Depot demolition deadline extended In Lafayette

By MICHAEL INGALLINERA
Staff Writer

The president of Southern Pacific agreed Thursday to postpone the demolition of its historic depot in downtown Lafayette until Christmas.

D.K. McNear, president of the Southern Pacific Transportation Company, added a three-month extension of the Sept. 15 deadline after a telephone conference call with Mayor Dud Lastrapes and City Council Vice President F.V. "Pappy" Landry Thursday afternoon.

About 3,000 Lafayette residents expressed their concern for the preservation of the 76-year-old depot through a telephone petition drive Wednesday which was sponsored by the Downtown Lafayette Unlimited. DLU Director Cathy Weber estimated that about 5,000 people would respond to the call-in petition through Thursday.

"The drive showed the mayor and the City Council that the community is proud of its historical landmark and will support the preservation of the depot," said Weber.

Landry said he and the mayor explained the City's predicament to McNear and asked for the necessary extension.

"I talked to Mr. McNear mentioning my past association with the railroad and explaining my desire to retain the depot," said Landry. "I thanked him for his consideration and invited him to Lafayette for a personal tour of our area and to enjoy our hospitality and cuisine."

"He thanked us and said, if he did visit, he'd forgo the coffee and accept the Cajun cooking."

Even if the depot is not feasible as the location of a multi-transportation facility, Landry hopes it can still be saved.

"If it does not, then hopefully, it can be saved as a link to the past and the railroad which has played an important part in the development of Lafayette and Acadiana," Landry said.

The councilman retired from Southern Pacific in 1983 after 35 years of service to the company as a railroad engineer, road foremen of engines, and rules and training officer.