



December 3, 2012

To: City Council Members Strom Peterson, Diane Buckshnis, Lora Petso, Joan Bloom, Kristiana Johnson, Frank Yamamoto and Adrienne Fraley-Monillas

Date: December 3, 2012

Re: Request for Incorporation of the Harbor Square Master Plan into the City of Edmonds Comprehensive Plan

Dear Councilors:

Early in 2012, the Port of Edmonds requested that ACE review its Preliminary Redevelopment Vision for Harbor Square and consider writing a letter of support for that vision. At that time, all that was available was the brochure mailed to the citizens. We discussed the vision at our meetings and had the Port attend to hear our concerns and answer some of our questions.

ACE Initial Letter to the Port of Edmonds

Following that process, we sent a letter to the Port dated April 3, 2012. That letter is in your package of materials provided for your November 20 meeting. To reiterate the summary of ACE's stated goals and orientation in our initial letter:

ACE supports responsible development that respects and complements the character of Edmonds – its small town atmosphere and its general low-level architecture. We promote preservation of the natural environment in our City – its streams, beaches, parks and open space. We also attempt to provide citizens with accurate information about land use activities that allows them to make informed decisions and provide relevant input to our elected leaders.

We told the Port that we could support a responsible mixed use concept for Harbor Square such as the one reflected in the brochure as one viable alternative redevelopment option, subject to the following conditions:

- Building stories shown as five to the South (i.e 55 ft) and four to the North (i.e. 45 ft) are in our opinion excessive. We propose current heights shown in the brochure be reduced, especially along Dayton. Avoid the wall effect for all buildings.
- We would like to see more emphasis on open space, gathering spaces.
- Increase setbacks along Dayton
- Port as a public entity should not act from the same profit motive as a private developer – require more public amenities such as open space, maximum marsh buffers, rooftop access.
- Linkage to downtown shopping district is a must.
- Schedule more public sessions before moving ahead to the city.

We do not believe that our concerns summarized above have ever been seriously addressed by the Port.

Updated ACE Position

Since that time, we have closely monitored the evolution of the Port's vision through its adoption of a detailed Master Plan at its June 25, 2012, meeting, and through the Planning Board's extensive discussions beginning on July 25, 2012 and concluding with its October 24, 2012 Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations presented to you as part of the package currently under consideration. Many of our members have been directly involved with this process through the Planning Board and the Economic Development Commission, and it has been a topic of discussion at almost all of our monthly meetings. This decision involves what we all know is one prime piece of real estate among several directly adjacent to our waterfront. Its redevelopment will have a significant effect on development in that area for years to come and indeed, on the entire downtown area.

We have reviewed and discussed many of the materials related to the Master Plan, and focused primarily on the Plan itself and the Planning Board recommendations. **Our conclusion is that ACE cannot lend its support to the proposal presented by the Port, even if all Planning Board recommendations are incorporated.** In two of the criteria to be considered to make changes to the City Comprehensive Plan, direction is given to take the Public Interest into serious account. We believe the proposed changes fail to do that, and also believe that there are too many unanswered questions that the Port and the City must resolve before that critical criterion can be met.

Bases for Our Conclusion and Some of Our Concerns

1. The Port's proposal supporting construction of 55-foot tall buildings between downtown residential areas and the waterfront is inconsistent with the small-town atmosphere of Edmonds.
 - a. It does not accommodate or compliment Edmonds' traditional low-level two-to-three story architecture.
 - b. It shows a lack of sensitivity to the impact on private views and the loss of value on those properties to their owners.
 - c. The 55-foot Ebb Tide on the waterfront is an aberration due to both its height and mass, and additional buildings of similar or greater height or mass should not be planned for, proposed, or accommodated in the downtown waterfront activity center.
2. We do not agree with adding buildings 35 to 45 ft. tall along Dayton, with a minimal 15 ft. sidewalk setback (which is 10 feet less than the current contract rezone for building setbacks) is in the public interest.
 - a. It impacts the Dayton Street public view corridor, especially if similar structures are allowed in the future on the North side of Dayton.
 - b. The proposal includes no upper floor step back requirement, and loosely uses more flexible "should" terminology rather than the stronger "shall" and "will" terminology.
3. We question whether the multi-family residential mixed use concept envisioned by the Port is the best use for this property.
 - a. Other than the proposal now before the city council, at no point to our knowledge has the Port ever solicited or seriously explored alternative uses for this property

- b. We believe the city would benefit if the Port would solicit open public comment on how the Harbor Square property should be used or disposed of and seriously consider that input.
 - c. Since the Port is committed to a long-term lease with the Harbor Inn and is also the site of a highly successful Athletic Club / Tennis facility, it is questionable whether 350 condominiums should be added to this property along with the associated density and infrastructure impacts.
 - d. Open space and public use are generally transparent in the vision concepts that have been presented to the public – there should be more specific requirements for those features within the property.
 - e. A recent presentation on gathering spaces and bringing visitors into the City has been met with much enthusiasm by the community. These concepts, and their relationship to tourism, do not appear to be addressed in any way in the Port’s vision.
4. We believe there are several environmental concerns that must be addressed now rather than later, and certainly before any changes are made to the City Comprehensive Plan:
 - a. A study is needed to determine the true impact of 55 foot buildings and their shadows along the marsh and the active wildlife within the marsh?
 - b. Day-lighting of Willow Creek at a cost of \$1 million has been mentioned by the Port in its presentations. Is that part of this proposal, and who will pay the cost?
 - c. Flooding East and North of Harbor Square is an ongoing problem. Resolution of that flooding, and who will bear the cost, has not been mentioned throughout this process.
 - d. Unknowns related to the fact that Harbor Square rests on fill (liquefaction issue?) and may be contaminated by oil beneath the surface and under the buildings. This could make the type construction proposed costly, impractical and fraught with risk.
 - e. Are condominiums adjacent to the ongoing and increasing rail traffic and its associated warning signals a wise use of the property? Will the sale price of the condominiums be less than projected?
5. We believe if the City Comprehensive Plan incorporates what is being proposed by the Port at Harbor Square, similar proposals are likely to follow for the Antique Mall and Skippers properties to the North and also up the hill to the East, and that it will be difficult for the City to control or deny them after allowing Harbor Square to be developed in this manner.
6. The financial ramifications of this proposal, and especially the cost of addressing the environmental concerns and the infrastructure issues associated with redevelopment in this area, along with the loss of property values when uphill private views are impacted, are not taken into account in the proposed redevelopment plans.

Recommended Council Actions

We recommend that the Port Harbor Square Master Plan NOT be incorporated into the City Comprehensive Plan. Instead, the Port, the City and the public should work together to develop a beneficial alternative vision for the Harbor Square site, taking advantage of its prime location near the waterfront.

Respectfully,

The Alliance of Citizens for Edmonds (ACE)