Saving old mansions is not easy

(Continued from Page 2)

primarily avoiding 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, Mr. 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 financing the improvements. The main thing we want is to have it accessible to the public."

Because of its classically ornate style, the newly restored house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. More than $300,000 and at least twice that many volunteer hours have gone into restoring the 1869 Meeker Mansion in Puget Sound.

Lil Costello president of the Enz Meeker Society, said the aged 17-room mansion was saved from the wrecking ball in 1978 after it had spent its declining years as a boarding house, a home for widows of the Grand Army of the Republic and as a boarding house.

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

Except for a $3,000 grant from the city of Seattle Foundation, 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 1860 when Enz Meeker built it for his bride.

The biggest immediate task facing the group is renovating the huge ballroom on the third floor. The completed parlor of the mansion is shown here whenever the group has a chance. Its next formal appearance will be December 26 when the furnished rooms will be decorated for Christmas.

Not so fortunate as these homes was the Thurston Mansion, a Medina estate facing on Lake Washington. The sprawling Tudor-style house was built last July to make way for six building lots on the 4.83 acres of land.

The present owners, Frank Jones and Gary Merling, bought the estate for close to $3 million from Ellen Thurston in 1979, but shortly after the purchase applied for permits to demolish it and subdivide the property for development.

Sloat 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 Sloat, who termed it "demolition by neglect."

Last month, a preliminary plan 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.