

Conservation district proposes purchase of PUD 3 building

By ARLA SHEPHARD
MASON COUNTY LIFE

Pending a feasibility study, the Mason Conservation District could make a new home in downtown Shelton, at the former administration building owned by Mason County Public Utility District No. 3.

The building on 307 West Cota St. has more visibility and accessibility to the public than the conservation district's current space leased in the Port of Shelton's business park, said district manager John Bolender.

Also, with 14,000 square feet, the building is four times as large as the district's current location, which it leases for \$2,400 a month from the port.

"Our staff has grown and we are beyond capacity here in terms of space," Bolender said. "We would also prefer to own the asset so we can retain some value of the public dollar."

The former PUD 3 property contains three parcels on a half block, including the building, a small park and a parking lot, as well as a fourth parcel across Grove Street.

The conservation district would relocate entirely to the new building, where Bolender foresees it would stay for the considerable long-term future.

"We've been around since 1956 and we expect to be around a good long while longer," he said. "That's part of what prompted us to be more motivated to own our own building. I



PHOTO BY ARLA SHEPHARD

can't envision growing out of that space."

Mason Conservation District's mission is to promote the sustainable use, conservation and restoration of the natural resources in the community.

The district has 16 employees and is funded primarily through grants and contracts, as opposed to tax assessments, like many other conservation districts nationwide.

The district's past projects include habitat restoration at Shelton Creek and the design and construction of low-impact stormwater at Turning Pointe Domestic Violence Services.

Currently, Mason Conservation District is working with Mason Transit Authority and the City of Shelton on a proposal to create a pervious parking lot, rain

garden and outdoor plaza space near the transit agency's community center on Franklin Street.

While the conservation district has had its hands in many projects county-wide, many people still aren't sure where the district's headquarters are or what it does, Bolender said.

The district has leased its office at the Port of Shelton's Sanderson Field since 2006.

"We would like to not only be more visible, but more accessible," Bolender said. "We want to become more active in the community, particularly in the city of Shelton."

The PUD 3 building has remained vacant since the utility relocated its operations to a new facility on Johns Prairie Road in 2012.

The utility's board of

commissioners approved a proposal to sell the Cota Street property to the conservation district on Sept. 23. The utility's asking price was listed at \$650,000.

Mason Conservation District has until Dec. 23 to complete its feasibility study, wherein an engineer will assess the building's electrical and other systems, as well as seismic

Mason Conservation District has made an offer to purchase Mason County Public Utility District No. 3's former administration building on West Cota Street. The district has until Dec. 23 to complete a feasibility study.

fortitude.

If all proceeds smoothly, the proposal's closing period is around the second week of January, with the conservation district ready to move in by the end of that month.

The district has no plans to significantly remodel the building, only to update the interior with minor modifications, such as painting walls or redoing the carpet, Bolender said.

"It's not a done deal," he said. "However, I have been cautiously optimistic. We'd like to see this come to fruition ... it's a good feeling for the downtown. We feel we're making a contribution."

PUD 3 maintains a payment center and telecommunications facility at 310 West Cota Street in downtown Shelton.

For more information on Mason Conservation District, visit www.masoncd.org. ■

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