

Saving old mansions is not easy

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primarily involving state and county grants which were used to raise and level the building, install a new foundation and sidewalks, roof and chimney and architects fees.

The council's intent was to bring the building to its original state, but with funds virtually exhausted, the building may remain as is, Mrs. Craig said. With the county pressing for its commercial use, "if we are going to finish it, we will have to have some agreement with business enterprises on finishing the interior. The main thing we want is to have it accessible to the public."

Because of its classically ornate style, the Neely Mansion was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

More than \$100,000 and at least twice that many volunteer hours have gone into restoring the 1890 Meeker Mansion in Puyallup.

Liz Costello, president of the Ezra Meeker Society, said the aged 17-room mansion was saved from the wrecking ball in 1970 after it had spent its declining years as a nursing home, a home for widows of the Grand Army of the Republic and as a rooming house.

"It was an absolute mess," she said. "But the society managed to buy it, now it's a National Historic Monument and it would take an act of Congress to tear it down."

Except for a \$5,000 grant from the Seattle Foundation and a couple of government-funded temporary workers for one summer, the society has used donated labor, materials and money to refurbish the mansion.

Costello says it will probably take another five years for the society to bring the mansion back to the shape it was in 1890 when Ezra Meeker built it for his bride, Eliza Jane. Inside most of the rooms have been stripped and painted, or wallpapered, walls have been torn down and replaced and broken windows have been fixed. Next on the list is yanking up yards of vinyl tile so the wood floors underneath can be refinished.

The biggest inside task facing the group is renovating the huge ballroom on the third floor.

The completed parts of the mansion are shown off whenever the society has a chance. Its next formal appearance will be December 4-6 when the finished rooms will be decorated for Christmas.

Not so fortunate as these homes was the Thurston Mansion, a Medina estate fronting on Lake Washington. The sprawling Tudor-style home was bulldozed last July to make way for six building lots on the 4.65 acres of land.

The present owners, Ivor Jones and Gary Merlino, bought the estate for close to \$2 million from Ellen Thurston in 1979, but shortly after the purchase applied for permits to demolish it and subdivide the property for development.

Skolnik said residents of the area were unsuccessful in trying to get the building designated as a historic landmark and saved from destruction. Unoccupied while the owners sought the permits, the building was extensively vandalized, according to Skolnik, who termed it "demolition by neglect."

Last month, a preliminary plat for the site was approved by the Medina City Council, and eventually six new homes will be built on the site of what was one of the most sumptuous mansions on the Eastside.



Kirkland's Marsh home is up for sale.

Peter Lissner / Seattle Times

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