State House skylight: is it worth preserving?

By TOM COAKLEY
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Historic Annapolis is looking for a consultant to tell them whether the skylight in the state Senate chamber is valuable enough to save.

The city's premier historic preservation organization will wait until it gets an appraisal from such a consultant before deciding whether to mount an effort to save the stained glass skylight.

"We haven't entered the picture yet," St. Clair Wright, president of the organization, said yesterday. "We're still discussing it among ourselves."

Plans are already underway to replace the pink-tinted panels, blossoms and black frills of the skylight with a stained glass seal of Maryland.

Contracts for the job, to cost $25,000 in taxpayers' money, have already been signed with the D. Willet Stained Glass Studio in Philadelphia.

The project is spearheaded by State Senate President Steny Hoyer, D-Prince Georges, and was approved by the state Board of Public Works and the State House Trust.

Hoyer feels the present skylight is unappealing esthetically and that the seal would be a more significant symbol.

Yet, Josephine Hunt, of 156 Prince Georges St., feels Hoyers' plans would "cannibalize" the state Senate and House of Delegates portion of the State House. Others have joined the fight to save the Tiffany-style skylight, writing letters to the Evening Capital and contacting Mrs. Wright about the skylight. She said about 20 persons have been in touch with her over the subject.

Col. Laurence P. Sangston, a former state architect, is the man in charge of the project. He has said that when the old skylight is taken down it may be sold to the public for about $5 a square foot. "I don't know what the state would do with it," he said in mid-November. "As far as I'm concerned, I think it's worthless as an item to the state."

Dr. Edward Papenfuse, state archivist, has agreed that Hoyer's plan is in keeping with the architecture of the Senate and House chamber section of the State House.

Mrs. Wright seems undeterred by the fact that the wheels of state government have already started turning against the skylight. "Things change so frequently," she said yesterday.

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