

Manassas - Historic buildings

Council Puts Ball Back in ARB's Court on Demolitions

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It appears that the Manassas Architectural Review Board will have to make a decision on Prince William County's request for permission to demolish six buildings.

The ARB must decide whether to approve the demolition of the buildings, which are owned by the county but are located in the city near the Judicial Center and the old county courthouse, by July 25.

But the Manassas City Council has decided not to pass on a request from the ARB to the Prince William Board of County Supervisors for an extension on that decision.

At its regular meeting Monday night, council approved a motion to send Mayor Edgar Rohr and Councilman John Weber, chairman of the council's property committee, to the ARB to discuss the demolition request.

And, it's possible that the city is considering acquiring some of that property from the county.

The council discussed the matter Monday in executive session, saying that it involved "possible acquisition of property."

Vice Mayor James Payne said in a later interview that the council had discussed acquisition of property in that area, but gave no specifics on what is being considered.

Several opponents to the demolition permit spoke out last week at a public hearing before the ARB, asking that at least two of the buildings be saved—the old jail, which was built in 1892 at the same time as the old courthouse, and the Bennett Annex, which was built in the 1920's.

Assistant County Executive Larry Hughes also attended that hearing. He said later that that the county has no plans for the property, but wants to tear down the six buildings because of maintenance costs. The

buildings are all in very bad condition, Hughes said.

Hughes has told the county's Historical Commission that a developer is interested in buying the property in order to build a "Williamsburg-style" shopping center, but he said last week that that was "just a rumor."

But, according to city officials, only public buildings are allowed under the current zoning of the property. Rezoning would be required before any other use would be allowed.

The ARB has scheduled a special meeting for Thursday, July 24 to consider the matter. Rohr and Weber will be meeting with the ARB to discuss the matter in the next few days, and will attend that meeting, according to Payne.

In other action Monday night:

- The council deferred action on the appointment of an assistant city manager, "until Clyde Wimmer is back in the country." Funding for the new position was included in the Fiscal Year 1987 budget.

It has been rumored that Wimmer, who is the city's public works director, and has served twice as acting city manager, is being considered for the new post, but council members would neither confirm nor deny rumor.

- A proposed amendment to the city's zoning ordinance that would remove a buffer requirement between commercial and residential zones appears to be meeting with opposition from at least some members of council, although the matter hasn't yet been passed on to council from the Planning Commission.

Councilman Maury Gerson said Monday that he would not favor removing the current 25-foot buffer requirement.

The current 25-foot setback requirements for buildings wouldn't be affected by the proposed changes, but parking and internal roadways would be allowed. The

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current 25-foot buffer would be removed completely.

Gerson said he would not support an amendment that would allow parking lots to be constructed up to the property line.

Councilman John Weber, who said he supports the

changes, suggested that the council could decide on whether to leave in any buffer requirements when the matter comes to council.

A public hearing on the proposed amendments will be held on Wednesday before the planning commission. The hearing is scheduled to begin at 7:30 p.m. and will be held in City Hall at 9025 Center St.