

Town is saving grace for historic home



The Becker House may be moved to a bluff in a new park in Fishers.

By KRISTY MEYER
 Sun-Herald staff writer

FISHERS — Mayor Becker would have wanted for Wednesday. Standing on the woods along the banks of the White River, town officials, local builders, historic preservationists and a general developer met to announce the fate of the 179-year-old home.

Mayor died in September. The town of Fishers announced a proposal to save what's become known as the Mansion House. It sits on the southwest corner of 96th Street and Allisonville Road. The town will study moving it this year to a bluff overlooking the White River, just south of 106th Street.

It would sit on the northern part of a 140-acre parcel the Washington Park Cemetery Association says it will donate to the town. Fishers hopes to create a park and use the house as a welcome center. Fishers History Museum and museum facilities.

The Cemetery Association bought

the 100-acre Becker property in March and had planned to demolish the house before preservationists raised objections. It sits on what could be prime commercial land.

The plan also calls for the town to buy land with David Hanson near the intersection of 106th Street and Elker Road. Area residents had lobbied for the swap. It would create an entrance for the 140-acre proposed park, which would include trails along the river.

"It's great to see the town take the initiative and step forward to preserve such an important piece of history."

YOU said it

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— Carol Ann Schweikert, private preservation consultant

three-year loan from the Indiana Historic Landmarks Foundation. Phil Myers and Denny Yonewich of the Hamilton County Council of the Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis offered labor, building products and expertise to help move the house.

"We will try to maintain our costs as much as possible," Kelly said. The Sun-Herald Page A2

House is going in pieces

By KRISTY MEYER
 Sun-Herald staff writer

FISHERS — Like a magician cutting in half a box containing his lovely assistant, workers took chain saws to the 179-year-old Mansion House Wednesday, dividing it into pieces small enough to move.

From the roof to the ground, inside and out, chain saws roared to cut in two the house on the southeast corner of 96th Street and Allisonville Road.

The house was split to make it easier to move, said Wes Bachler, Fishers director of development. The main structure was left intact, with the kitchen wing in the back of the house split off.

The house is scheduled to move to the town's new park along the White River Nov. 19.

Instead of demolishing the house it bought early this year, Washington Park Cemetery Association agreed to

donate it and 140 acres along the White River to the town. The town will move the house to the acreage and create a park with the house serving as a welcome center and museum.

The house will travel north on Allisonville Road to Elker Road, cut through Elker Trails subdivision and across a field to its new home. The kitchen portion of the house will be moved in the morning, between 9 and 11 a.m. The rest of the house will be moved in the afternoon between 1 and 3 p.m. Town Marshal George Kohl and Jim Brimberry, director of public works, will help coordinate the redirecting of traffic. Businesses and houses along the path of the move will be notified.

The mansion house has been renamed Ambassador House. Addison Harrison, U.S. ambassador to Austria, used the house for his summer home.



Construction workers with Steve Schurtz Builders continue preparation work Wednesday to save the Becker house in half.

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 ever home in the 1880s. The construction plan to restore the house is the way it looked in 1980, when Harrison was its resident.

The house will be the first thing people entering the park will see. Parking will be located on a lower level, near the creek.

"Everyone will be delighted with the new site," said Maxwell Davis, chairman of the town's historic preservation committee. "It will be located on a grassy knoll that overlooks a valley and the White River."

Over railroad, the committee has also discussed creating an interpretive site specifically for the house and selling commemorative books for \$20 each to raise money.

A team of up to 2000 tons built the historic landmark. Foundation will help with the cost of the move. Members of the Hamilton County Council of the Builders Association of Greater Indianapolis are donating their time and expertise to the project. Phil Myers of Phil Myers Construction will help joiners, cabinet and kitchen installers. Steve



The Historic Preservation Committee plans to restore the Ambassador House to its appearance in this 1980 photo. The 179-year-old house will be moved from its 96th Street and Allisonville Road location to a bluff in a new park along the White River Nov. 19.

Steve of Schurtz Builders and his crew cut the building in half. Randy Culp of Edgewood Building Supply cleaned back and block.

They'll be moving the house to its new location.

"The move is a major step," Kelly said, "but it is another big step for the community. Over the

house is needed immediately, the real work begins."

Restoration of the house and completion of the land is scheduled for the summer of 1997.



The ripping noise of chain saws sounds through the Mansion House in Fishers Wednesday as Rick Simpson of Steve Schurtz Builders cuts through the upstairs hallway.



Home: Cooperation from everyone was essential

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may even examine selling off some property to fund the project, he said.

"Success in saving the house was guaranteed due to its age and history. It once belonged to the American ambassador to Austria, Addison Harrison. It's on Noblesville Preservation Alliance's 1996 most endangered structures list and on state and county historic registers. None of this would have prevented its demolition."

Center Prairie living-history museum announced March 13 it would not move the house to its grounds three miles north, disappointing many who hoped the house could be saved.

The house was given a reprieve two days before its scheduled demolition March 22, when Fishers expressed interest.

Kelly was happy with the cooperation from everyone involved in the process, and will present the proposal to the council for a vote next week. Approval is expected.

"This has been a win-win situation," said Ms. Thomas and Thomas Associates of Indianapolis, representing Washington Park. The cemetery association will use 15 to 20 acres of the land to expand its Oakland Memorial Gardens on Allisonville Road.

Thomas' cooperation was key, said Fishers resident Dana Kemper, who had worked to save the house.

"Thomas has allowed us to get into the house and do the site plan," Kemper said. "He has listened to our ideas and considered suggestions."

Myers agreed to help move the house because of a meeting he had with Mayor Becker before he died.

Myers struck a chord with him when he began to tell him about the house and its history and what it meant to her.

"What began as a short visit turned into three hours," Myers said. "We got out her photo album and talked to her about the house."

Myers was smiling too after he heard the news.



The wooden staircase in the Mansion House leads from the bedrooms to the parlor and living room. The woodwork is reflective of the time period in which the house was built.



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Life: After move, house will become a visitor's center

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The Craig House in Noblesville is the most recent historic home to be moved in Hamilton County, when it was taken from one side of Corner Street to the other in 1988. It is on the National Historic Register.

A change of scenery often reduces the historical significance of a house, White said. But in the case of the Mansion House, it was a matter of more or less it.

Despite the move, the house will continue to have historical value. It was home to Addison Harrison, American ambassador to Austria in the 1880s, and its original layout remains intact.

Built within the same period as the Corner House, the interior reflects the simple taste of the era when it was built. The rooms are open and accessible to allow air to circulate. A fire place chimney in the living room extends upward to heat second-floor bedrooms.

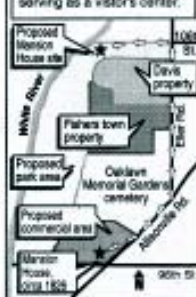
Half-in wardrobes, leaded glass attic windows and simple woodwork give the house its character.

Once it is placed on the bluff over the White River, the Mansion House will serve as park entrance and historical museum for Fishers.

Restoration will begin as the house settles in for a long stay in a new location.

On the move

The Fishers Town Council plans to move the Mansion House this summer to a bluff overlooking White River. The house will travel north on Allisonville Road to Elker Road to its new location. The town accepted 140 acres along the White River in April from the Washington Park Cemetery Association. This land will become a park with the house serving as a visitor's center.



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