

PESHASTIN — The Port of Chelan County has accepted a Leavenworth couple's offer to buy a scenic old lumber mill site here for \$1.65 million. Jennifer and Bill Goebel signed an intent-to-purchase agreement with the port Friday and paid \$30,000 in earnest money. The sale is pending a title review, short study period and cleanup of some contaminated soil. Bill Goebel, 64, said Monday that the couple plan to build a wine-processing building and plant a vineyard to further the growth of Peshastin's Icicle Ridge Winery. Goebel said he's friends with the winery owners. Other development there will also be wine-related, he said. They don't plan to get into the wine business, themselves, but use the property as incubator space for other wine-related businesses.

"It's such an exceptional property and one of the few properties of that size on the river," he said. "We'd like to do something with it that keeps is green." Goebel owns a company in Phoenix that builds electronic equipment used to test the computers and other electronics that keep aircraft airborne. They built a home on the Icicle River in Leavenworth and have lived there 15 years. He said he's been eying the mill site for decades.

According to the terms of the contract, the buyers have 14 days to study the proposed deal and back out of it, without losing their earnest money. The port commits to working with the state Department of Ecology to complete a voluntary effort, already underway, to excavate a small garbage dump left on the property from its lumber mill days and refill the excavation with clean soil.

Development Partners, a company controlled by the port's real estate agent Jon Eberle, will receive a 3-percent commission on the property's sale price, the agreement says. Port spokesman Craig Larsen says he expects the sale will become final by the end of the year.

The Goebels' proposal is for 49 of the mill site's 61 acres — the portion north of the Wenatchee River. A group of local organizations is raising \$460,000 to buy the site's remaining 14 acres — a long, narrow strip along the river's south shoreline — to build and maintain a public pedestrian trail. The port owns the land. Goebels said he's a member of Trout Unlimited, one of the organizations, under the "Complete the Loop Coalition" title, that is seeking to create the pedestrian trail.

The Peshastin Lumber and Box Mill ceased operations in 1998. The port paid \$1.1 million for the 61-acre site in 2003 with the hope of developing it into a light industrial park. The sale followed some six years of work in transferring the mill's old water right. The port also spent \$350,000 to improve road access to the site. Development plans were on hold for the next couple of years, when the University of Washington proposed building an underground science lab near Leavenworth. The mill site property would have been the lab's administrative office complex. The university eliminated the site on its list of potentials in 2006. That same year, port commissioners agreed to surplus the property for sale. The property was under contract in 2008 to a developer for a mixed-use technology park, but the deal fell through in the recession.

"It's a big deal," the port's Larsen said Monday. The 1.65 million sale price "is a lot of money. The property has been surplused now for nine years. Getting it back on the tax rolls is great news."