

SUBJECT: Sale of Woodlawn by the State Preservation Board

COMMITTEE: House Administration — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Goolsby, Luna, Chisum, Geren, Hamric, Hawley, D. Jones, Maxey
0 nays
3 absent — Allen, Bailey, Giddings

WITNESSES: For — None
Against — None
On — Rick Crawford, State Preservation Board; *Registered but did not testify:* Hal Croft, General Land Office

BACKGROUND: The historic property Woodlawn in Austin on Niles Road, also known as the Pease Mansion or Shivers Mansion, was designed by renowned architect Abner Cook, who also designed the Governor’s Mansion. The Shivers family donated the mansion to the University of Texas System, which sold it to the state. SB 494 by Harris, enacted in 1999, transferred ownership of Woodlawn from the General Services Commission (GSC) to the State Preservation Board (SPB), which has been responsible for preserving, maintaining, and restoring the historic mansion.

Natural Resources Code, sec. 31.158(c) governs real estate transactions authorized by the Legislature. If the Legislature authorizes a sale of real estate involving property owned or held in trust by the state, the asset management division of the General Land Office (GLO) negotiates and closes the transaction on behalf of the state. Government Code, sec. 443.0103 governs capitol renewal accounts, which are special accounts in the general revenue fund including money that is deposited specifically for the purposes of the account. Money only can be used to maintain and preserve the Capitol, the GLO Building, their contents, and their grounds.

DIGEST: HB 2164 would amend the Government Code, sec. 443.025 to allow the State Preservation Board to sell Woodlawn at its fair market value. The GLO would transact the sale on behalf of the board. Proceeds from the sale would be deposited in the Capitol renewal account or its successor and only could be spent for maintaining and preserving the Capitol, the GLO Building, their contents and their grounds.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS SAY: The State Preservation Board took possession of the pre-Civil War estate in 1999, but the 147-year old mansion has been vacant since 1996 and is deteriorating badly. There have been several proposals for what to do with the estate, but so far none have come to fruition. Sale of the mansion to an appropriate entity would strengthen oversight and upkeep of the mansion by putting it in the hands of someone with the desire to manage this historic facility and utilize it to its fullest potential. The yearly upkeep on the estate is about \$60,000, according to the SPB.

Former Gov. Allan Shivers and his wife donated the estate to the University of Texas System in 1975, with the understanding that proceeds from the sale of the property would endow university chairs. It never was intended to be a state property.

OPPONENTS SAY: Woodlawn is the third most important historic state building in Austin after the Capitol and the Governor's Mansion. It should be kept in the hands of the state, as the late former Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock wanted.

NOTES: According to the bill's fiscal note, the estimated fair market value of the property is \$5 million and an expenditure of \$400,000 would be required in connection with the sale of the property.