

Historic house's fate remains in limbo

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

THE FATE of the 150-year-old Harger House is expected to be decided in 90 days.

Farmington Hills officials have been charged with determining what's to be done with the stone house that sits in the commons area of the Farmington Hills Hunt Club subdivision, east of Halsted, north of Grand River.

Approximately 20 Hunt Club residents who met with city officials Wednesday demanded a resolution to the more than one-year-old controversy over the house. Residents also demanded a progress report from city officials within 30 days.

City officials and members of the Farmington Hills Historic District Commission have waged a battle to preserve the house, built in 1837 by John Dallas Harger — one of the area's earliest settlers.

During the controversy, however, residents have become progressively adamant in wanting the old dairy farmhouse removed or torn down.

The special meeting between city

administrators, the city council, members of the historic district commission and officials of Standard Federal Savings of Troy — the subdivision's majority landowner — was called in the Harger House to "try to resolve, get a sense of direction" and to "share viewpoints," City Manager William Costick said.

BUT IT was clear from the meeting's start that residents have grown tired of the issue and want the house removed so they can continue with plans to use the subdivision's 30-acre commons area. Residents said they do not wish to give up any portion of their commons area.

Although all of the 60-70 homeowners were not in attendance Wednesday, those who were maintained that their opinions are shared by the majority of subdivision residents.

Yet, Mayor Joe Alkateeb is still unconvinced.

"I'm not fully convinced we got the right answers," he said in a telephone interview following the meeting. "There wasn't a full representation of the whole subdivision."

Alkateeb said he would like to

send out a letter survey to every Hunt Club homeowner. The survey would ask residents to choose one of four available options to resolve the Harger House issue. The options are: 1) selling the house to a private owner for restoration as a residence; 2) exploring the possibility of restoring the house as a subdivision clubhouse; 3) demolishing it; or 4) moving it elsewhere in the city.

"I think the council should have solid information — beyond a shadow of a doubt — on which to base their decision. This is a big decision," Alkateeb said.

The results of the latest survey, taken by the homeowners association, show that of the 46 who responded, 30 want the house moved or torn down. Seven residents want the house sold and nine want to keep or lease it, according to resident Linda Cassar.

RESIDENTS TOLD city officials at the meeting that they are opposed to the sale of the house to a private owner for restoration on site.

"Selling is out of the question. We would lose control over the house and the area. We don't know what kind of building will be there," Cassar said in a telephone interview the following day.

Also at the meeting was a married couple who made a reported \$26,000 purchase offer to the bank for the Harger House and an acre of land. The Hunt Club association rejected the cash offer last spring.

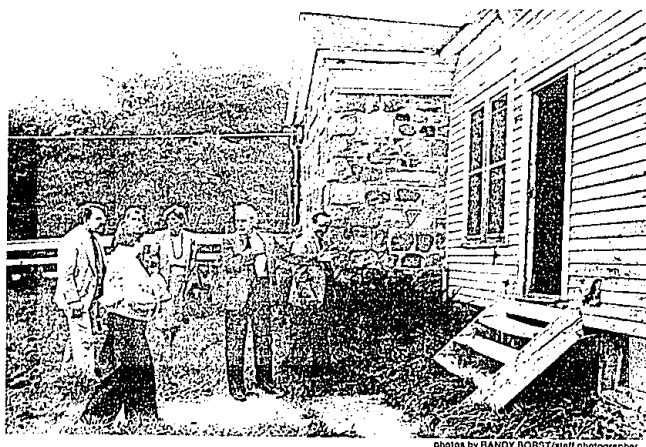
When city and bank officials again referred to the purchase offer, residents angrily opposed the notion of selling the house.

Some residents maintained that \$26,000 was not enough of an offer and that the house and the hill it sits on — considered the prime portion of the commons area — is worth at least \$200,000, particularly with its frontage on Halsted.

Mary Fowle, bank attorney, disagreed. "I don't happen to believe the land with or without the house is worth \$200,000. It's not saleable. It's a commons area."

Fowle told residents that proceeds from the sale of the house would go directly into the subdivision association's treasury. She reminded residents that when all subdivision lots are in the hands of private owners, the bank will no longer have a financial interest in the subdivision or commons area.

DURWOOD ALLEN, senior bank officer and chairman of the Hunt Club homeowners' association, reminded residents that "Standard



City Councilman Ben Marks (center) and residents into the Harger House before Wednesday's meeting.

(Federal Savings) has never counseled demolition."

Still, residents held to their opinion. "We have made our point clear. You know how the subdivision feels," a resident said. Selling the house is no longer an issue, the resident added.

Residents told city officials they oppose the sale of the house because they do not wish to lose control over the commons area. Even if the married couple, for example, promises to live in the house, residents have no guarantee that the land won't be rezoned for office or commercial use in the future, residents said.

"We have a lot of political pressure put against us to do something," resident Ron Henry said. "Ownership of this property eventually belongs bottom line, here. . . I haven't heard one good reason to save it (Harger House)."

Residents told city officials they eventually want to build a subdivision clubhouse on the site where the Harger House now stands. Suggestions by Alkateeb that residents use the Harger House as a clubhouse were rejected. Residents said they don't wish to be bothered with restoring the house.

ATTEMPTS BY Jean Fox, Farmington Hills Historic District Commission chairwoman, to stress the importance of preserving the house and the difficulty in moving it, were met with fierce opposition from residents.

"The reason this house is important is because it is a cut-stone Greek Revival home. There aren't many left in Michigan," Fox said. "There's a community interest in this home because of what this home stands for and what it means. Are we going to celebrate the Michigan sesquicentennial by tearing down a sesquicentennial house?"

Residents responded succinctly: "Yep."

One resident told Fox that, "We have gone over this time, after time, after time. We are covering the same ground. We are wasting time. Our position is set."

Finally, Fox took her seat, after residents told her that if she wanted the house preserved, she could put it in her subdivision or in front of city hall.

The city council and historic district commission want the house pre-

served. If city officials find a way and a place to move the house, subdivision residents cannot be expected to foot the bill, even though they share ownership with the bank, Alkateeb said.

RESIDENTS ARE seeking the most expedient and least costly method of resolving the Harger House issue. Relocating the house more than likely is not the least costly solution, Alkateeb said.

Following the meeting Wednesday, Costick said he felt city officials have two options: determining whether the house can be moved or explore the possibility of finding a private owner who would be willing to move and restore it.

Concerns have been expressed by city officials and historic district commissioners about the difficulty in moving the house without damaging it. City officials are uncertain about costs as well whether the house would have to be dismantled to be moved.

Residents chided city and historic district commission officials for failing to provide them with any type of restoration plan for the house, including costs.



Durwood Allen, senior vice president for Standard Federal Savings and Loan Association, relates to Wednesday's gathering that the bank has never favored demolishing the Harger House. City Councilman Donn Wolf is at right.

short takes

If you recently opened a shop, captured an award, earned a promotion or are planning a new venture or project — and there's a Farmington-area business angle — we'd like to hear from you so we can share your news item with other Farmington Observer readers. Send items to: Short takes, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024.

• NAMED ASSOCIATE

Lawrence Schwartz of Farmington was named an associate of the Society of Actuaries.

To be named an associate, Schwartz successfully completed an intensive course of study and examination on the basic concepts underlying the financial analysis of risk and its application to life and health insurance, pensions and other security programs.

Actuaries are trained mathematicians who study and evaluate risks and determine the costs of benefit programs such as pension plans or life insurance policies. They are also frequently expert in the design of such programs, in computer systems, finance, marketing and management.

The Society of Actuaries, an international organization of professional actuaries, performs research in actuarial science, provides continuing education for members and maintains high standards of competence and conduct.

• RELOCATION MARKET

In partnership with eight national companies, Hilton Hotels Corp. has launched "America on the Move," a national relocation network designed to capture a substantial share of the United States' multimillion-dollar temporary lodging market.

After six months of field testing at Hiltons in five major market cities, "America on the Move" was judged ready for systemwide distribution.

Statistics of the relocation market show that each year, nearly 17 percent of all Americans relocate. It is further estimated that executive transferees make at least three trips to the area where they will move. With the "America on the Move" network of business partners, Hilton plans to tap this market segment.

Participating Hiltons will offer special relocation services, rate incentives, and guest room accommo-

dations designed to suit the need of an extended stay. Shopping tours and temporary fitness club memberships are examples of special services designed for the long-staying guest. As is standard with Hilton, children stay free in the same room with their parents. Additional reduced rate rooms for larger families are also part of the relocation package.

Hilton's partners in "America on the Move" include Eastern Airlines, USA Today, All Points Relocation Service, IDS Financial Services, ADT Security Systems, Ryder Truck Rental, Move Management by Ryder and Relocation Publications, the author of the program.

With support from the American Medical Association, the American Bar Association, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "America on the Move" was designed to provide transferees with a reputable network of established, service-oriented firms.

The Novi Hilton has teamed up with the Detroit Airport Hilton and have formed a local network. Members of the team include Eastern Airlines in Southfield, the Novi Chamber of Commerce and the Benzos Company Apartment Rental, Farmington Hills.

• MAKES DONATION

The Make-A-Wish Foundation of Michigan received a \$2,000 check from The Columbus Mutual Life Insurance Co., Columbus, Ohio.

The donation was made on behalf of the Dan Cafolla Insurance Agency, Troy. The Cafolla Agency earmarked the donation to benefit a child in the Detroit area. Cafolla lives in Farmington Hills.

Earning the right to select the recipient of the Golden Rule Agency Award, the Cafolla Agency was first in its sales category with 215 percent over quota in Columbus Mutual's President's Month Sales Campaign.

The Make-A-Wish Foundation of Michigan "exists to grant the personal wishes of Michigan children 17 years of age and younger who suffer from terminal illnesses." It endeavors to provide emotional support to family members of the critically ill child.

The foundation, in Traverse City, is affiliated with the Make-A-Wish Foundation of America, headquartered in Phoenix.

special dinner at Diggers Restaurant, Farmington Hills.

• FREE SERVICE

Flamingo Phonecasting Network has set up two Detroit-area telephone numbers that callers can dial to hear free information on either the Michigan Lottery or Detroit-area weather.

"Callers to the Lottery Hotline will hear a recorded message announcing the latest Michigan Lottery results. The information heard on the Lottery Line is updated each evening immediately following the Bureau of State Lottery drawing at 7:29 p.m. Callers to the Weather Hotline will hear a continuously updated weather forecast for the Detroit metropolitan area, as well as the current temperature, and the correct time," said company founder Brian Levine.

Levine stressed that the information heard on both hotline numbers is provided free to callers. Both hotlines can be dialed from any type of telephone and are available to callers 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Lottery Hotline can be reached by dialing 522-5768 or by dialing JACKPOT.

The Weather Hotline can be reached by dialing 522-1212.

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