

# Hills uncertain of Spicer House fate

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tear down the house. "There was enough good about this building to maintain it," she said, adding that she also wouldn't want the house removed from its site and restored elsewhere.

"We need to do some initial things to stabilize, preserve the house to prevent it from further deteriorating," said special services director Dan Potter, in a telephone interview Tuesday.

To put the exterior of the U-shaped house in decent shape would cost an estimated \$100,000. That also would include some work on the interior, such as converting the oil furnace. The discovery of a percent asbestos in the house's plaster walls also brings some expense. To remove the fire retardant would cost another estimated \$40,000, excluding replacing the walls.

And then there's the site work — grading, fixing the asphalt, for ex-

ample — that's expected to cost just under \$100,000, Potter said. The house is currently used for hunters safety classes, cross country skiing and nature studies, he added.

"The house is in pretty good shape except for these minor things that need correcting," Potter continued.

Plans are also on the drawing board for hooking the park and house up to the city's water and sewer system.

A DECISION was not made by the city council on what course of action should be taken with the house. The joint meeting was scheduled for discussion only. But councilman Joe Alkatch told his colleagues he wanted more information before he would agree to any course of action.

"Before I can think about stabilization, I would like a reasonable number (cost estimate) for utilization," he said. "Stabilization and utilization go hand-in-hand. It's the law of diminishing returns."

About 1 1/4 years ago, parks and recreation commission chairman Dennis Fitzgerald told the city council he would have a solution of what to do with the famed estate house within 90 days.

That promise began what could be called "the most talked about issue among parks and recreation commissioners," Fitzgerald said.

Finally, after more than a year of debate, commissioners "came to the conclusion that we were thinking in the wrong direction," Dollars and emotions guided the debates, Fitzgerald said.

Because of cramped conditions in city hall, officials had hoped the growing special services department

could be moved into the house. With Heritage Park serving as the city's prime recreation area, the idea seemed appropriate.

But dollars and the discovery of asbestos in the plaster walls brought an end to that idea. "You'd be putting a lot of money making a silk purse out of a sow's ear," Fitzgerald said.

HIS COMMENT, however, didn't sit well with councilwoman Jean Fox, a former member of the Farmington Hills Historical Commission and Historic District Commission. "It really gets my hackles up to hear this is a sow's ear. This is not a sow's ear," she said.

Fox questioned why, throughout discussions of the house, the historical commission was never asked for an opinion. Six historic buildings have been renovated and preserved in Farmington Hills. "None of these have approached the figures you are talking about," Fox said.

"You have another cadre of people in this city that are quite devoted," she said, speaking of the historic commission.

After realizing the prohibitive costs of using the house as special services offices, parks and recreation commissioners turned their attention to using it as a community gathering place for civic organizations, arts groups, bands and general cultural purposes, Fitzgerald said. "If you're going to turn it over to the community, you're in direct competition with our neighbors," Fitzgerald said, about the nearby Farmington Community Center, which serves a similar purpose.



FILE PHOTO

The 62-year-old Spicer House may become a visitor's center for Heritage Park, although it's future has not been decided.

## Centers expand horizons

Care Centers of Michigan, a major provider of long-term care services for the elderly and infirm in southeast Michigan, has bought five nursing homes from Beverly Enterprises. The purchase was agreed to in October, but wasn't final until Dec. 1. In Farmington Hills Williamsburg Convalescent Center will be known as Williamsburg Care Center.

Care Centers of Michigan was founded in 1966 with Oak Hill Care Center in Farmington and has owned and operated four long-term care facilities in southeast Michigan since the early 1980s. The acquisition of the five long-term care facilities, formerly owned by Beverly Enterprises, brings Care Centers of Michigan's bed total to 1,500 beds.

Along with basic nursing care offered at all nine facilities, some facilities offer skilled nursing care, a closed head injury unit, a respiratory care unit, a geropsychiatric program for those afflicted with Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias, a supervised living program licensed as a home for the aged, senior apartments, home health care and extended and post-operative care.

Care Centers of Michigan's nine long-term care facilities serve Oakland, Livingston and Wayne counties and their surrounding communities.



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