PRESS RELEASE

March 20, 2015

The Port of Edmonds is a partner with the City of Edmonds toward protecting community values and promoting reasonable future development that will create new incremental resources for maintaining a healthy, vibrant community across generations. The Port is a separate legal entity and independent public enterprise, with a special purpose mandate from the State to promote economic development for the benefit of the community, including jobs creation, expanding the local tax base and environmental stewardship.

The Port of Edmonds fully supports the goal of restoring the Edmonds Marsh and daylighting Willow Creek. However, the Port believes the most cost effective path for accomplishing those outcomes is through redevelopment at Harbor Square. Redevelopment and restoration are not mutually exclusive events. They work together by providing a pool of mitigation funds which without the Port believes other funding sources will not be sufficient to achieve the desired environmental restoration.

There is disagreement between the Port and the City over specific strategies. The Port objects to the City’s Shoreline Master Plan (SMP) approved by City Council in 2014, wherein the City proposes to establish expanded buffers and setbacks along the edge of the Marsh. If allowed to prevail, the result will be de facto preservation of the existing asphalt parking lots and bare concrete structures that are now immediately adjacent to the Marsh. Nothing will change at Harbor Square.

Although the record clearly shows the current 25ft buffer meets the “no net loss” criteria as required by State regulations, and there is no meaningful science to expand beyond that, the City seeks to unilaterally impose a 100ft buffer/setback on a 2-year interim basis, ostensibly to achieve grant funding for daylighting Willow Creek. We do not accept the “interim theory” as a practical reality. There is no agreed or stipulated method for changing Marsh buffers/setbacks back to its current delineation. Further, the Port has a fiduciary responsibility to optimize the economic value of its land and assets. Our fundamental mission is committed to balancing economic values with environmental considerations.

Creating expanded buffers/setbacks will encroach into Harbor Square and eliminate a significant area from redevelopment. The Port believes this is a changed condition that marginalizes the economic value of Harbor Square and compromises opportunities to achieve a first class redevelopment that will benefit the Edmonds/Woodway communities for decades into the future. From the Port’s perspective, expanded buffers/setbacks will likely foreclose any chance of redevelopment at Harbor Square. It will choke off a potential new source of public revenue that would contribute additional funding for Marsh restoration and daylighting Willow Creek. We think this is not a wise choice.

The Port is not suing the City of Edmonds. Rather, the City has forwarded its SMP to the Department of Ecology (DOE) for review and public comment as the process requires before the plan is approved by DOE for final adoption by the City. The open public comment period will expire on March 27, 2015. The Port has sent our comments and concerns to DOE for consideration as the process moves forward to completion. In our comments, the Port has submitted technical reports and other public documents. The Port has requested DOE to reject the City’s demand for expanded buffers/setbacks to 100feet even on an “interim basis”, and to reconfirm the existing 25ft buffer/setback is adequate and sufficient to meet the “no net loss” criteria as required by law.

Robert E. McChesney
Executive Director
PORT OF EDMONDS