

# Old Lester depot has new owner

by Herb Belanger  
Times South bureau

The Lester depot, the 97-year-old railroad station in the Cascade Mountains, has been sold by the Burlington North Railroad to a Woodinville developer, Wayne Farrer Jr., for \$1.

The sale was made with the stipulation that the building would be removed from the BN property by Feb. 1. What Farrer intends to do with the building was not indicated and he could not be reached yesterday for comment.

The depot has been a subject of major interest among historically minded people who feel that it should be saved as a memorial of a time when the first railroad line was punched across the Cascade Mountains opening the Puget Sound area to direct communication with the East.

A decision by the King County Landmarks Commission on whether the depot should be designated as a county landmark is due at the commission's meeting tomorrow.

Landmark designation provides a measure of protection for a building or site in that any subsequent alterations or significant

changes have to meet with the approval of the commission. The ordinance provides for appeals of commission decisions to be made to the County Council.

Kjris Lund, commission administrator, said that a brief talk she had with Farrer indicated that he would be looking at ways to make the building usable.

The railroad had no further use for the structure and wants it removed from its right-of-way in the remote mountain community south of Snoqualmie Pass. A problem with moving the building is that Lester is in the city of Tacoma watershed and there is no convenient place to move it nearby.

A permit to demolish the structure has been sought by BN, but sale of structure probably invalidates that application.

Lund said she talked recently with representatives of the Tacoma watershed who disputed claims made at a commission hearing about ownership of some land in Lester. Some of the few remaining residents of the town had suggested that the depot could be moved to a site beside the Lester school.

She was told that Tacoma owns all of the land there, that the city has a closed-watershed policy and that leases or subleases can't be made without Tacoma's approval.

In another matter involving a historically important building, prospects appear brighter that something eventually can be done about resuming restoration of the 87-year-old Neely Mansion in Auburn.

About 20 people showed up Monday night at a meeting to organize the Neely Mansion Association, a nonprofit organization.

A problem is that the status of the Auburn Arts Council, which acquired title to the building and turned it over to the county, is unclear and there is a question on ownership of the building.

Dave Arnesen, of the county's Real Property Division, who attended the meeting, said the Arts Council apparently acquired a bill of sale for the building from the previous owners. But the county owns the land on which the building stands.

"We are looking into how to combine the title of the building

and the title of the property," Arnesen said. He said he told the newly formed association that if members can get the Auburn Arts Council to clear title to the building, the county would have no problem in combining the building and land titles.

Arnesen said the Real Property Division had been preparing a letter to be mailed to community groups in Auburn asking for input on how the restoration work, on which about \$100,000 of state and county grants already has been spent, can be resumed.

The letter was not mailed in view of the formation of the Neely Mansion Association, he said.

Elected officers of the association are Haugen, president; Rick Hatley, vice president; Arline Bauman, secretary, and Theresa Braeden, treasurer. Its board of directors includes Haugen, Pat Berrens, Linda Geitzler, Twila Bartholomew, Linda Van Nest, Mary Tungzik and Jenny Rice.

Another meeting has been set for Sept. 12 at Auburn City Hall. Persons interested in more information can call Haugen at 833-6205.