

Panel sets terms for the 'haunting' of Neely Mansion

by Herb Belanger
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The historic Neely Mansion again will be used by the Auburn Jaycees for a fund-raising Halloween "haunted house" this year, if their organization agrees to a number of conditions imposed by the King County Landmarks Commission.

The conditions:

- Forty percent of the proceeds are to go to the Auburn Arts Council, owner of the building, to help it meet mortgage payments.
- The premises must be cleaned up within three weeks after the event, and a deposit must be made to cover the cleaning costs.
- The building must not be damaged; an inspection of the premises must be made before and after the event to make sure the premises are returned to the same condition.
- A stairwell, required to comply with fire regulations, must be removed after the event and a porch railing replaced.

Dan Abuan, who represented the Jaycees at the commission meeting last week, said he would have to confer with club officers on the 40 percent figure,

which was suggested by Virginia Haugen, president of the recently formed Neely Mansion Association. The association hopes eventually to be able to take over restoration of the building.

Last year the Jaycees donated 30 percent of the proceeds from the "haunted house" to the arts council, which used the money for mortgage payments.

The reason given for the other conditions imposed this year was the debris and structural defacement found after last year's event.

Kjris Lund, landmarks commission administrator, said two truckloads of material were picked up at the site by county parks crews. She also noted that nails had been hammered into the finish and fluorescent spray paint and staples had been used on the wood surfaces.

"I feel a 'haunted house' can be done without hurting the house, but it depends on how it is done," she told the commissioners.

The only disagreement to its use again was voiced by Earl Layman, who said he was not against the motives for holding such an affair, but using it as a "haunted house" was "no way to treat a landmark. It's no way to build integrity, but a step downward to deterioration."

The 88-year-old Neely Mansion in the Green River Valley was a showplace in its early years, but became run-down after the Neely family members moved away in the 1940s. The arts council acquired it in 1979 with a \$12,000 mortgage. More than \$100,000 has been spent in restoration work since, mainly to the exterior and the foundation.

It was the second building to receive county landmark designation from the commission. The Arts Council is no longer active and restoration work has stopped because of lack of funds; \$6,000 remains outstanding on the mortgage held by the Washington Mutual Savings Bank, with the next payment due in October.

The county is at present trying to reach an agreement with the Arts Council on transferring the building to county ownership, Lund told the commissioners, and the Parks Department has been contracted to make the building secure for the winter by boarding up the windows.

In another matter, Lund told the commissioners she is preparing a memo for County Executive Randy Revelle on an agreement whereby incorporated cities could make use of commission expertise in landmark identification. With the consensus of the commissioners she will recommend that participating cities be

charged only a marginal cost or no fee at all for work done by the commission staff.

The rationale is that historic or significant sites, whether in incorporated communities or not, are important to all of King County. The ordinance setting up the commission empowers it to act only on sites in unincorporated parts of the county.

For the next few months, Lund said, consideration of a Dockton Historic District will take up much of the commissioners' time. Dockton, on Maury Island, was a major ship-building site for the Puget Sound Dry Dock Company in the late 1890s and early 1900s.

Lund has scheduled a series of visits and meetings in the area with the goal of having a final commission decision on Dockton's status at its Dec. 8 meeting, the final one at which the present commissioners will be gathered. Terms of all the commissioners expire December 31 and several of them have said they will not seek reappointment.

A meeting to acquaint Dockton residents with the significance of having a historic district, the steps to be taken and how the community can get involved will be held at the Dockton fire hall Sept. 22.

The commission will make its preliminary determination of Dockton's significance Oct. 13 and two public hearings will follow, one in Seattle Nov. 10, the other in Dockton Nov. 14.