

City taking over old post office

Watsonville city officials this morning were expecting the city to take ownership of the old post office by the end of the day today.

Bill Segal, the city's temporary redevelopment director, said this morning that he expected escrow to close today. The only thing holding it up, he said, was that the federal government needed to move some things — old paint, lockers, desks and other assorted items — out of the building.

"It could be ours by the end of the day," Segal said.

The city wants to buy the historic building on the plaza for possible use as a restaurant and visitor's center, the idea being to draw more people downtown.

Segal said the federal General Services Administration had accepted the city's offer of \$425,000 for the building Nov. 22.

"I think it's a pretty good deal," Segal said.

An appraiser had put the value of the building at \$850,000, he said.

Several other uses are being considered for the building, includ-

ing renting it out as office space, putting a museum in it or using it for city offices, which are outgrowing their current buildings.

Segal said the restaurant is "the No. 1 option," because the city needs the revenues such a business could generate, and because a successful restaurant could provide the draw to the downtown the city wants. People who favor a restaurant there point to the success of Jalisco's restaurant, he said, which, in the refurbished PG&E building on Main Street, is heavy on the atmosphere and moderate on the pocketbook. Segal said he thinks Watsonville could support another restaurant with that combination.

The city won't run the restaurant — it'll look to lease the space as soon as possible, Segal said, adding that a couple of people have already expressed interest.

A visitor's center would most likely accompany the restaurant, and would sell locally produced Watsonville items — such as Martinelli's cider — and provide information about the area.

Some have called for the post office to be used as a museum or art gallery, but Segal said the city just can't afford to purchase the building and turn it over for public use. He said that with the library expansion and the youth center the city is planning to build, there should be more room for community meetings and events.

The city did a bit of maneuvering to place itself in a good position for the bidding on the building. Public agencies had been invited to take a first crack at making an offer, but none except the city were interested. Segal said the city made its offer Nov. 22, the Friday before the Monday the General Services Administration said it would open bidding. The offer was only good until the end of the day. It was accepted.

The government requires a cash payment for its buildings and sells them "as is," Segal said. The basic attitude of the federal government in such transactions is "caveat emptor," Segal said, but the city did manage to get a "small warranty" on the building.