

So What Are the Challenges?

by Dave Earling

After my last column I had a couple of people mention everything I said about the community in my column was upbeat and optimistic. Well, no apology there! We do live in a community which has endless amenities, a gorgeous seaside setting – a community which celebrates itself throughout the year. So again, no apologies there!

However, the comments made did get me thinking about several challenges and interesting issues I feel the community faces, and so, here are five big items on my list of ongoing concerns Edmonds needs to consider.

Few would argue the economy has vastly improved in Edmonds from the lows of the recession in the previous mid-decade. Highway 99, downtown, and Westgate are all bustling. Our property values are up, car dealers are thriving, retail is strong, and younger families are moving in causing a shift in demographics. Edmonds is seen as a community on the move and a positive place to be. So what's the problem you ask?

Well, if you take a long-term look, our financial future is a large concern. As I have said before, Edmonds has no shopping malls or "big box" stores, we are pretty much a community which is built out and so where do we look to generate long-term revenue? We have made positive financial progress in the past few years, but we need to remain creative to meet the quality of life expectations of the community. So there's one issue.

Next, while we've had great success, in particular with our downtown... it's filled with energy, retail shops are busy, restaurants are thriving, our reputation as a daytime destination is growing and jobs are being created but... parking continues to be a challenge and an increasing concern. This is an issue we need to pay attention to and we have begun developing ideas for improvement. So there's issue two.

Issue three centers on our desire and need to enhance our two-mile section of Highway 99. We have important anchors: car dealerships, the International District, and Swedish Hospital and its surrounding campus. Still, there are wide gaps that need attention. We are in the middle of a year-long effort to develop a "sub-area plan" to help create a vision of this underserved area including the residential neighborhoods surrounding the retail corridor.

Number four is how do we deal with the waterfront access issue? With 40 trains a day coming through, we need to solve the at-grade train crossing issue at Main and Dayton Streets. Many of you know we have a task force made up of representatives of the port, city, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Washington State Department of Transportation, Sound Transit and Community Transit. We will have their report to us by early fall.

And finally, we are beginning to have a look at some of the social service needs in and around our community. Some of the items we are looking at: affordable housing, homelessness, and issues related to addiction. Staff and Council have formed working groups and are coordinating with non-profits and other cities in South County to address this growing challenge.

So there you have it. Are there other challenges? Sure! And I'm sure many of you have your own lists. But, over the coming years, staff and I will be focused on the above as well as other important city-wide improvements we can make.

So yes, we have challenges! And while we need to stay focused on these and other issues, we also need to celebrate this quality community that we live in; a community which values itself and understands big issues are solvable.