

WPCC to get downtown site for expansion

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Western Piedmont Community College will expand its downtown campus, thanks to a generous gift from the Burke County Board of Commissioners.

The board voted to approve the purchase of the current Morganton City Hall and CoMPAS buildings at a price of \$750,000.

The county then plans to turn the buildings over to the community college for administrative and classroom space. The community college will occupy the buildings once the city vacates the premises and moves to its new location at the old Premiere Mill site.

"The community college is one of the better things we have in the county," County Commission Chairman David Campbell said.

"It's a matter of the county looking out for its responsibility."

Campbell said the City Hall buildings were not the first choice for the community college.

"Our first intention was to buy the Buster Brown facility. It would have even given us some space for

public schools, but the state would not approve the move," Campbell said.

Richard Green, vice president of academic affairs at WPCC, said the school was strapped for space. The move will consolidate all off-campus college locations in the county and take care of the college's space needs for years to come.

"We have the lowest student to square foot ratio among our 58 sister schools.

"Although absolute, concrete plans have not been ironed out, the downtown location will probably house the Human Resources Development department and administrative offices and classroom space for most of the Continuing Education division," Green said.

The move also benefits the City of Morganton and the downtown area.

"The key to my excitement about the sale is the hundreds of people the college will bring to downtown," Mayor Mel Cohen said.

The downtown presence of the

WPCC

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community college will be a big boost for downtown merchants, Cohen said.

The mayor was also pleased to sell the property to the county.

"The sale of City Hall to another government institution made it a lot easier for us to relinquish, as far as legalities are concerned," Cohen said.

The city-owned parking lots located across the street from City Hall will be available for use by WPCC students, Cohen said.

Campbell said he estimated the

cost of renovations at City Hall to be about \$200,000.

City officials have said they do not expect construction of the new City Hall to be complete until around March 2000.

City Council voted in November to locate City Hall in the Morganton Trading Co. or old Premiere Mill building. In addition to City Hall, the building will house 50 residential apartments, office space and a restaurant.

The city's cost for the building was put at \$3.3 million.