Lafayette historic sites issue tabled

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LAFAYETTE — After hearing about two hours of testimony from proponents and opponents of designating some buildings here as local landmarks, the Lafayette City Council unanimously decided Tuesday to table the considerations indefinitely.

Also at the meeting, council members expressed opinions against selling Lafayette City Hall to the state for $4 million.

There are 17 National Register of Historic Places properties in Lafayette, and seven of the owners have agreed to allow their buildings to be designated as local landmarks, said John Raines, director of the Department of Zoning and Development.

The other 10 are opposed to the designations because of restrictions that will be placed on the properties, he said.

According to city law, once a property is considered a local landmark, owners need approval of the Lafayette Preservation Commission before making certain changes to the exterior of the structures.

People disobeying the law or the rules of the commission will be fined between $50 and $100 per day for each violation. Also, people demolishing a structure without first receiving approval from the commission can be fined between $1,000 and $10,000, according to city law.

Raines said there are no financial incentives under state law available to the property owners.

Councilman Al Simons said property owners should have some freedom to make changes to their structures.

"I find it very difficult to force a person to accept a landmark designation," he said.

Ethel Goodstein, chairwoman of the commission, said the restrictions in the ordinance are broad, so owners would be able to make some changes.

She said the council's decision will be a "true test of historic preservation" in the city.

The council introduced ordinances pertaining to four properties, and tabled ordinances which would designate three structures as local landmarks.

Several property owners expressed discontent with the possibility of their properties becoming local landmarks, particularly because they want to be able to change the exteriors of their structures without commission approval.

"We really can't understand how the city can control the destiny of a family," said Frank Preston, who owns the Sidney Martin House, which was up for consideration on Tuesday.

People would be less likely to buy the house should he decide to sell because of the possible restrictions, Preston told the council.

Preston said in a letter that he and his wife, Rita, spent more than $250,000 to restore the home, which they bought in 1981.

"Rita and myself would cooperate with you in any way you may deem necessary to continue your wonderful cause if you would not try to control our destiny with your clauses," he said in the letter.

Flora Rickey, owner of Cafe Vermilionville, which was up for consideration on Tuesday, said she also opposes having her property designated as a local landmark.

"If I want to sell it, I don't want a commission telling me what to do with my property," she said.

Also, Dr. Ray Authement, president of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, said he is against having the J. Arthur Roy House, which is owned by USL and located adjacent to the university, designated as a local landmark.

"Don't do this to the university," Authement said to the council. "I would not have proceeded the way I have had I known this was going to take place. Consider the plight of the university."

The council agreed to table the three considerations indefinitely so the owners will have time to work with the commission on reviewing the ordinance that pertains to local landmarks.

On the City Hall matter, Mayor Dud Lastrapes had suggested that the state buy the building instead of purchasing two buildings outside the downtown area.

Council member Nancy Mounce said that, if the state moves its offices, it will "strike a blow to the downtown area" and to the individuals who need the services, but she can't support the $4 million.

Councilman Wilfred Pierre said the city has put a "tremendous investment" into downtown, and if the state moves its offices it would "kill the downtown area."

But he, along with Simons and council President F.V. "Pappy" Landry, said he doesn't support the proposed sale.

Council member Jan Heymann said she couldn't comment because of a conflict of interests.

In other business, Lastrapes told the council that bids were received for garbage and yard pickup for a five-year period. The successful bidder was American Waste and Pollution Control at a monthly price of $5.19 per household, he said.

There will be a reduction in the $7.85 that residents pay now, he said.

"Keep in mind that for less money all residents will get garbage pickup, yard waste pickup, recycling and city operation of a composting facility," Lastrapes said.

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