

Jerry –

As I mentioned, our trade association's nat'l conference is that week, and I am now a boardmember, so must attend.

So thanks for the opportunity to share some things in writing. Yes, I opposed the rezone- to sum it up, 90 feet was too much height. I did spend significant time floating the idea of a compromise to my colleagues, state officials, and others- 65 feet. The reason was simple- what we have now on the isthmus is unacceptable. Vacant, derelict buildings and surface parking lots. And to remove the need for 50% of the land to go to surface parking, you must structure it. And for structured parking to pencil out even barely, it takes 5 stories...or 65 feet. My compromise was meant to be a pragmatic one. At the time, I hoped we could achieve both goals- housing density in downtown, and preserving significant views.

Since then, a lot has happened. And I have learned a lot. The Isthmus Park Feasibility study was VERY revealing, offering some good estimates and ideas. It showed that a park is indeed feasible, if a broad coalition can get behind it. I did not previously think it was feasible, as I stated in September 2008, and I was wrong. The study was sound, I read every word, and I am convinced. So I have you and the citizens of Olympia to thank for getting that study done.

In addition, we have seen unprecedented (at least in my time) citizen voices saying this area should be preserved. You cannot say you are listening to these voices and NOT be swayed by what they have to say. Like Watershed Park and Priest Point Park, the people are saying this large space should be open. And as one of my favorite poets says 'Open Lands open minds.' We are a community of accepting, open minded people...so it might just fit.

I was also inspired last fall when Bonnie Jacobs came to Council and talked about all the ideas of what COULD be done with the space. Pushing the negativity aside, she presented a list of options that would drive tourism, create economic activity, center the community...AND be a park. All the previous visions I had heard were more crushed marble walks and promenades ... not active, not energized, and not usable. Bonnie presented a list that would potentially bring thousands, if not hundreds of thousands to the area, and also build a real community space with many potential uses.

All in all ... what I thought was impossible is not only feasible, but could also be a huge benefit to the community.

And while it creates a great amenity- it still does not solve our problem of density downtown. I have been working with officials at the state, the city, and the private sector on developing what we call 'Opportunity' sites. Properties downtown that WE control, consolidate, cleanup, and then market for mixed use development. 4th and Columbia and the Colpitt's project are an early example. The Cleanup at 300 State is another. The Derelict Fish and Wildlife Property off Washington is ripe, and so are many others, often under government ownership. I can throw my full support behind developing the vision of an Isthmus Park stretching from Water Street to the Deschutes

River- but only if WE work together to create the economic drivers that will finance that park and create nearby residents to use it, by your group supporting this process of bringing 'opportunity sites' like this to market elsewhere in Downtown. We have incentives in place and I do not think we need to offer subsidies, but we can help by removing barriers, getting land consolidated and cleaned up, and working in a partnership to bring at least one site to market each year.

For every acre we want to acquire for the public, let's find a matching acre elsewhere in Downtown that can be committed to mixed use projects- and build our denser community, one project at a time. These projects will also create the economic activity that fuels the tax base- that allows us to afford the Park,

Key to all this, I think, is the participation of the State. We need leaders at the state to join us in calling openly for this vision to become reality. We need a clear statement that extending the campus to the bay is important. The City can do a lot, but not without a strong advocate in the state. A financing tool to accomplish our goals has already been presented- the Capital District. BY diverting sales tax revenue to capital projects, we have a long term financing tool to bond against, enabling us to acquire and develop properties now. You were supportive of this bill last year, and I think your continued advocacy is key to things succeeding.

I could go on and on ... but won't. In summary, I will say this. I am still a young public servant, and am very much still learning this job. I am not afraid to admit when I am wrong. My vote on the rezone was right. My compromise, while well intentioned, was the wrong proposal at the right time- hence it never got much traction. My belief that a park was impossible was wrong. It is not only possible, it is preferable, to me, and to the vast majority of citizens in Olympia.

There are so many things we cannot do in this world. When we find one that is possible, although improbable and difficult, don't we have to try for it with all we have to give?

My single biggest priority in the next term will be the Health of Budd Inlet. The more parks we have surrounding it, the easier that monumental task will be. Let's do it.

Best,

Joe