

# Tentative land deal would open riverfront for public use, economic development

**Keith Erickson/Coeur d'Alene Today**

COEUR d'ALENE—The city of Coeur d'Alene has reached a tentative land purchase agreement with a railroad that will open up a two-mile stretch of property along the Spokane River to public access and economic development opportunities.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) has partnered with the city to sell about 20 acres of lineal right-of-way that runs roughly from the eastern side of Riverstone west to Huetter Road. Under the railroad's ownership, the riverfront property along the corridor was essentially landlocked.

Jobs Plus President Steve Griffiths hailed the potential for economic development. "It's extremely attractive for companies that want to relocate or expand to our area," he said.

Coeur d'Alene Mayor Steve Widmyer agreed. "Without right-of-way, no developer would look at those parcels because a big chunk of that property was tied up by the railroad," he said. "This is a tremendous opportunity because it opens it up for both public access and economic development."

Coeur d'Alene city attorney Mike Gridley, who has been working with the railroad for years on a deal, said purchase of the BNSF right-of-way will allow an incredible opportunity for public access, including the development of trails and parks along the river and expansion of Riverstone Park to the Spokane River.

Terms of the purchase have not been finalized, but could include urban renewal funding from the Lake City Development Corporation (LCDC). "We look forward to being a partner and bringing this deal to fruition," said LCDC executive director Tony Berns.

The eastern end of the BNSF property connects with land now owned by the Bureau of Land Management that is part of the city's Four Corners master plan. Development along the railroad stretch could be tied into the Four Corners planning efforts, Gridley said.

Post Falls Mayor Ron Jacobson applauded the pending deal. "As the cities of Post Falls and Coeur d'Alene grow closer, having this right of way and allowing for the potential for some development is definitely a benefit," he said.

The Coeur d'Alene City Council next Tuesday is expected to take action on the agreement. The council meets at 7 p.m. in the community room of the library.