

Opera House restoration committee formed

Village, township approve \$5,000 for Opera House grant

by Mark LaRose
Staff Writer

VERMONTVILLE — In accordance with terms of a state grant the community received for the Opera House restoration project, the Village Council and the Vermontville Township Board each approved payment of \$2,500 for the project last week.

Another condition of the Department of Commerce Michigan Equity Program grant calls for the village to supply \$5,000 "in-kind," which is volunteer labor or use of equipment. Hildred Peabody of the Historical Society told the council Thursday.

Peabody and Clerk Sharon Stewart wrote the grant, and Peabody noted that the labor involved in the grant writing project would be used as part of the \$5,000 in-kind.

She also informed the council that she had met with the Township Board Tuesday and that it had approved its share, \$2,500, of the grant, which provides for a total of \$35,000 to be spent on renovation of the interior of the historic Opera House.

The council then approved payment of the \$2,500 it had approved when the grant was written.

n. Trustee Russ Bennett said.

The authors, however, originally applied for a \$43,000, so certain adjustments will have to be made, Peabody noted.

She also told the council that the grant called for the formation of a committee that will be made up of one member from each of the following groups: The Village Council, the Vermontville Township Board, the Vermontville Historical Society and the Vermontville Chamber of Commerce.

Peabody noted that the com-

mittee was required to meet bi-monthly until the project is completed.

The timeline calls for completion by Oct. 1.

The committee will be responsible for quality control on the project and for reporting to the two governmental units.

Peabody will represent the Historical Society on the Opera House Restoration Committee, and Township Clerk Janice Baker confirmed that Supervisor Russ Laverty will represent that body.

The council then appointed Village President Sue Villanueva to represent the village government.

Chamber of Commerce President Don Mulvany will represent the business community.

A grant administrator will also be appointed to handle the financial account.

Peabody also told the council that she had planned to meet Friday with State Senator John Schwarz, who was instrumental in securing the grant for Vermontville, to discuss the grant.

Because of health problems, Schwarz didn't make it Friday, but he sent two of his aides, Scott Sowulewski, Calhoun County, and Julie McNamara, Eaton County.

At that meeting, several items were discussed.

Peabody said that because the grant was for less than they had sought, certain changes would have to be made and that the grant would have to be amended.

Sowulewski said that wouldn't be a problem.

"The problem is getting the money the first time, but once you get on the list of ongoing funded projects, they (the DOC) generally see them through," Sowulewski said.

One of the big problems discussed was the handicap-



Because of a \$25,000 Michigan Equity Grant the village received recently, the interior of one of Vermontville's historical landmarks, the Opera House, will be renovated this year.

ped accessibility to the building because the grant called for an \$18,000 lift to be installed.

But Sowulewski said that because it was a historical site and because there wasn't enough money to do the interior restoration and the elevator, there was a waiver they could get that would be good for up to 10 years.

He added that there was a \$200 application fee for the waiver.

Peabody also noted that another big problem had developed since the grant was written.

The furnace hasn't been working, but a part was on order, and she was under the impression that it could be fixed.

However, on Thursday she learned that the part was obsolete and that the furnace would have to be replaced.

Therefore, she suggested amending the grant to allow for the approximately \$18,700 needed for the drywall and interior restoration and to allow for the purchase of a new furnace, which was a top priority because the drywall would be ruined by the cold.

Sowulewski didn't foresee any problems with amending

The restoration is being performed to provide Vermontville with a community center.

"Our motive is to make the building more functional for the community so that once again it can be used as a cultural, educational and historical center," the grant says.

When completed the Opera House is expected to be used for "youth activities — programs, dances, meetings, wedding receptions, little league groups, and art exhibits."

The grant notes that these are "only a few of the possibilities."

Other plans call for the display of memorabilia on early tent shows, theater pictures, programs and related items to be put on display.

Peabody also said that the

grant calls for the creation of a Fine Arts Council, which will bring art and other exhibits to the Opera House on a regular basis.

A tentative meeting for the Opera House Restoration Committee was scheduled for this week.

It was not known when the work would actually begin because one of the topics discussed Friday was the bidding process.

The bid used in submitting the grant proposal came from Brandenburg Drywall of Vermontville.

It called for ceiling plaster frame wall removal — \$2,500, drywall — \$6,500, painting — \$2,000, insulation — \$1,200 striping and scraping woodwork — \$4,500 and refinishing trim — \$2,000 for a total of \$18,700.