

Historic renovation proposal favored

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Tax credits and property tax breaks for renovation of historic properties in Bloomington would be commonplace in a proposed law recommended yesterday by the Bloomington Planning Commission.

However, the proposed law drew mixed opinions from city residents living in historic districts.

The rough spot in the proposed law, and the one that brought objections from property owners in the historic Franklin Park area, is that property owners who plan to renovate must comply with mandatory strict standards of historic renovation.

The City Council will make a final decision on the issue at its meeting beginning at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 27.

One resident, Tim Maurer, 305 E. Chestnut St., cautioned planners to avoid making a law "that is bigger than we need."

Harold Hungerford, 310 E. Walnut St., is president of the Franklin Square Association, favors the proposed law. He said voluntary compliance with the new law doesn't make sense. Speaking for some of the association's membership, he said, "We want stringent requirements and mandatory restrictions" in order to have historically accurate renovation work done.

Rev. Charles Hartman, 302 E. Walnut St., said the new law would commit him "to a lot I cannot foresee. I feel uneasy about it." He said the law may create a "good deal of resentment" among Franklin Park residents.

With the new law in place, property owners who renovate income-producing property will be eligible for a tax credit of up to 25 percent and those who renovate the houses they live in will be eligible for a total of 12 years of property tax relief.

The law would establish a seven-member Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission that would have full power to allow developers to obtain building permits from the city.

The preservation commission would issue certificates of appropriateness if renovation plans met guidelines that closely followed standards of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The preservation commission would also issue certificates of eco-

nomnic hardship if property owners do not have the money to renovate property to historic standards. Either certificate is necessary to get a building permit. Without the permits, renovation work cannot be done.

Maurer said the planning commission is "creating a preservation czar" in the new preservation commission. He prefers voluntary compliance with standards and objected to language in the proposed law that leaves only one avenue of appeal — the circuit court.

Planning commission members agreed with his appeal complaint and changed a clause in the law that would allow appeals to the City Council if four of the seven preservation commission members deny either certificate.

In connection with the preservation law, the planning commission also recommended rezoning several areas in the city that have historic designations.

All the areas would retain their historic and cultural classification, but would also have their basic use described in the zoning, such as public lands or residential zoning.

Among areas that were recommended for the multiple zoning are the Franklin Park residential area and the park itself, the Julia Vrooman home, the Ewing Museum of Nations, 605 E. Front St., the David Davis Mansion and the McLean County Courthouse square.

In other business

The commission also:

— Recommended to the City Council that a petition be denied requesting a change in city code to require screening of either trees, shrubs or a fence between Ann Drive residential property and Gill Street manufacturing property.

Kenneth Emmons, principal planner for Bloomington, said a narrowly-defined law such as that would probably be viewed by the courts as "arbitrary and capricious."

Planners are asking the council to return the request to them for a public hearing and recommendation as required by law. Emmons said a change in city code should be broad-based and suggested a requirement that a fence be installed before any new business development occurs on lots abutting residential property.