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While the planning commission decision was pending, the City of Rochester gave the diocese permission to replace the roof of Sacred Heart Cathedral after interior water damage was discovered.

Landmark status denied again

Cathedral vote mirrors previous debate, outcome

As Yogi Berra might say, it was *deja vu* all over again early in the morning of June 24, as the Rochester City Planning Commission for a second time voted to deny landmark status to Sacred Heart Cathedral. The vote followed a heated hearing and deliberations that lasted four hours.

In separate votes, commission members voted 4-3 against landmark status for the exterior and interior of the cathedral.

Landmark designation would have required a 6-1 supermajority vote, which is needed when landmark status is opposed by a building's owner — in this case, the Diocese of Rochester.

The vote was welcomed by diocesan

leaders, including Father Joseph A. Hart, one of the diocese's two vicars general, who noted at the hearing that the diocese would seriously consider another site for the diocesan cathedral if Sacred Heart became a landmark. In fact, he said the diocese had already chosen an alternate site outside the city, and had drawn up a plan to use it if Sacred Heart was designated a landmark.

If landmark designation had been imposed, the diocese would have been required to obtain the city's approval for certain changes to the cathedral, a process diocesan leaders noted would involve expense and inconvenience. Additionally, landmark status would have impeded the diocese from making structural changes called for by church liturgical norms, diocesan leaders said, noting that

this could impinge on the First Amendment freedom of religion.

After the vote, Father John Mulligan, a diocesan vicar general and pastor at Sacred Heart, said work had already begun on the cathedral's roof, and that major renovations will likely begin sometime in mid-autumn. The cathedral's final Mass will take place on Sunday, June 29, at 10 a.m., he said, noting that Masses there are slated to resume in August of 2004. In the meantime, parishioners will attend Masses at two neighboring parishes, he said.

Last October, the planning commission voted 5-2 against landmark status for Sacred Heart. Renovation opponents had sought the designation on the grounds that the Gothic-style church would be "fundamentally destroyed" by interior

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Story by Rob Cullivan • Photos by Karin von Voigtlander

