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## West-side library a long-range goal

Community activists pressing for a new west Olympia library hope to make an offer on a parcel of property to lock it up for a year. That would give the West Olympia Community Visioning Group time to make progress toward its goal of a new community gathering space anchored by a branch of the Timberland Regional Library system.

The vision also includes a public plaza, amphitheater, carillon tower and fountain.

It's a grand vision, but let's be clear. A west-side library is likely years away from reality.

By announcing their property purchase plans, the west Olympia visioning group might have confused voters.

After all, it was just three weeks ago when voters in the five-county Timberland Regional Library system soundly rejected a ballot proposition to increase property taxes to maintain existing library services. The levy lid increase was rejected by 55 percent of the voters.

At the time, Timberland executive director Jodi Reng said, "We're asking to maintain existing services. We're not adding new services or opening new libraries, just continuing to provide the services we have now."

So how is it the west Olympia group is talking about a new library?

The answer lies in the manner in which library buildings and library services are paid for.

For the most part, Timberland provides library services — books, CDs, computers, tapes, resource material, etc. The five-county system also hires and trains the librarians who stock the shelves and assist patrons. The library buildings themselves — for the most part — are financed by city governments.

Timberland Regional Library system, for example, does not own the library buildings in Olympia, Lacey or Tumwater. Generally, city libraries are financed and built when city voters approve a construction bond. Lacey, which built its library without a public vote, is a bit of an exception.

And truth be told, Olympia voters have not always looked kindly upon requests for library construction funds.

Olympia's downtown library, located at the corner of Eighth Avenue and Franklin Street, was built in 1978, but recently received a facelift. Efforts to build a larger downtown library or a second library on the west side have fallen flat. Residents voted down two bond issues in 1997 to build a larger downtown library. And while there has been talk for years about taking another stab at a library bond issue, the talk has not generated any action.

Until now, that is.

The visioning group has been quietly working on a west Olympia facility plan for about a year. They have a champion in Craig Ottavelli, a member of the Olympia City Council who is also vice chairman of the West Olympia Community Visioning Group. Ottavelli convinced his colleagues on the City Council to include the west Olympia plan as one of the city's top priorities for the year.

So there is a bit of momentum behind this movement. And that's a good thing because most of the growth in the capital city during the past decade has been on the west side. Having a library more convenient and a community gathering center for the west side is a great idea.

But it's only an idea at this point.

As excited as he is about the prospects of a west side library, Ottavelli cautions: "It's not about today. It's about tomorrow. It's about this long-range vision."

Dreaming never hurts.

But it's hard for members of the public to understand how Ottavelli and his group can be talking about building a new library at a time when Timberland officials say they will have to cut \$2.5 million out of the budget and cut service because of the recent levy failure.

Before Olympia voters are asked to increase taxes to build a new library, a financing plan must be in place to provide library services without taking dollars away from Timberland's 27 other community libraries.