

Option Bought For Potential Police/Fire Facility Site

The North Wilkesboro commissioners on Tuesday night agreed to pay \$10,000 for a six-month option to purchase 19.43 acres on Second Street as potential site for a public safety facility that would house the town's police and fire departments.

The \$10,000 would go toward the \$500,000 purchase price if the town decided to buy the land from Janie Winebarger Cheek, Billy Mathis, Maggie M. Mathis, Donna Mathis McDowell, Richard E. McDowell, Robin Mathis Stanley, Rogan Chad Mathis and Renee Mathis, who already signed the option to purchase. The money is non-refundable if the purchase isn't made.

ADW Architects estimated the combined cost of the land and a 24,000-square-foot facility for the police and fire departments on the property at \$6.7 million.

The town will conduct due diligence on the property during the six-month option period. This would include determining if two different access sites to public roads could be established and if the N.C. Department of Transportation would put up a stoplight on Second Street for access.

Town Manager Larry South said if the land is found unsuitable for a public safety facility, the town could still purchase it for another use.

Commissioner Joe Johnston made the motion to approve the option to purchase.

"I expressed opposition about putting it there because of visibility," he said. "I haven't changed that but I don't think there's any reason not to approve this. There are a lot of uses which could be a good thing for the town."

Commissioner Debbie Ferguson seconded the motion. She said that after spending time with Police Chief Joe Rankin and Fire Chief Jimmy Martin, she believes this is the right site for the facility.

"I got a sense that both of the chiefs support this site and feel that it is the right place and gives us room to grow," she said. "Our job is to find a facility that will meet the town's needs for fifty years."

Commissioner Bert Hall said, "I'm not sold on the site but we're obligated to do our part and see."

Commissioner Junior Goforth said, "It's the best site for possible growth. But we need to look into the cost and get new estimates to try to get the cost down."

Commissioner Bart Hayes said he has also talked with both chiefs. "I can think of no better place to put it," he said. Hayes said a new facility is important to attract and retain a high caliber of firefighters.

Mayor Robert Johnson said, "We've chased this rabbit for 12-14 years. We can come to a consensus to move forward. We need to do our due diligence to get the cost as reasonable as we can. Let's see what we can get done this year on this project."