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River Street, Historic Preservation

Editor, The Statesman:

Contrary to the impression given by an article on River Street development which appeared in The Statesman on July 13, the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office did not recommend preservation of two "dilapidated" houses owned by Gerald Riedel.

Federal agencies, before making loans for construction projects like Riedel's, are required by law to investigate whether the project would have an adverse effect on properties

of historic or architectural significance.

The purpose of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 is to prevent federal agencies from spending the taxpayers' money to adversely affect the nation's heritage. The requirement is that an investigation be made and that steps be taken to mitigate any adverse effects the project might have on historic values. The law does not say that such project cannot be funded — only that historic values be identified and considered.

The role of the Idaho Historical Society, by law, is to represent the people of Idaho in this process of federal compliance. Our part in the Riedel project was to respond to a request from a federal agency to look at two buildings involved and to send them photographs and other factual information. This material was reviewed by federal staff at the National Register in Washington. It was the federal determination that the properties had sufficient historic and architectural interest to qualify as part of a National Register district. Therefore they merited simple documentation before Mr. Riedel's loan could be approved and the structures demolished.

Preservation of the buildings was not recommended by the Idaho Historical Society. Our suggestion was that documentation, required by law, be done to clear the project.

The suggestion in the July 13 article that the Historical Society "is where Riedel's troubles began" is misleading. Our role is to assist with legal compliance, not delay or block projects. — ARTHUR HART, director, Idaho State Historical Society

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