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**Attachment 4B**  
**Submitted Written Testimony**

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City of Florence Planning Commission  
Florence City Hall  
planningdepartment@ci.florence.or.us  
150 Highway 101  
Florence, OR 97439

Dear Members of the Planning Commission,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the potential zoning of the old Lotus property on Bay Street as residential, specifically for the development of condominiums. This decision warrants careful consideration in light of its broader implications for Old Town and its businesses.

Old Town has long been a place of interest, yet many local businesses have struggled in recent years. The transformation of this prime waterfront location into residential condos could detract from the unique character of Old Town and diminish the opportunity to create a destination that attracts visitors and supports local commerce.

As the owner of Waterlily Studio, a business that has consistently attracted visitors from Eugene and beyond since 2008, I understand the importance of creating places that contribute to the charm and appeal of our community. It is essential for Old Town to cultivate more destination points that draw people in and add to the atmosphere, where both residents and visitors can enjoy our local offerings.

Moreover, our town currently lacks engaging activities for younger people. This property presents a unique opportunity to develop something truly special—perhaps a brewpub, activity center, dance hall, or community gathering space. Such developments would not only draw foot traffic but also foster a sense of community, making Old Town a more appealing place for both residents and visitors.

Given the picturesque views of the dunes, the bridge, and the river, this property has immense potential to serve as a landmark and gathering place. Rather than converting it to individual condos—an outcome that may lead to properties being used primarily as seasonal rentals—we can envision a development that enhances community engagement and economic vitality.

Additionally, please consider the environmental implications of placing residential units in a tsunami inundation zone. Such a decision raises concerns about safety and long-term sustainability in our city.

I believe that this property could be transformed into a vibrant space that benefits everyone—residents, visitors, and local businesses. By prioritizing additions that create engaging experiences for everyone, we can enhance the allure of Old Town and support the flourishing of our local economy.

I urge the Commission to reconsider the zoning proposal for the Lotus property and explore alternatives that would provide maximum benefit to our community. A collaborative approach to development will ensure that Florence remains a thriving community for all.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to seeing how we can collectively foster a prosperous future for Florence.

Sincerely,  
Lily Madera Hursh

## Some thoughts on uses for Lotus Site, overlooking the Siuslaw Estuary

A city that has an estuary running through it is fortunate indeed if planners seek guidance in development and management of this resource for the public good. If the goal is more housing, it is a sad loss. As I understand it, the owners of the Lotus Site are waiting to hear what suggestions might come from public input, and since estuaries have enriched my life over the decades, I offer my suggestions based on what I have seen and experienced in those places.

Any interest that the state of Oregon might have needs to be considered first. Input from several agencies and the Marine Science Department at the University will inform the decision. That input could be as close as Charleston where the Coos estuary has spawned research and education. The Confederated Tribes should have a seat at the table.

Florence is proud to call ourselves a Coast Guard City. Our Coast Guard building, and the area around it, are experiencing slippage. The Coast Guard might be eager to consider the purchase of the Lotus Site. If the building can be saved, imagine offices along with a small museum such as the lifeboat stations in Port Orford and Winchester Bay. If the upper story remains it could serve as quarters for visiting public speakers, educators, and dignitaries involved in estuarine and watershed research from the US and other countries.

Florence should take its place in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, a network of reserves across the US that protect and study more than 1.3 million acres of estuarine systems. Each of the reserves is managed by NOAA, another possible partner for this Florence project. I once lived near Elkhorn Slough, Moss Landing, California, Monterey County. In its early life this tidal estuary provided a walking path for locals and a small building for research and mapping. It is a bird watcher's/photographer's delight and that small building had grown as eco-tourism has expanded. Elkhorn Slough is now a "big deal" but still remains a special place for locals to enjoy nature up close, just as the Lotus Site may be one day.

When I moved to Coos Bay I soon discovered South Slough, another beautiful, tucked-away jewel being slowly and carefully developed by the best scientific minds. Located above the estuary between Charleston and Hwy. 101, sits the rustic appearing visitor's center featuring a large meeting room whose walls are lined by works from local artists. Microscopes and drawers full of fossils, bones, shells and feathers offer children their first taste of scientific research. The property encompasses miles of walking trails and a kayak launch. The Saturdays In Winter film series drew me there once a month for free nature documentaries. We all learned to pronounce the word "estuarine" at South Slough. The schedule offers so many family activities such as van trips to bird watching spots around Charleston, and to Coos Bay's North Spit with spotting scopes in hand to see more birds and dune critters, plus children's programs (The Tide of the Toddlers). As with the Coast Guard facilities along the coast, this is a modest tourist draw with the potential for a good increase in tourist and local attendance. Florence has the advantage of its Old Town being located within an easy walk.

Charleston has benefited from South Slough's presence as well as the University of Oregon's Marine Science Institute. There could be a bonus tie in with our own junior college. Their beautifully restored Coast Guard Lifeboat Station attracts diverse groups of students and locals who wish to learn more about marine science. Training sessions for Oregon's Coast Watch Program are held there. Charleston built its Marine Life Center above its harbor. Featuring several specimen tanks, its other exhibits are educational and imaginative. It took thought and careful planning. It's a fun place for youngsters to explore and wonder. Here is a Coast Guard City and an estuary at work.

## IF THE BUILDING IS TO BE RAZED.....

Coos Bay, growing in recognition as a city that knows how to make good use of its estuary, relocated its Maritime Museum to its waterfront, and expanded it to include the area's early history. It is a must-see attraction for people visiting the Oregon Coast. A large log pavilion nearby could serve as inspiration for the Lotus Site re-imagined. This structure invites people in to browse through the historical interpretive signs. An old locomotive is a draw for kids. It is a multi purpose structure that serves the city well, for instance, the swearing in of CASA volunteers, with a Coos County Judge and state representative attending. It is available to the public at all times, and features picnic tables for those who want to eat their meal under cover, next to an unbeatable view. As with Florence, restaurants and shopping are a quick walk away. There is certainly enough room at the Lotus Site for a simple city park such as this. I picture new railings with telescopes affixed, and picnic tables with plexiglass wind shelters. It would be another boost for food purveyors in Old Town.

Another way to provide a City Park: Bandon, on the Coquille River Estuary, sets a beautiful example of how a city park can enhance an Old Town. The city decided to make its crabbing dock something special for both locals and visitors. Large, carved, fantastical creatures provide sitting and climbing opportunities for young and old...lots of photo-ops. A cleverly constructed elongated frame continues the length of the dock, providing a wind and rain proof gallery for art shows of all kinds...school kids through adults. A rustic log structure welcomes visitors to come in out of the breeze. Play a game of checkers, work on a variety of projects, or simply add a log to the fireplace and contemplate, but please, no cell phones. Estuaries are good for people.

Reedsport built the Umpqua Discovery Center on its estuary. It's all for the kids, but grownups find plenty to enjoy. Educational...entertaining...perfect for a small town. Too ambitious for the Lotus Site, with school and tour buses arriving and departing. What an ambitious use of an estuary. They made it work.

The city is ready to install a veteran's memorial. I don't know the size of the piece. Might The Lotus Site be a perfect place for it? Our splendid Military Museum may not be the best spot. Other communities along the west coast place such bronze remembrances in a setting where water is constantly moving, as does our own memorial in Old Town. Consider the Vietnam Memorial in Newport with its beautiful and evocative walkway.) Our estuary provides that setting. Again, a few telescopes, benches, picnic tables with windbreaks and, of course, flags. I can imagine a large statue in the center of the parking lot, with the pavement re-stripped in circular fashion. Benches would allow people to sit and contemplate. This could be combined with either of the ideas above for a city park, or remain a stand-alone memorial. (I have long thought about an acquisition for the Military Museum, and it is overdue for a move from Coos Bay to Florence. It was given by France to ALL the people of Oregon to wonder over, a true piece of military history. Cal Applebee can tell you more.)

Another thought for the Lotus Site would require input from non-motorized watercraft operators in our community. Coos County was able to use a small piece of land, approx. 8 to 10 miles up the estuary, to provide a parking area and launch for these water sports. Depending on the time of year, and the river's whims, it could serve as a sweet spot for those who enjoy the more gentle water sports. Perhaps this thought could be raised in Planning Dept. Meetings. It would be a quiet use in this residential area. It might be another attraction for the city park concept. Paddle boarding has become a competitive event. Festivals, anyone?

I visit the Lotus Site often with my little dog, and we both enjoy that awe-inspiring view, the fresh breeze, and the sense that we have the good fortune to live here. Our local residents, especially those who are unable to walk along the beach, should always be able to have access to this inspiring view. Florence seems to be quickly losing our forest feel as the wooded places fall to development. What a shame it would be to give up the opportunity we have here to keep something wild, really wild. The wild things that take life from the estuary will not complain about the noise on the bridge.

Florence is the middle link in a chain of Oregon's very special places, its estuaries. We need to take this amazing opportunity, offered by extremely generous people, to embrace it, and do something important with it, joining with the chain of estuaries on the entire west coast to a coastline across the country, to realize something that will last, delight, and educate people who will be planting roots here after we are gone. Florence is at the very center of this chain, and in a perfect position to draw the best minds in marine research from north, south and indeed, the country to our city. Or, perhaps, to simply beckon people who want, and need, to restore and renew themselves from the many challenges of life in these times.

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