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Lots considered for new library

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A nonprofit community group is considering several properties on the west side of Olympia for a public plaza anchored by a new branch of the Timberland Regional Library.

City Councilman Craig Ottavelli, who also is vice president of the West Olympia Community Visioning Group, said the group plans to make an offer on a property that would be an option to hold it for a year.

The goal is for the group to raise funds and build the new facility, which could include an amphitheater, carillon tower and fountain, he said. Timberland Regional Library then would provide staff and materials for the new library.

It's unclear how much it would cost, and it could be years before it is built.

"It's not about today," Ottavelli said. "It's about tomorrow. It's about this long-range vision."

The group has been working for about a year on the project: the goal is to create an identity for the west side, Ottavelli said. At this year's City Council retreat, he pitched the project as one of Olympia's top priorities, and other council members agreed, placing it as the city's eighth priority for the year.

"The city's had ... an opportunity to really focus on our downtown, which has been great," he said. "But we need to broaden our scope."

The group's president is Jim Morris of MPH Holdings, who also is president of the West Olympia Business Association. Morris said he didn't have time to talk Monday.

Timberland Regional Library has 27 community libraries, five cooperative library centers and two library kiosks in Thurston, Lewis, Mason, Grays Harbor and Pacific counties. Its existing Olympia location, at Eighth Avenue and Franklin Street, was built in 1978, but was recently remodeled.

A west-side library might be years away, especially because voters turned down a recent measure to raise the maximum tax levy to 50 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value from 32.9 cents. Residents also voted down two bond issues in 1997 to build a larger downtown library.

Cheryl Heywood, the chief librarian at Timberland's downtown Olympia branch, said the library system is looking to cut \$2.5 million out of its budget in 2010 because of the recent levy failure. But she said talks about the west side library will continue despite the setback. She said she has been a member of the group since its beginning.

The library has long wanted a new, bigger downtown library. Heywood said building a library on the west side wouldn't preclude that. "I definitely think the city could use both," she said.

She noted that although the library levy failed districtwide, it passed in Olympia and Tumwater. It failed in Lacey.

She hailed the west Olympia effort.

"There's a lot of momentum, and there's a lot of energy, and there's a lot of positive energy," she said.