

Landmark panel to eye old mansions

by Herb Belanger
Times South bureau

The King County Landmarks Commission will make a preliminary decision tomorrow on whether Auburn's Neely Mansion meets the criteria for the county's Register of Historic Places.

The commission session will be from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Room 400 of the King County Courthouse. The commissioners also will announce their final decision on the status of the Morasch House in Highline and will deal with the James W. Clise residence in Marymoor Park near Redmond.

The next step in the process to get the Neely Mansion on the county's Register of Historic Places would be a public hearing, followed by a commission recommendation to the County Council.

The two-story Neely mansion on the Auburn-Black Diamond Road, built in 1894 by Aaron Neely, already is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and has been in the process of restoration since April, 1979. Funds for the project are being provided by the Auburn Arts Council, county Housing and Community Development block grants and a grant from the state Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation.

The 87-year-old house was purchased by the Auburn Arts Council and deeded to King County two years ago. Restoration work primarily was aimed at getting the run-down building into a condition where it wouldn't deteriorate further.

This included leveling the building, putting in a new foundation, sidewalls and chimney. Painting the exterior and putting in windows is scheduled for the spring.

According to Kjrjs Lund, county historic-preservation officer, after completion of the exterior work the Neely Mansion will be offered for lease to organizations or a party willing to restore the interior, while retaining the historical character of the building. She said there are a number of incen-

tives available for such an arrangement.

The Neely Mansion once was a show place in the Green River Valley with people from miles around attending the splashy parties given by the Neely family.

After World War II, when the Neelys moved out, deterioration set in, with the house used as rental property and later occupied by transients. The Auburn Arts Council bought the building in 1979 for \$12,000, and has since spent about \$80,000 on restoration.

The Morasch House was the first of the county residences considered for landmark designation by the commission in a meeting November 23. The emergency meeting was called because of pending zoning reclassification and subdivision appeals involving the 5½-acre tract on which the house stands.

Granting those requests could have affected the status of the building.

The commission's preliminary determination was that the house had historical significance and additional information was received at the January 15 public hearing when its designation as a community landmark was recommended.

Meanwhile, after a public hearing on a request to rezone the property from single-family resi-

dential to multi-family residential, a hearing examiner recommended that the County Council deny the change.

But Stephen Araki, attorney for the owners of the Morasch House, Marian Kurosu and her son, Roy, submitted a new proposal omitting the half-acre on which the house stands from the zoning reclassification.

A rehearing was held January 28 and the recommendation of James N. O'Connor, zoning and subdivision examiner, is expected sometime next week. An appeal of a recommendation to deny the subdivision request is being held in abeyance until after O'Connor presents his latest recommendation.

The Highline Historical Society is seeking to have the Morasch House and an acre of land on which it stands preserved as the nucleus of a community historical area.

The Landmarks Commission also will take final public input on the James W. Clise residence near Redmond.

The Clise residence, owned by the King County Parks Division, was given preliminary consideration as a county landmark at the commission's January 15 meeting. It is listed on both the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Adding it to the county register

would provide additional protection for the building since any alterations or changes made would require approval from the Landmarks Commission.

The house, built by James W. Clise, a Seattle banker and president of the first trust company in this state, was used initially as a hunting lodge. In 1907, three years after it was built, it became the Clise family's year-around residence.

The commission's final determination on the historical significance of the residence will be made March 11.

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