WASHINGTON — Plans to build a new federal courthouse in Lafayette raise the question: What will happen to the old building?

Lafayette Mayor Kenny Bowen would like to acquire the building for the city. Earlier this year, he asked several members of Louisiana’s congressional delegation to help him in this pursuit.

The 53,000-square-foot Lafayette Federal Building, built in 1960 and recently renovated, belongs to the Government Services Administration, the agency that acts as the federal government’s landlord.

GSA official David Bibb said Thursday the agency will conduct a “retention-disposal study” of the courthouse early next year.

But Bibb predicted the government isn’t likely to keep the facility. “We’ll probably declare it excess to the needs of the GSA,” he said.

If a state or local government is interested in the building, the GSA will negotiate a price. If no other public agency is interested, the GSA will take bids.

Helen Bellamy, Lafayette City Council president, said the council and parish governments, set to consolidate in June 1996, are backing Bowen’s efforts to acquire the federal building.

Bellamy said it could be used for “any number of potential civic uses,” but she’d like to see the building become the new city-parish courthouse. Converting it to a new city hall “was not out of the realm of possibility,” Bellamy said.

But Bibb of the GSA said it will be years before the federal government will vacate the building.

Congress this year approved $5.04 million to start building a new courthouse. But the $38 million structure won’t be finished until late 1998 or later.

And there’s another catch. Even if the federal government decides to rid itself of the old courthouse, federal law requires that homeless groups have the first shot at obtaining the property.