



Fremont Mayor Skip Edwards orders the audience to be quiet Tuesday night at Fremont High School.



PHOTOS BY KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD

their seats at Fremont High School for a City Council hearing on a proposed

Breaking vote in Fremont

By JOHN FERAK
AND CINDY GONZALEZ
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITERS

FREMONT, Neb. — Five-term Mayor Donald "Skip" Edwards says illegal immigration is a huge problem, but he doesn't think his small city is the place to try to solve an issue facing the entire country.

At about 11:30 p.m. Tuesday, Edwards cast the pivotal vote to break a 4-4 Fremont City Council tie and defeat a proposed city ordinance aimed at driving away illegal immigrants by punishing landlords and businesses who rented to and hired them.

"Casting the vote was very emotional for me. I sincerely mean that we do have a problem in this country with illegal immigration," Edwards, 69, said today.

The vote followed a hearing

On Omaha.com
Video and more photos.

that drew more than 1,000 people to the Fremont High School auditorium, where the council heard impassioned testimony for and against the proposal.

Edwards said that he strongly opposed illegal immigration and that the vote had weighed heavily on him. But he made his decision after consulting with several law firms.

"Trying to enforce this type of ordinance would be very expensive, hundreds of thousands of dollars, possibly millions," he said. "I am of the opinion this is a federal law. I vote no."

Boos from an audience that shrank as the night wore on were drowned out by a standing ovation. *See Fremont: Page 2*

Who wants a used mansion anyway?

■ The Watanabe home will be torn down to make room for two new houses.

By CHRISTINE LAUE
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The Watanabe mansion, one of Omaha's largest and most notable homes, will be demolished and the property divided to accommodate two single-family homes, a project manager said.

The Regency mansion at 9800 Harney Parkway South sold recently to Harney Street Real Estate LLC, said Christian Christensen, a residential developer who will serve as manager of the limited liability company.

The owner plans to recycle the materials and donate as much of them as possible, said Christensen, whose Bluestone Development built some of downtown Omaha's new residential projects, including Rows at SoMa and Towns at Little Italy. The owner will split the four-acre lot into two, two-acre lots, he said.

NP Dodge's Jeff Rensch, the property's listing and selling agent, said he could not comment on the buyer, the sale price or the plans for the property.

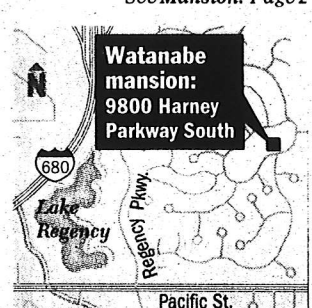
"We did show it to many prominent Omaha families," he said. "Contractually, I cannot comment on it."

Christensen said he is talking to prospective buyers of the lots but currently has no deals.

Rensch said the sale closed July 18.

County records indicate that the property sold for more than \$2 million less than the 2008 assessed value.

The real estate transfer statement, which accompanied a warranty deed filed on July 22, shows *See Mansion: Page 2*



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increment financing. Under that approach, the property tax revenue generated by new development within three blocks of the streetcar system would help pay for its construction.

Fahey said establishing those districts would be a major effort. Even then, there is no guar-

antee that the council will support the council to pass it." Fahey said he is hopeful that the city will have new police and fire union contracts by the end of 2008. The city and the fire union are headed to the State Commission of Industrial Relations next week to resolve their contract dispute, with a second

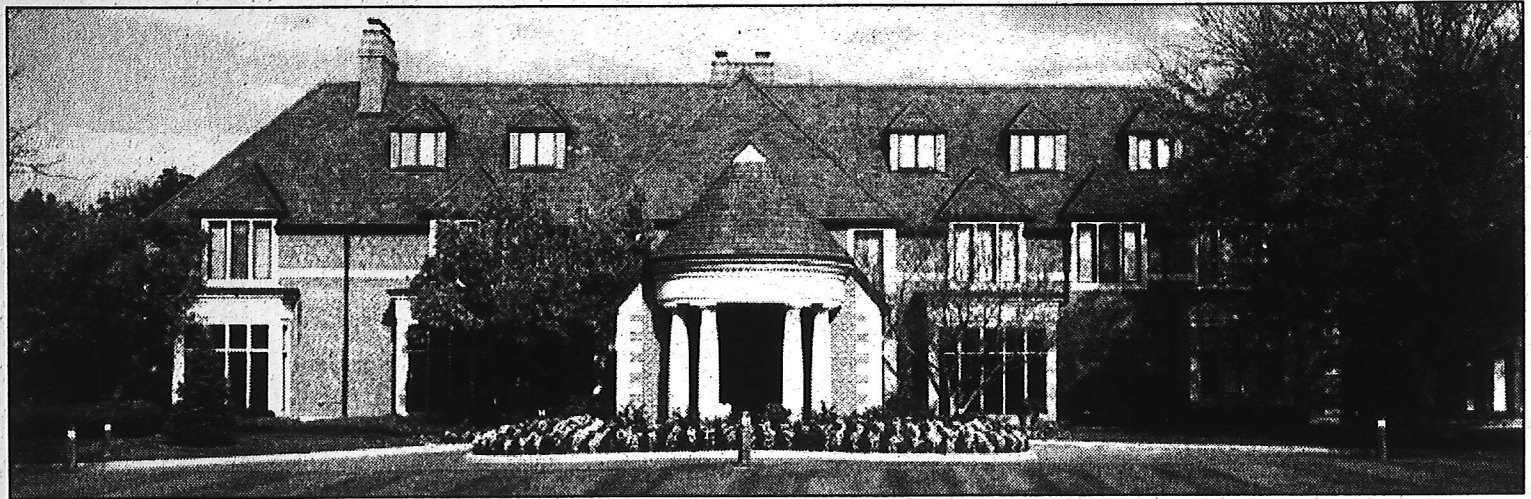
and pensions. Construction is slated to begin in the coming months on a number of major civic projects, including the Zorinsky Lake Water Park and the new downtown baseball stadium.

Fahey said he also is looking forward to the fall opening of

Street and South 24th Street streetscape projects.

One of his final acts as mayor will be to put together the preliminary 2010 city budget.

Fahey said he doesn't expect his new lame-duck status to keep him from accomplishing his remaining goals.



Slated for demolition, the brick, limestone and slate Watanabe mansion has nine bedrooms and 18 bathrooms. Developers plan to recycle and donate as much of the mansion's materials as possible.

Mansion: Material from home will be donated

Continued from Page 1
the purchase price as \$2.66 million.

The Douglas County Assessor's Office Web site shows the 2008 assessed value as \$4.87 million.

The seller is philanthropist Terry Watanabe, former owner of Oriental Trading Co., which sells party supplies, toys, home décor items and giftware.

Rensch previously said that Watanabe plans to maintain another residence in Omaha.

Christensen said the home will be dismantled as soon as he receives all necessary permits. Details about the demolition and donation of materials have

not been finalized, he said.

"We've hired an architect to create a master plan, which will position the homes in a suitable manner to the street, the surrounding neighborhood and the park," Christensen said. "The goal is to create two beautiful home sites in one of Omaha's most exceptional neighborhoods."

Harney Street Real Estate LLC will strive to minimize disruption in the neighborhood during demolition and construction, Christensen said.

Godfather's Pizza founder Willy Theisen built the home in 1983. In April 1995, Theisen sold the property for \$1.8 mil-

lion to Terry Watanabe, whose father, Harry, founded Oriental Trading Co.

On Halloween 2000, Terry Watanabe retired from the company.

An expert hired by Douglas County officials in 2004 to rank the desirability of Omaha-area mansions put the Watanabe house at the top of its list. At that time, its main living space was 12 times as large as the average Douglas County house.

According to the Assessor's Office Web site, the property was assessed at \$4,989,600 in 2007 and at \$4,871,700 in 2008.

Assessor records placed the home's square footage at 18,045

square feet, but Rensch said in January that the finished space was 20,125 square feet.

The brick, limestone and slate mansion sits on 4.05 acres and has nine bedrooms, 18 bathrooms, a gourmet kitchen, a wine cellar, a whole-house energy management system and a three-story elevator. The lower level features a modern exercise facility and health spa with sunken Jacuzzi, steam room, dry sauna and massage room.

The property also includes indoor and outdoor swimming pools and tennis courts.

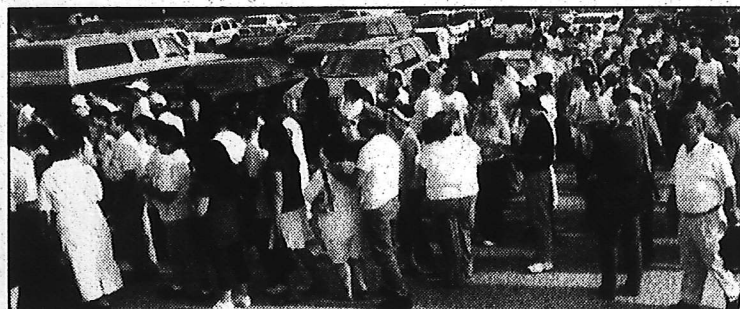
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Fremont: Legal advice led mayor to vote 'no'

Continued from Page 1
tion cheering Edwards' vote.

When the tense meeting ended, the slender, gray-haired Edwards sat for several minutes in a classroom, recuperating from the emotionally charged session that had lasted nearly five hours.

Some City Council members and other city officials offered



Fremont native who said she represented a coalition of local churches, schools and social service agencies. "Rather it will negatively impact Fremont."

Severiano Franco of Lincoln said the council could distinguish itself by enacting the ordinance. "You'll be No. 1," he said, "You'll be the biggest big-