



The town of Jackson is asking the U.S. Forest Service to consider the direct sale of 10 acres off North Cache Street, labeled "Town Parcel" in the map above. Options being considered for the site include roads, open space and a convention center.

Town makes case for Forest Service land

Purchase of 10 acres on North Cache would provide 'substantial public benefit,' town says.

By Cory Hatch and Tram Whitehurst

Town of Jackson officials want to purchase 10 acres of U.S. Forest Service property downtown to meet the needs of the community for years to come.

That's according to a final application submitted Friday to Bridger-Teton National Forest in which the town requested a direct sale of the North Cache Street parcel.

The application is a crucial step to justify the direct sale of the property, a practice the federal government discourages because it is noncompetitive and might not result in the highest return. The town therefore must show the sale would provide "substantial public benefit," that no other land is available and that it could pay for the purchase.

The Forest Service estimates the parcel is worth \$8 million to \$10 million. It seeks to have a deal done by November.

"We hope we've made a strong case for the direct sale," town planning director Tyler Sinclair said.

The Forest Service has been pondering the best use of the property for more than a decade. The sale of a portion of the site would allow it to upgrade or replace current facilities, and could influence whether the supervisor's office stays in town.

Forest Service officials said in a document earlier this month that they're still deciding whether to keep the office in Jackson or move it to Alpine.

For the town, the ability to obtain 10

acres of relatively undeveloped land in downtown Jackson represents a rare opportunity. In its application, it proposes using the site to build roads and parking, open a public transit center, create open space, expand the Jackson/Teton County Recreation Center, develop affordable housing or build a convention center.

"We left our options open in terms of land uses," town manager Bob McLaurin said. "We will have a community conversation about how it should be used."

To pay for the purchase, the town would look to the bond market and the specific purpose excise tax, according to its application.

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, which formally opposed any sale of public land, recently softened its stance over the prospect of the town purchasing the parcel.

In a formal statement, the alliance board said such a sale would "keep public lands in public hands" and that it is the "best solution that is currently available."

Alliance officials hope the sale will "significantly influence retaining the supervisor's office in Jackson," Louise Lasley, public lands director, said.

The support of the conservation alliance for the sale is "pretty huge," Bridger-Teton National Forest supervisor Jacque Buchanan said.

"If we go through with a direct sale, that's a good thing," she said. "It's good for the town, good for the Forest Service and good for the public."

Buchanan said she plans to discuss the town's proposal with regional Forest Service officials sometime this week.

"If the community feels that this is the right thing to do, now is the time to support the town," Buchanan said.

Group to ask citizens how they would cut U.S. budget

The Concord Coalition invites Jackson Hole residents to "be Congress" at a budget simulation event Friday.

The event, sponsored by the Democratic and Republican parties of Teton County, is intended to follow up on former U.S. Sen. Al Simpson's talk on the national debt in June. It will include a reception and refreshments along with an exercise designed to replicate the process federal lawmakers go through to pass the national budget.

Doors will open at 6:30 p.m. for

the reception, and the budget simulation will begin at 7 p.m. The event will be held at Hansen Hall at St. John's Episcopal Church on Glenwood Street.

The Concord Coalition is a nonpartisan nonprofit that works to educate the public on federal budgets, deficits and fiscal policy.

Questions can be directed to event organizer Paul Hansen, the coalition's regional director, at 413-8879 or phansen@concordcoalition.org.

The event is free to all comers.

"The American wage earner and the American housewife are a lot better economists than most economists care to admit. They know that a government big enough to give you everything you want is a government big enough to take from you everything you have."

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