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Jose Gill at the Beacon Avenue heritage building that's up for sale.

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Bookstore owner eyes landmark post office

By Malcolm Curtis

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Sidney bookstore owner Clive Tanner is considering buying the town's heritage post office to make it his flagship store.

Canada Post is putting the 62-year-old Beacon Avenue landmark up for sale and moving to smaller, less historic premises in a former furniture store a couple of blocks away.

In the "best of all worlds" the post office would be turned over to the town for a cultural centre, Tanner said Thursday.

But he doubts the municipality can afford to acquire the two-storey, 6,500-square-foot brick building. "So the next best thing is to put a bookstore into it."

That would bring to nine the number of stores in Tanner's "Book Town," an enterprise that the former MLA started a few years ago to make Sidney B.C.'s bookstore capital.

Just three postal employees work in the building, which is too big for its current use, said Mike Sieradzan, Canada Post's local retail manager.

"From a retailer's point of view it's not efficient to stay in this building," said Steve Clark, Canada Post's retail director for B.C., visiting Sidney to look at the new outlet.

Clark said the building would be ideal for a pub or a restaurant.

But some residents feel such commercial use is inappropriate.

"We don't think that's a proper use of the building," said Sidney pioneer Don

Robb, past president of the local history society.

Robb, 75, believes the post office building should stay in public hands, suggesting it would make a great location for a civic cultural centre.

Groups like the Arts and Crafts Society, lacking a proper venue for its activities, could make use of the building, he said.

"I don't think there's a great deal of sentiment about the post office as much as the building itself."

It was built at the tail-end of the Depression of the 1930s when times were tough in Sidney, Robb said. A sawmill that primed the town's economy had closed down and farmers in the area were having a rough time.

Construction of the post office "marked a turning point in the fortunes of Sidney," he said, because shortly thereafter construction began on the airport. "It could mark another turning point."

There is a twinge of regret among many regular users of the post office about the pending closure.

"Why would they take it out of a building that looks like a post office," said Dorice Santick, a Saltspring Island resident, who drops into the post office once a month. "This is such a wonderful brick building I hope they don't pull it down."

Ainsley Dagg, 82, has used the post office for 32 years, ever since he moved to North Saanich.

"It's an attractive old building, I would like to see it's still used," he said.