

New era opening for Mansion House

By KEN McLAUGHLIN

The fight to save the historic Mansion House from the wrecking ball came to fruition yesterday.

Realtor Marty Sglav and his business associates have sold the land on which the 107-year-old structure sits to Roger and Jeff Hoffman, who plan on restoring the building inside and out.

The building itself was deeded by Sglav to the Pajaro Valley Historical Assn. The association, in turn, will lease the building to the Hoffman brothers for a negligible cost, with an option to buy. In all likelihood, the building will be purchased by the Hoffmans as soon as the remaining technicalities have been taken care of. The agreed-upon purchase price is \$10. (The price tag, of course, is only a technicality to make transfer of the building legally binding.)

Roger Hoffman, who has helped spearhead the drive to revitalize the downtown, declined to say what he and his brother paid for the land under the Mansion House. Revealing the price, he said, would only artificially inflate the cost of other historic buildings in the downtown, which might make their rehabilitation impossible.

Hoffman did say, however, that the full Mansion House rehabilitation project would cost about \$800,000. That includes the price of the land purchase, he said.

The Hoffmans plan on completely restoring the building's facade. As much as possible, the structure will look the way it did when it was new. The inside of the building will be so completely rehabilitated that it will "essentially be a new building," Hoffman said.

The Hoffmans plan on putting a restaurant, offices and specialty retail shops in the old hotel.

Hoffman said the restaurant will be the "top, first-class dinner house" that Watsonville residents have waited for so long. "It's either that, or there'll be no restaurant in the building at all. There will be no in-betweens," he asserted.

The target date for beginning the rehabilitation work is April of next year. The Hoffmans hope that the work will be completed by December of 1979.

Yesterday's disclosure of the sale came after months of speculation about the fate of the Mansion House. At a City Council meeting several months ago, realtor Sglav said that the building would not be economically feasible to rehabilitate. He made the statement while appealing a council decision to clamp a moratorium on building and demolition permits on the downtown. After the council decided that Sglav has been dealt with unfairly by City Hall, he was given the permit to demolish the Mansion House.

Working behind the scenes for the past few months has been historical association president Pat Pirtle. On June 1, Mrs. Pirtle was given the OK by the association's board of directors to do "whatever is necessary to save the Mansion House." She was instrumental in coordinating the complicated sale arrangements.

One legalism still has to be taken care of. It involves drawing up a document that will give the historical association an "historical easement" that will allow the organization to dictate what happens

to the architectural facade of the building "for perpetuity," Mrs. Pirtle said.

Hoffman said this morning that the Mansion House is well on the way to becoming listed in the National Register of Historic Buildings. All the necessary papers have been filled out, he said, and he expects the listing to become final by April.

Getting the building on the Register will mean tax advantages for the new owners, under terms of the national Tax Reform Act of 1976. Probably the most important tax break is called "accelerated depreciation," which, in essence, allows owners to "write off" the cost of rehabilitating historic building in five years.

Jeff Hoffman said that the building was purchased from Sglav and his business partners without bank financing. But doing the rehabilitation work will require attracting other investors, he said. That won't be much of a problem, he said, since several persons have already indicated they would financially back the project.

The project would be the first massive spruce-up job of an historic building in the downtown. And it's expected to trigger other projects.

"People are becoming more aware of preservation," a delighted Mrs. Pirtle said this morning.

Mrs. Pirtle praised Sglav for his support in the effort to save the Mansion House. "Since I told him last May that the historical association wanted to save the building, he has worked very close with me," she said. "He has cooperated very nicely."