

# Mansion restoration to start this month

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AUBURN — Phase 1 of restoration work on the historic Neely Mansion here is expected to begin late this month.

The restoration is estimated to take three years and cost about \$300,000, according to Mary Mendenhall, project coordinator for King County Historic Preservation.

The home, on Black Diamond and Green Valley Roads, was built in 1894 by Aaron Neely, Sr., whose father, David, came to the Green River Valley from Tennessee to homestead and raise hops on 320 acres. The mansion was sold to the Auburn Arts Council for \$12,000 earlier this year.

A Longview couple, Fred L. Hardin and his wife, Mary, granddaughter of Aaron Neely, donated about an acre surrounding the home to provide parking once the mansion is restored.

**THE STATE** is being asked to fund half of the restoration cost. It has awarded \$25,000 and is asking the community for matching funds. An additional \$10,000 was awarded to the Auburn Arts Council by the county's Housing and Community Development block-grant program.

The arts council also has about \$2,000 in its treasury for the project, according to Effie Weeks, finance chairman.

The community, however, believes it already has matched the state funding through pledged donations of labor and materials, including glass, electrical work and paint, according to Aletta Thorn, an arts-council member.

The initial task in the restoration, for which Art Skolnik of the Conservation Co. in Seattle is project architect, will be to secure the mansion's foundation. According to Ms. Mendenhall, it's weak and sinking.

A fence will separate the house from the rest of the Hardins' land. Security measures will be taken once work gets under way.

**ALTHOUGH** the home has not been occupied by any Neelys since Mrs. Hardin's parents, Aaron Neely, Jr., lived there during World War II, it was a rental property until several years ago. After that, it became a haven for transients for many years.

According to Ms. Mendenhall, the mansion — surveyed by a team from the county to determine its condition — still has some of its original wallpaper. And although its once-white exterior is severely weathered, she says, it has changed little since it was built. A gazebo seems to be the only major exterior feature missing, she says.

Hardin concurs. "It looked about the same in 1920 as it does now," he said.

The mansion, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, is "architecturally significant," Ms. Mendenhall contends, because while it was a farmhouse it was extremely ornate and extravagant for its location.

"IT'S A craftsman-type house with a Victorian flavor," she said. "As far as we know, Aaron Neely, Sr., and friends built it without the help of an architect."

The house in its heyday was a big social center for the area. There were many dances held in it, and visitors stopped often there on the way to Auburn to shop.

The arts council hopes it will once again be a gathering place. For although the council has taken it on as a project, Mrs. Weeks says, "It's something for everybody to get involved in — it's for everyone."

The council will hold a cocktail buffet and silent auction to help pay off the mortgage on the house. From 7 to 10:30 p.m. April 26 at Holy Family Catholic Church. Tickets, which are being sold for \$5, are available from the arts council or at the door.



The historic Neely Mansion is the target of a \$300,000 restoration project.

— Staff photo by Richard S. Heyza.