

DOVER POST

Greater Dover Committee looking to house nonprofits

By Jayne Gest, Staff Writer

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The Greater Dover Committee is working on plans to buy the former Wachovia Bank on Loockerman Street and rent it to non-profit groups.

jayne.gest@doverpost.com

The former Wachovia Bank building, at 101 W. Loockerman St., may soon have a new purpose.

The Greater Dover Committee is moving forward with plans to open a community service building in downtown Dover with the help of a \$600,000 grant from the Longwood Foundation and a \$200,000 grant from the Welfare Foundation.

Members hope to use the funds to purchase the Wachovia building through the Greater Dover Foundation, as long as they get a conditional use permit from the Dover Planning Commission when they come before the commission in March, said Shelly Cecchett, executive director of both the Greater Dover Foundation and Greater Dover Committee.

The community service building would be modeled after the 10-story Community Service Building, at 100 W. 10th St., Wilmington, which has more than 70 nonprofit tenants and has been open since 1997.

“We’ve seen it work,” Cecchett said of the Wilmington Community Service Building. “We’re just going to bring it to our town, and in this economy who can’t use a break?”

Cecchett said they eventually want to house 501(c)3 organizations at below market rent rates, although the committee still is applying for more grants as well as looking at raising additional funds to renovate the building itself.

President of the Greater Dover Committee Bob MacLeish said the 8,500-square-foot building even could be expanded in the future. Committee members looked at a number of properties, but felt the Wachovia building would best fit their needs, with 16 parking spaces behind the building and space for expansion, he added.

By purchasing the building outright, the tenants' rates won't be paying off the mortgage, which is a huge piece of the pie, Cecchett explained. Although tenants would have to pay for utilities, there are other cost savings such as a building manager who will be volunteering his time and shared space like meeting rooms.

"Nonprofits are struggling and anything we can do to take away things they have to spend for, like space, is important," Cecchett said. "We're not in this for the money. We are in this to give back and help these organizations do more for our community."

MacLeish said it's critical to put as much funding back into nonprofits' programs as possible and having a central location also can help cut down the cost associated with meeting other groups.

The idea for the Dover building came from one of the Greater Dover Committee members, who are a group of CEOs and business leaders working to improve the quality of life in Dover, Cecchett said.

"These are real doers and community-minded individuals," she said, later adding that the project "has moved so quickly, which is so exciting."

It's been less than a year since the idea was first discussed, she added.

Both Cecchett and MacLeish said one key component has been to make sure the building is in the heart of Dover in the hope it would help with the revitalization by bringing traffic downtown to use the restaurants and shops.

"It's a really perfect puzzle when you think of it all," Cecchett said. "There's a lot of people who would benefit from this building."

Some nonprofit organizations already have shown interest, such as Read Aloud Delaware and the Delaware Community Foundation in Wilmington. Cecchett said there are a lot of organizations that see Dover as central place between north and south.

Email Jayne Gest at jayne.gest@doverpost.com