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City Council tags site for possible \$20 million artists hub

By JENNY ZUVELA

The local arts community envisions a downtown Everett mecca for the arts — studios for living and creating art, galleries, workshops, classroom space.

City officials envision a thriving arts district that attracts national attention and boosts the economy.

On April 26 the community moved one step closer to building a \$20 million regional arts center in downtown Everett.

The City Council committed to



Mike Dunn photo

Artspace and the city hope this parking garage at 2919 Hoyt Avenue will become an arts center for artists to live and work.

working with Artspace Projects of Minneapolis, an affordable housing developer for artists, in the possible future development of 2919 Hoyt Avenue, where an aging parking garage sits today.

Council members authorized the mayor to negotiate a lease agreement with Artspace for a term of 100 years — the expected life span of this type of arts center. It will be similar to the arrangement for the Everett Events Center — the city owns the land while the public facilities district owns the building.

“This is the first step, having the

city make the site available,” said Judy Tuohy, executive director of the Arts Council of Snohomish County. “This is a huge step (toward) making this project a reality.”

Artspace, the arts council and the city have partnered on the project and are scheduled to break ground in 2008. Artspace has completed 17 projects throughout the country, including the 2-year-old Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts in Seattle’s Pioneer Square District, and has 16 projects in the works.

“This sends a strong message about how much the city values the quality of life in Everett,” Tuohy said.

Forty apartment units where artists will have work space in their homes will cost \$14 million to \$15 million, funded mostly through public affordable housing and state and local funds through Artspace, Tuohy said in a previous interview. The center may include two exhibit spaces, a gallery store, studio space for rent, art supplies shops, office space and a coffee shop.

The arts council is currently housed in the Monte Cristo building next door to the Hoyt garage.

“We really want to be able to create a visual arts center that will be nationally renowned,” Tuohy said.

An arts center has the potential to attract businesses and people to Everett, bring together a group of artists that is engaged in the community, provide more cultural experiences and bolster the economy, the partners said.

“(The arts center) doesn’t just empty out at the end of the day,” since artists live there too, said Cathryn Vandenbrink, regional director of Artspace.

“It’s a proven fact that wherever one of these arts centers locates, the area ends up becoming a (destination) in that area — people start to spend

time there, to visit,” city spokeswoman Kate Reardon said.

Philanthropic efforts must raise \$5 million to \$6 million, Tuohy said. The city pledged \$100,000 worth of early planning and architectural work, most of which has been spent, Reardon said.

A fund-raising campaign, headed by the arts council, will start in early 2007.

“(The arts council) is the heart and soul of this project,” Vandenbrink said. “(The arts center) will give them the opportunity to expand what they

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have to offer.”

Everett has given Artspace the official support necessary to create a successful project, she said.

“It’s really exciting to be working in a community where the arts organization is out in front, and the public entities like the mayor and council are right there with them,” Vandenbrink said.

If Artspace leaders determine they can build on the approximately 20,000 square-foot site, the parking garage will be demolished. Until that happens in the next couple years, the city and downtown businesses will continue to use the two-story garage.