

Nelson-Merry to be razed, gym saved

By Susan Davidson
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If a recommendation by the Jefferson City Parks and Recreation Commission is approved by the city council, Nelson-Merry School will be torn down except for the gym and former science area.

A sparsely-attended recreation meeting Tuesday night was called to gain input from city residents about the future use of the property. With the exception of one person, it seemed to be the consensus of those at the meeting that razing the old portion of the building was probably the first step to be taken before the site could be developed further.

City recreation director Ronnie Kerr said that the property is of no benefit to anyone as it is now, adding that he didn't know when it ever could be if the old structure remained standing.

"The old building was gone, we had a nice park," he explained. "It has been dragging its feet for three years and it's time to do something now."

Although no specific plans have been put on paper, Kerr said the park would probably include a picnic area, playground equipment, and outdoor basketball court on the 11 acre site.

Drawings and cost estimates on the project will be submitted to council before further funds are allocated.

Kerr gave a summary of expenditures on the building over the past two years. Some \$10,513.21 was spent on heat, material and labor for replacing windows, and material and labor for a new roof for the gym.

Money spent on the rest of the school building amounted to quite a bit more. A contract to White Glass and Tile Company and Andy Turley amounted to \$18,024.71. The cost of the materials added another \$8,012.74. Labor costs, which included a CETA contract, totaled \$46,233.56.

During the last two years alone, \$82,784.22 was spent on both the school building and the gym.

It was pointed out at the meeting, though, that the funds were spent without a specific renovation plan in

mind. The commission was urged to have a specific plan to present to the council not only by Mayor Alan Palmieri but by several residents at the meeting.

The amount of vandalism at the building is one of the main reasons Kerr and others cited for having the building razed. Difficulty in patrolling behind the building was one of the factors in controlling vandalism.

Both blacks and whites have made the structure the object of vandalism, Kerr and residents of the area noted. But one resident noted that the community has begun a youth organization to try and get the young people involved in their community. A recreation center would be an asset, she said.

The vandalism must be controlled before further development can occur, though, the mayor said. He suggested that the old building be demolished before any more improvements be made so the site can be more easily patrolled.

Councilmen John Gibson and Frieda Burts added to the idea of better control of the area. Gibson suggested that the city recreation director move his office to the building so that some-

one would be there each day. It was Burts' idea that a caretaker be hired to live on the premises during the renovation process.

The original motion that the commission recommend the demolition of the old building while preserving the gym and science area was amended to read that a caretaker be hired for the area before any work is done.

That recommendation will be presented to city council at their regular meeting in two weeks. It is anticipated that Kerr will have drawings and cost estimates ready for council's consideration by their March meeting.