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City Council OKs symbolic freeze on home foreclosures

By STEVE BRANDT, Star Tribune
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An admittedly symbolic call for a three-month freeze on home foreclosures in Minneapolis won approval Friday from a split City Council.

Supporters said the proposal was one ray of hope that the city could give to residents after a tripling of foreclosed homes between 2005 and 2007. "Give those who are in the process right now some relief," Council Member Don Samuels asked.

Opponents said the call for lenders to negotiate with borrowers on loan terms instead of foreclosing would accomplish no such thing. "This is a simple solution that does nothing to address a hugely complex problem," said Council President Barbara Johnson.

Both council members represent North Side wards hit hard by foreclosures.

Opponents said the city should continue to focus on foreclosure prevention counseling and reoccupying abandoned houses.

The council endorsement was the first in Minnesota, said Brandon Nessen of Minnesota ACORN, an advocacy group that sought the freeze.

Johnson, Sandra Colvin Roy, Paul Ostrow and Lisa Goodman opposed it. Voting for it were Samuels, Diane Hofstede, Gary Schiff, Robert Lilligren, Elizabeth Glidden, Ralph Remington, Scott Benson, Betsy Hodges and Cam Gordon.

In other action, the council:

• Granted a permit for up to 77 condo units proposed by developer Basim Sabri on the Midtown Greenway. Sabri's lawyer said the size was an acceptable compromise from the original 92 units. Area Council Member Lilligren voted no.

• Gave authority for demolition of fire-ravaged Gustavus Adolphus Hall, a Lake Street landmark, but stayed the razing to see if a new developer meets deadlines. Chris Rydrych, co-owner of a construction firm, said he's had rights to the building since Nov. 8 and is working on restoration options for the 83-year-old former home of a Swedish fraternal group. He must post a performance bond by April 21.

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