

Metal mystery may bury postal site

Object hampers BC post office expansion plans

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BOULDER CREEK — The discovery of an unidentified buried object could send a proposed post office site to the dead letter office.

Recent soil tests have detected some type of metal object buried in the vacant lot behind the Liberty Bank on Highway 9.

What it is, how big it is, and how far down it's located, are as-yet unanswered questions.

Possibilities floating through the rumor mill include a fuel tank, a still, a car — or maybe even the long-lost site of Al Capone's vault.

Whatever it is, it is apparently enough to scare off the postal service. The postal service will be re-advertising

for another location in the next couple of weeks, said Gus Ruiz, postal service spokesman.

"At this time, no suitable site has been found," said Ruiz, who would not say that any site had specifically been rejected.

According to Liberty Bank manager Dave Walker, "We are still in negotiations with the postal authorities."

Until the metal mystery surfaced, the spot was considered the likely choice of the United States Postal Service for the town's new post office.

The decision to move the 32-year-old post office from its Pine Street location started nearly a year ago.

The 3,000-square-foot facility, sited on a 5,000 square foot piece of land, is badly overcrowded, postal officials say, with little parking available for its 16 employees and none for the public.

With the building's current lease due to expire next March, postal officials proposed replacing it with a 9,500 square feet building on 45,000 square feet.

Several sites were mentioned, includ-

ing the 33,300-square-foot parcel behind Liberty Bank.

Walker said that postal authorities had expressed interest in the property, and were conducting preliminary investigations.

He said price had not been discussed. The metal object was detected by routine seismic tests of the property, in which sound waves were sent through the soil, Walker said.

"The fact is, they have found some type of metal object on the property," he said. "Right now, they are reviewing the soil engineering report, and we're doing some further evaluation of that report."

The site, now vacant, has previously held a fruit stand, a rockery and a lumber mill.

Walker said that digging up the buried object will have to wait until he determines whether a permit is needed or not.

Environmental Health official John Ricker said a grading permit is probably not needed to dig down to see what's there.

However, Ricker said if it does turn out to be hazardous material, a permit would be needed to clean it up.

The possible elimination of the bank property throws open the question of where to put the post office.

That decision was described earlier by San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor Fred Keeley as critical to downtown Boulder Creek. In Boulder Creek Town Plan meetings, Keeley compared the post office to a "6,000-pound gorilla." Although the town is surrounded by vast acreage of wooded forestlands, there are very few large parcels in downtown Boulder Creek.

If no suitable site is found, Ruiz said, the postal service has several options. They could buy an already-existing building and turn it into a post office, or lease a building that already exists.

The could also expand the territory where they look for a site. Ruiz said that the postal service would not choose a remote location.

"The post office is central to the community," said Ruiz. "It has to be accessible."