

# What's the best use for Boise warehouse?

A growing biotech company could move into the prime Downtown real estate. But not everybody says that's the right thing to do with city property.

BY CYNTHIA SEWELL

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A vacant city-owned warehouse near Boise's main library could soon be the new home for Biomark. The move could bring more jobs Downtown and generate lease revenue "through the improvement and utilization of a dilapidated city asset," said Mayor Dave Bieter aide Jade Riley.

But the proposal is raising several questions, including:

- Is this the best use for a city building in a premium location?
- Is the city picking favorites by leasing property to one local company?
- Should the city commit property it owns in its prominent Downtown cultural district to nondistrict uses?

See BIOMARK, A6

SEE A MAP OF THE AREA

Plus, find out how to have your say. A6

## BIOMARK

CONTINUED FROM A1

➤ Could a long-term lease and remodeling affect future expansion or development of Boise's Downtown library campus?

Downtown developer Mark Rivers is one of those questioning whether there aren't better ways to use the site near the Boise River.

"The city needs to be a smart, strategic steward of its properties," he said. "This is the city's last developable site along the Greenbelt in the Downtown core — it is beachfront. Shouldn't it be used for a grand purpose?" said Rivers.

In an effort to help promote the city's cultural district, Rivers this month offered to give the city \$25,000 to strengthen its cultural district plan.

### A NEW HOME FOR BIOMARK?

Biomark is a Boise company that makes electronic tags and monitoring devices for fish and wildlife. It's looking to relocate its office and

## WAREHOUSE PUBLIC HEARING

The Boise Planning and Zoning Commission meets at 6 p.m. Monday, March 7, at City Hall, third floor, 150 N. Capitol Blvd.

The commission will consider Rocky Mountain Development's application to remodel the city-owned warehouse at 705 S. 8th St. The City Council will hold a hearing at a later date on the proposed lease agreement.

manufacturing plant from Americana Boulevard. It is represented by Rocky Mountain Development, which has a March 7 hearing before the Boise Planning and Zoning Commission to remodel the vacant warehouse at 705 S. 8th St. The city has owned the 15,000-square-foot warehouse and its 1-acre lot since 2002.

The city wants to keep innovative Biomark and its 20-plus jobs in Boise, said John Brunelle, a member of Bieter's economic develop-

ment team.

Last summer, Rocky Mountain negotiated with the city's urban renewal agency, Capital City Development Corp., to renovate and occupy a warehouse owned by CCDC at 9th and River streets. That project got shelved because Rocky Mountain said the costs were too high to remediate the site and the building, abide by the urban renewal agency's development policies and secure parking.

So Rocky Mountain began talking with Brunelle about renovating the vacant warehouse the city owns next to the library.

Rocky Mountain doesn't have a lease agreement with the city yet, and any lease agreement must be approved by the City Council, Riley said. "This proposed transaction is still in the conceptual stage, so any discussion of specific terms and conditions would be premature," he said.

The city does not use taxpayer dollars to make improvements to a property that is leased to a for-profit entity, Riley said. Upgrades



This vacant warehouse on 8th Street behind the Boise Public Library lies within Boise's cultural district.

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to the property would be the responsibility of the developer.

Giving a business a lease on a city building is not picking favorites but doing what's in the city's best interests, said Riley.

State law does not require a competitive bidding process for the lease of city-owned property, Riley said. If the city wanted to sell the property, by law it would have to auction it to the highest bidder — and lose control over who moved in.

And the city's economic development staff is charged with "maximizing" use of city-owned property, which can include leasing or selling, said Brunelle.

"The mayor himself makes regular visits to local businesses and often discusses ways to help these companies thrive and expand," Riley said.

The city has several existing lease agreements with private businesses for city-owned property, including the Peak Fitness climbing gym at 27th and Fairview; the Giraffe Laugh on Grand Avenue; the storage of freight cars on 18 miles of city-owned rail line southeast of town; and hangar leases at the Boise Airport.

The city also is working on a lease for a solar-generating facility at its 20-Mile South Farm.

### CITY VISION FOR ITS CULTURAL DISTRICT

The city and CCDC adopted the Downtown Arts & Culture plan in 2007. The plan's goals include finding ways that cultural infrastructure can be created or enhanced through public and private investment.

The plan describes the 8th Street historic area as the "axis" for arts and culture in Downtown Boise and says "many opportunities exist for further investment. ... This is an excellent location for the much-needed community arts and culture center."

Managing Director of the Idaho Shakespeare Festival Mark Hofflund helped the city craft its cultural district plan.

"The primary mission was to raise consciousness and identify existing cultural resources," said Hofflund, who is also chairman of the Idaho Commission on the Arts.

The city can support the agenda to enhance the cultural district, Hofflund said, but businesses, nonprofits and the public share the responsibility of furthering the mission.

"We need to all pull on these oars together," Hofflund said.

If the city does not have the money to provide or build a new cultural amenity or facility on that site — and the private sector is not stepping up with a proposal — then the city should be looking for other ways the community can benefit, Hofflund said.

"The city can take that public resource to a higher level of use and then, perhaps, distribute its increased benefit to infuse greater support for the cultural community," he said. For example, the city could put the revenue from the building's lease toward culturally related programs or improvements, Hofflund said.

The city said it is continually looking for ways to enhance the cultural district. Last year, the city applied for a federal grant to create an

### BOISE CULTURAL DISTRICT

The area between 6th and 9th streets from Idaho Street to the Boise River

1. Boise Public Library
2. City-owned vacant warehouse (proposed Biomark facility)
3. CCDC-owned vacant warehouse
4. Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial
5. Foothills School and Trey McIntyre Project headquarters
6. Esther Simplot Performing Arts Academy
7. Fulton Street Theater
8. The Cabin Literary Center
9. Basque Museum
10. Qwest Arena
11. Boise Centre
12. Egyptian Theatre
13. Morrison Center
14. Julia Davis Park: Boise Art Museum, Idaho Historical Museum, Idaho Black History Museum, Discovery Center of Idaho, Zoo Boise.
15. BoDo



arts and culture incubator and public market in a warehouse within the cultural district, but the landowner decided to use the property in a different way.

The city has few tools available to serve as a catalyst for economic development, Riley said. Leasing the vacant library warehouse to a business has the potential to create and retain jobs. Additionally, in order for the cultural district to succeed, Riley said, it needs to have a balance of uses — commercial, retail, residential and cultural.

"Marquee activities" and arts events in the district tend to be on evenings and weekends. "A strong commercial business presence is needed to create the jobs that serve as a catalyst for revitalization and ensure a lively, 24/7 environment," Riley said.

Rivers helped redevelop the 8th Street Marketplace into BoDo and founded the annual Boise Curb Cup. In 2006 he proposed building the "Library Blocks," a six-block mixed-use \$200-million project along with a new main library in that same part of town, but the city never sanctioned the project, the economy tanked and the proposal went into the history books.

Rivers thinks any use of publicly owned buildings or land within the cultural district should be consistent with the city's vision for the district.

"If we are somehow motivated to rehab that warehouse, let Trey McIntyre Project or Shakespeare or other arts groups expand in there," Rivers said. "Let them create jobs and jump-start the district. Arts are jobs generators, too."

On Feb. 18, Rivers proposed to the mayor, council and CCDC giving \$25,000 to create "a written vision and conceptual plan for a renewed Boise Arts and Cultural District."

"The economy and Downtown need the boost," Rivers said. "Our arts community is flourishing and is a proven economic engine of its own."

Riley said the city is already focused on the arts. "We look forward to meeting with Mark Rivers so he can learn more about the work the city already has been doing to make the cultural district a reality."

"The city's recent support for cultural organizations like Trey McIntyre Project, Boise Contemporary Theater, Idaho Shakespeare and

Ballet Idaho proves our commitment to promoting arts as an economic driver; a potential Biomark presence in the cultural district is intended to advance that same vision," Riley said.

Rocky Mountain Development President Mike Fery said the cultural district will benefit from the \$1.5 million project.

"Our plans for this project include taking an 80-year-old nearly abandoned warehouse and completely renovating the exterior and interior, transforming it into a beautiful, well-appointed building," he said. "The art and cultural district could also benefit by having diversified people and uses in its vicinity. This diversity will enhance its position to attract new and varied patrons adding to its depth and success."

### A HOME FOR THE FUTURE MAIN LIBRARY

The debate over the warehouse site comes at a time when the city's main library is bursting at its seams and in need of expansion. Library staffers park their cars in the warehouse lot and the library uses part of the warehouse for storage.

Library Director Kevin Booe could not be reached for comment on the proposed lease/development of the library warehouse or how it could affect future library plans.

But Riley said there's no conflict.

The city's current plan for a new, expanded main library remains on track, although building the new branch library in Bown Crossing in Southeast Boise is the first library-building priority.

Discussion has swirled for years over where and how to build a new main library, and the city's preference today is to expand on its current property, Riley said. The proposed long-term lease or redevelopment of the warehouse site would not affect that expansion, he said.

Riley said if the warehouse is leased to Biomark or put to any other use, the library may have to use other city-owned buildings for storage. The city will ensure that any lease agreement includes provisions for adequate library parking, either on the leased property after hours or on adjacent properties, he said.

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The Idaho Statesman will be selling restaurant gift certificates from more than 50 of the Treasure Valley's best restaurants for up to 50% off.

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Blue Cow Frozen Yogurt	MickeyRay's
Blue Door Cafe	Moon's Kitchen Cafe
Boise River Ram	Murphy's Seafood & Steak House
Brick Oven Bistro	Nick & Willy's
Burrito Banditos	Ohana Hawaiian BBQ
Buzz Coffee & Cafe	Opa
Cafe Rio Mexican Grill	Papa Joe's
Cafe Russian Bear	Pizza Pipeline
Cancun	Polo's Carousel Cafe
Cazba	Popeye's Famous Fried Chicken
Chandler's Steakhouse	Quinn's Restaurant & Lounge
Cool Hand Luke's Steakhouse	Romio's Pizza & Pasta
Copper Canyon	Seasons
Diggs Pizza	Skippers Seafood & Chauder