

LOCAL/STATE

THE PANTAGRAPH, Monday, March 27, 1995 A3



The Pantagraph/MARK VON BROCK

A historical marker stands on the lawn of the former home of Joseph W. Fifer, a governor of Illinois in the late 1800s. The McLean Street residence is on Franklin Park, one of Bloomington's historic districts. Owners of homes in historic districts in the city might become eligible for grants for exterior renovations under a proposed city program.

Historic homes get new lease on life

Bloomington to offer grants for preservation

By KAREN HANSEN
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There is a variety of funding assistance available to people who want to renovate historic commercial properties.

Bloomington will soon begin a similar program for owners of historic homes.

After May 1, residents who live in local historic districts can apply through the Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission for grants up to \$2,500 to be used for exterior restoration or rehabilitation.

"If you're a resident in a historic district, sometimes there are times that to do things well — or even to do them right — it costs more," said commission member Russel Francois. "We

would like to create some carrots for owners so they can opt to go the high road."

The program is called the Eugene D. Funk Jr. Historic Preservation Grant, named for the former president of Funk Seeds Co. Beginning with the 1995-96 fiscal year, the city will budget \$10,000 that can be awarded in amounts up to \$2,500. It is similar to the Robert G. Bone Historic Preservation Grant program in Normal, created four years ago.

The grant provides funding for up to 50 percent of the cost of professional services for an exterior renovation project. Any applicant can receive no more than two grants annually.

The property must be a local landmark, or part of a locally designated historic district. Those districts include the Franklin Square area, the Davis-Jefferson district and a handful of individual sites.

Interested homeowners can apply through the Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission,

which will review any applications and make recommendations to the City Council, which must approve all funding requests.

No interior renovations will be eligible for funding, nor will any commercial properties.

"It's kind of a little morale booster for the districts," Bloomington Mayor Jesse Smart said.

Francois hopes the program will spawn additional renovation efforts, as well as interest from other neighborhoods that might want to become local historic districts.

Local historic districts are required to adhere to exterior renovation standards outlined by the commission.

Francois said the grants add an element of fairness to the community standards expected of those who own historic homes.

"The public's asking something of private owners — to preserve," he said. "I think there should be a little incentive, a little giving back."