

## Westgate wants to be more walkable, green, diverse

By Sharon Salyer, Herald Writer

EDMONDS — At stake is the future of land surrounding one of Edmonds' busiest intersections — Edmonds Way and 100th Avenue W. — home to popular grocery stores, coffee shops, restaurants and drugstores.

Once the Westgate neighborhood's most famous landmarks, Robinhood Lanes was demolished last year to make way for a Walgreens drugstore. This vanishing of a well-known business occurred as the city was studying the potential for future development in the area.

The Westgate business district is in the city's geographic bull's eye. "It's right in the center," said Richard Senderoff, a longtime resident. It has better access for the Edmonds community than any other business center in the city, he said.

The goal of the city's study of Westgate is a comprehensive plan that addresses diverse needs.

Edmonds Way is state Highway 104, the link between I-5 and the Edmonds-Kingston ferry. So one desire is to encourage business services that serve local and regional residents alike.

The city also is seeking to encourage environmentally friendly or "green" construction; more housing choices for both young and older adults; and public areas, such as plazas and pocket parks.

"We've got a very walkable downtown Edmonds," said Mayor Dave Earling. The city would like to recreate that feeling in Westgate and other city neighborhoods, with a mix of housing and businesses such as banks, grocery stores and restaurants.

The Westgate area has many of those features now, he said. "What's the missing piece? A walkable neighborhood."

Pedestrians trying to cross from one of the four corners to another can face an intimidating amount of traffic. Some 13,000 vehicles each day use eastbound Highway 104. A total of 14,000 cars use northbound and southbound 100th Avenue W. daily.

In a city rich with history and tradition, the plan has been met with varying degrees of support, questions, skepticism and resistance.

There's concern about building density and heights, Senderoff said. Many people want to keep the city's connected small-town feel. "There's folks skeptical of changes that imply something different than that," he said. "We're not just an exit off I-5. You have to have a reason to come to Edmonds."

The study of the Westgate area began in 2010. Dozens of people since have turned out for meetings and have written letters about the plan. The Edmonds Citizens Economic Development Commission issued a "white paper."

The City Council will consider taking action on the proposed zoning changes next month, nearly four years after the planning began.

Current zoning in the Westgate area allows for strip-mall type projects, said Mark Craig, president of Henbart, a Seattle-based commercial real estate developer which owns property in the area.

Developers are looking to build more dynamic, multi-use projects "that create more of a life, work and shop environment," which are pedestrian friendly and near public transit, he said.

In both public meetings and letters to officials, some residents have expressed concern about the increase in traffic new development would create. This was among the issues raised by Charles and Carol Kalkwarft in a letter: "More commercial buildings mean more traffic problems."

Earling said he understands the concern. "Traffic certainly is a part of the Westgate puzzle," he said.

Yet there are other considerations, too, Earling said. Some people need smaller, higher-density housing. Among them are young millennials, many of whom prefer mass transit, and older adults, some of whom want to simplify and downsize. "We need to think about all age groups," Earling said.

Rob Chave, the city's planning manager, said encouraging a mix of housing and business in the area could help change traffic patterns from a roadside commercial center to one where people are provided with a variety of activities.

For example, at Mill Creek's Town Center, "You go there and park and walk around," he said. "You don't drive from store to store."

University Village shopping center in Seattle is another example of “a place you can hang out for a while,” Chave said. “There are all kinds of things to do. There’s open space where you can relax.”

People love downtown Edmonds, “but we don’t have the small, ancillary centers that provide some of those same kinds of opportunities that people seem to want in urban areas,” Chave said.

Some, like the Kalkwarfts, remain skeptical. In their letter, they said they don’t understand the urgency of creating more commercial space and housing when there already are significant vacancies in the area. “As senior citizens, we would appreciate greater concern for open areas and the ability to move about easily within the Westgate area,” their letter says.

The city can’t dictate what businesses move to the Westgate area, but it can create an atmosphere to encourage development in a certain way, Senderoff said.

“There is no doubt the plan is intended to increase density somewhat,” he said. “I do think it has a bigger vision than just that.” It was intended to provide a benefit to the whole community and make Westgate more than just a “drive, buy and leave” area, he said.

“Change is hard,” Senderoff said. “These things are never easy. It’s never all benefit and no risk. The question is, do the benefits strongly outweigh the risk?”

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## **PLANNING WESTGATE**

Westgate is the area surrounding the intersection of Edmonds Way and 100th Ave W. It is home to businesses such as QFC, Starbucks, Bartell Drugs, PCC, Walgreens, McDonald’s and Ivar’s. The city of Edmonds soon will complete a comprehensive plan for the neighborhood. Likely changes include:

- Buildings are now capped at two stories. The new proposal would allow two-, three- and in some cases four-story buildings. Lower heights would be required near residential areas where slopes don’t provide a natural buffer.
- Open space and pedestrian walkways, with development that encourages walking rather than driving within the area.
- Denser development within the present commercial area.
- A new zoning classification called Westgate Mixed Use. This hybrid zoning would mix traditional uses and setbacks with elements not presently regulated by standard

zoning, such as building types and locations, requirements for amenities and open space. Commercial properties in the area would be changed to this zoning.

- Incentives for “green” building construction, stormwater filtration and green roofs with vegetation.
- Additional protection for surrounding slopes, trees and vegetation.
- Places for people to meet, such as plazas, sidewalks and pocket parks.

*Source: City of Edmonds*