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City of Rochester officials have denied an application to designate Sacred Heart Cathedral a landmark.

Diocese wins landmark case

Those who supported making Rochester's Sacred Heart Cathedral a city landmark won the first battle in the process, but wound up losing the war.

At the end of a five-hour meeting the night of Oct. 7, the Rochester City Planning Commission voted 5 to 3 against granting landmark status to the cathedral.

Noting, in part, the Diocese of Rochester's strong objections to landmark status, the commission rejected the recommendation of the city's seven-member preservation board, which had voted unanimously Oct. 2 to designate the cathedral a landmark.

Father Joseph Hart, diocesan vicar general and moderator of the Diocesan Pastoral Center, said the commission's vote upheld proper church-state relations.

"I'm pleased because the government ought not to have a say in how a religious edifice is furnished and shaped and formed and changed," he said at the end of the planning meeting.

Mary S. Giorgi, a Sacred Heart parishioner who led the drive to seek landmark status, said she was disappointed by the vote, but accepted it as final.

"I do feel that the cathedral is a landmark even if it is not designated so," she said.

The petition to make the cathedral a landmark covered the church's entire interior and exterior, as well as the rectory and landscaping. The preservation board had voted to designate the church's exterior and much of its interior a landmark, but excluded such furnishings as the confessionals, bishop's chair, pews and altar.

Landmark designation would not entirely have precluded renovations, but would have required the diocese to seek city approval for certain interior and exterior changes. In the end, however, the planning commission's majority appeared to agree with the diocese that landmark status would unduly impede

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Story by Rob Cullivan • Photos by Karin von Voigtlander