

City delays house demolition

City council decided to stall action Thursday night when informed another buyer was in the offing for a James Bay house a developer wants to demolish.

Residents of the Battery Street area have united in an effort to get the house at 648 Battery St. designated a heritage building to prevent it being razed.

Developer John Hanrahan has said he will seek redress in the courts if he

is not allowed to demolish the house so he can build a nursing home on the site.

Battery Street resident Mark Maddoff told council Thursday that the property owner now has an offer from another person who would respect the historical and architectural value of the building. It was built in 1907 by George Mesher for John Hall, one of the city's early alderman and a printer by trade. Hall came to Victoria from San Francisco in 1859.

Ald. Martin Levin was the only alderman who voted against tabling the issue until June 5 to see if the owner will negotiate the sale of the house to somebody other than Hanrahan.

Levin received no support for his motion to have the house designated a heritage building. It is already listed as an historic site. Once declared heritage nothing could be done to the exterior of the building, or the building demolished, without council approval.

"We are told there might be possible legal action if we go ahead but council has to face the possibility that one of our historic properties would

receive a legal challenge some day," Levin said. "But tourists, which are our largest industry, are attracted here because of the way in which we have preserved our historic buildings. It has made our city unique."

Levin said he was not impressed with a letter received from Hanrahan's lawyer, Gerald Neely, in which he said his client would withdraw his application for demolition if council agreed to remove the house from the list of possible heritage homes and not designate it as a heritage site.

Levin said there was no assurance that Hanrahan would change his mind once his terms were met.

"I've been informed by the city solicitor that the letter has no legal significance," Levin said. He contended council has a responsibility to take a stand on the issue and preserve the building.

"The decision of the owner to accept the (newest) offer is probably dependent on what we do tonight," observed Ald. Geoff Young.

Ald. Murray Glazier said he was in favor of tabling the matter "in view that a potential sale can be successfully dealt with."