

Public input for Edmonds redevelopment project moves to the next level

By Chris Keuss, Executive Director, the Port of Edmonds

The recent headline said that the Port is turning over the lead in the Harbor Square / Antique Mall redevelopment project. Does this mean we are taking ourselves out of the picture?

Somewhat perhaps, but are we riding off into the sunset? No way.

Keep in mind that the Port is still the largest landowner of the three entities involved. It would be irresponsible to remove ourselves—and our public—from the process. However, it should be noted that, of the three properties involved, the Port's Harbor Square business complex is today the one least in need of redevelopment.

It makes sense that those who own the properties that are likely to be the redeveloped first should assume the most visible role. Rest assured that the Port will continue to be a player in the project and will weigh in on behalf of the public whenever and wherever our expertise is needed.

The current direction came to light at a public meeting of the Port Commission earlier this month at the Edmonds Yacht Club. The meeting was called to review the Port's master plan, in particular that portion dealing with Harbor Square.

The Harbor Square / Antique Mall redevelopment project fits well within the scope of the Port's mission, which calls for us to “play a leadership role in ensuring that the waterfront is a vibrant, active centerpiece for the Edmonds and Woodway communities, [and to] provide opportunities in economic development . . .”

Developer Bob Gregg, one of the other landowners at the meeting, gave a brief summary of where they are today in the redevelopment planning process. His is the smallest of the three parcels involved—the property that was most recently the site of a Skipper's restaurant.

Gregg, who recently purchased the property, made it clear that he intends to waste no time in

moving forward. He said he expects to be well into the permitting process by the end of the year.

The Port has been involved from the outset because we are one of the landowners. (Note here that “we” really means *you*, the public.) The Port owns all the land and all but two of the buildings in the Harbor Square business complex. And, whatever ultimately happens, the owners of the remaining two—the Harbor Inn Hotel and the Harbor Square tennis facility—have both indicated their willingness to redevelop along whatever lines the community ultimately adopts. It was agreed that they are both very important to the redevelopment design.

Meanwhile, the public input process continues. Last summer we brought together a broadly-based citizen group. After much study, they came up with a series of redevelopment concepts, from which the architect created four conceptual plans and—with continued input—ultimately narrowed them down to one.

As I told the City Council when I presented the results to them, “It is in your hands now.” Next, the developers’ group will be speaking to the Council on March 25 presenting the status of their plans. Then, at the following week’s Council meeting—April 1—the public is scheduled to offer their thoughts.

The more the project is explained, the more the public seems to appreciate what is at stake. The immediate reaction was mixed, with many people questioning the designs.

The pendulum of public opinion may be swinging the other way. Today, I am hearing more positive comments about redeveloping the property. The owners are willing to discuss different options with city officials.

The process is slow, but it is working, and today compromise appears to be a real possibility.