

Mansion-restoration plan faces financial problems

by Herb Belanger
Times South bureau

The Aaron Neely Mansion is an architecturally elaborate farming country showplace in Auburn dating back to 1894. Its historic significance has been recognized by the King County Landmarks Commission, but a restoration effort is in financial trouble.

The building is owned by the Auburn Arts Council, which has to come up with about \$10,000 within three months to pay off a loan from Washington Mutual Savings Bank used to buy the property in 1978.

But loan payments are overdue, and the council faces foreclosure unless it can come up with the cash.

Federal and state grants paid for restoration that has brought the building back to good condition structurally and the exterior appears much as it did in its early days. But more work is needed both on the exterior and interior of the building.

Leta Craig, speaking for the Arts Council, said that group's out of funds and is asking the public for money to fix the mansion.

"If we could get \$1 from every man, woman and child in the community, we could get the mortgage paid off and finish restoring the interior," she said. The land was deeded to the county by the council.

"We don't want to lose the building to the county," she said, because "the county wants to go commercial with it." There has been talk of leasing the building to commercial firms with the stipulation that the interior be restored in keeping with the original style.

"That would take the building out of the hands of the general public," she said. "We want to keep it so that the children can become informed on how their grandparents lived."

A book about the Neely family

AUBURN

and its historical association with the Green River Valley will be available in April, she said. It will sell for \$3 and cost of publishing it has been donated.

Contributions to help pay off the loan should be sent to the Neely Mansion Restoration Fund at the Auburn branch of the Washington Mutual Savings Bank, or to the Auburn Arts Council, 2605 Forest Ridge Dr. S.E., Auburn 98002.

Meanwhile, the county's Landmarks Commission has scheduled a public hearing on the Neely Mansion for its next meeting starting at 11 a.m. April 8 in the executive conference room of the King County Courthouse.

The commission will decide whether the mansion should be given county landmark status. With such designation, any changes made to the structure in the future would have to be approved by the commission.

The mansion, on the Auburn-Black Diamond Road, already is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The David Neely family arrived in the area from Tennessee in 1853 and homesteaded in what was then called the White River Valley. Aaron Neely was 4 years old when the family moved to the West. He took out a claim to 120 acres in 1878 and the house he built in 1894 became a showplace noted for the elaborate parties for neighbors and friends.

DOUGLAS PRINTING

14616 Pacific
Ave. So.

242-3684

BUSINESS CARDS

1,000 \$18.95 up

Business Cards

Business Forms Letterheads

Invitations Labels Postage

Open 5 Days 9-5:30 p.m.