeting.

439 words