

Former 'cyber district' focal site up for sale

By Thor Jourgensen / The Daily Item | Posted: Friday, March 7, 2014 3:00 am

LYNN — The former telephone company building on Oxford Street that became Internet entrepreneur Lowell Gray's headquarters in 1998 is for sale and could get a new lease on life as an office building.

The distinctive yellow brick building's \$845,000 listed price will attract buyers, said Hunneman Commercial Company Principal Carl Christie.

"We're actively showing it in anticipation it will sell. Someone could move right in there and set up shop," Christie said.

Once the home of the local New England Telephone and Telegraph office, 173 Oxford St. came into city possession 22 years ago before Gray expanded his Internet technology firm, Shore.Net, from an upper floor Munroe Street office into the Oxford Street building.

He bought 173 Oxford for \$25,000 in 1996 and city officials pledged financial support for his moving, pointing to Shore.Net as a focal point for turning part of downtown into a "cyber district."

That vision gave way to a nearly 10-year-long effort to turn downtown buildings into residences and, more recently, to attract restaurants to the area, including The Blue Ox, located next to the Shore.Net building.

"He (Gray) put a lot of money into that building. It's key to us because it's right next to Blue Ox," said Economic Development and Industrial Corporation Director James Cowdell.

Blue Ox owner Matt O'Neil last month consolidated ownership in the two buildings his restaurant is located in, but O'Neil said he has no interest "at the moment" in 173 Oxford.

"It's a beautiful building and a big space. I'm not looking to expand over there, but I hope someone great comes in there and contributes to the neighborhood the way Lowell did," O'Neil said Thursday.

Gray sold his company to Virginia firm Primus in 2000, and the company at the time announced plans to continue local operations on Oxford Street and the Lynnway.

Christie said the Shore.Net building is equipped with backup generators, central air conditioning and wide-open floor space that could attract an office developer, even a stock trading company.

Gray, noted Christie, outfitted the building with fiber optics with globe-spanning capabilities.

"Someone could communicate with Europe much better than anyone in Boston," he said.