

MTA offers up building as restroom facility

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A centrally located building could be the home of a new public restroom, if the right organizations step up to take the lead.

Mason Transit Authority owns an empty 600-square-foot building on Railroad Avenue in downtown Shelton with electricity, water and sewer. MTA says it has no use for the building, but Transit-Community Center manager Kathy Geist said the transit center is willing to work with any group that wants to turn the building into a restroom.

"I was lying in bed one night, and it came to me," Geist said. "What is one of the No. 1 things this town needs? Public restrooms. And this is the perfect building for it."

Geist said the building, built in 1958, is in working condition; until recently, it was home to Ascend Roofing. However, the company recently moved to a new location. Unless a group takes over the building, MTA plans to demolish it during an upcoming project, which will turn the empty lot next door into a parking lot with raised gardens and an electric car charging station.

MTA acquired the property in 2006 as part of the National Guard surplus land it purchased for the Transit-Community Center.

While a restroom project is outside MTA's mission, the transit authority



Journal photo by Brianna Loper

Mason Transit Authority owns a 600-square-foot building on Railroad Avenue. Transit-Community Center manager Kathy Geist said she thinks the building would make a perfect public restroom for downtown.

said it would donate the building to any group or groups that committed to transforming the empty building into a public restroom facility.

Geist estimates the building donation would account for more than half of the cost of building a new facility.

"If you think that it would cost, oh, maybe \$150,000 to build something like this, then you're already \$100,000 on

your way," she said. "It's perfect for a public restroom."

The inside of the building would need to be gutted and redone. Right now, the interior is several rooms, previously used for offices.

Geist pointed to entities such as the City of Shelton, Shelton-Mason County

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Chamber of Commerce and local Kiwanis or Rotary clubs that could head up the project. However, she added, multiple groups could take over different parts of the project and work together.

"Partners breed inclusiveness and togetherness to meet the public's needs," Geist said, adding that the more groups that participate in the project, the more people will feel an ownership of the restrooms.

Green Diamond Resource Co. has offered to help fund part of the project, Geist said.

She said she's talked with city officials such as community and economic development director Steve Goins, who briefed the Shelton Poverty Advisory Team (SPAT) on the idea.

"They (SPAT) are supportive of having something like that in the city," Goins told the *Journal*.

The advisory team found a need for public restrooms downtown Shelton, and last year, got three portable restrooms approved by the city.

The portable toilets were installed last fall at Brewer Park, a lot near the pump station on Front Street and the Shelton Civic Center parking lot on Cota Street. The city commission approved \$5,000 to keep the toilets downtown through 2016.

Goins said the portable toilets have been a "stop gap, but they're not everyone's favorite place to relieve themselves."

Goins said SPAT has not moved forward with the idea of taking ownership of the public restroom renovation project on Railroad Avenue.

"The poverty advisory team advises the city commission and they have not taken any action to bring a formal recommendation to the commission," he said.

PARKING LOT PROJECT

In addition to the vacant building, MTA owns an empty lot, which it plans to renovate into an upscale parking area and gathering place.

Mason Transit Authority recently received a state Department of Ecology stormwater grant to revamp the gravel parking area behind the new Transit-Community Center.

The grant will allow MTA to insert parking pavers, which clean and filter

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Kathy Geist, Mason Transit Authority's Transit-Community Center manager

stormwater before it re-enters Oakland Bay.

The pavers will serve as a parking lot during the day, but as a community gathering area or plaza during off-hours.

The transit authority plans to add raised garden beds, and hopes community youth services will use the gardens to plant produce as part of their programs.

Geist said the plaza area could be used for community events such as farmers markets or even outdoor movies, projected on the building wall next door.

"We didn't want to pave paradise and put up a parking lot," Geist said. "Not on Railroad Avenue."

In addition, MTA plans to add an electric vehicle charging station.

"It's one more way to draw people to downtown," Geist said. "Think about it — they stop here to charge their car, use the public restroom, and then walk around to shop or get some food in downtown Shelton."

On U.S. Highway 101, the closest charging stations are in Kamilche to the south, and in Port Townsend to the north, according to a map on Plug Share's website.

The project is scheduled to break ground next spring, after MTA receives the required permits and planning.

Geist said if no organization or individual steps up to take over the potential restroom building by that time, the facility will be demolished.

For more information on the potential public restroom project or to get involved, call Geist at 432-5754 or email kgeist@masontransit.org.