

Council takes step to name city street after Edwin Neill

By **DAVID J. MITCHELL**
Daily Star Staff Writer

The City Council took the first step Tuesday toward renaming a portion of West Hanson Avenue after Edwin Neill II and heard related plans to turn one block of West Hanson into a small park.

The council unanimously introduced an ordinance that would change West Hanson to Edwin Neill Way between Southwest Railroad to Mooney avenues.

The ordinance won't be considered for final approval until Jan. 18.

Neill, former chief executive officer and president of Neill Corp., a major local employer, died in February at age 64 due to Hodgkin's disease.

As a memorial to a man many give large credit for aiding in the revitalization of downtown, members of his family proposed the street name change and creation of the one-block long park area next to Neill Corp.'s downtown headquarters.

The park would be built on a closed section of West Hanson, between South Magnolia and South Pine streets.

The green space, which would include a children's play area, water feature, maze and shade areas and be built on a slightly raised platform, would be open to the public.

"It is not so much closing down the street. It is creating a new space between the (Neill Corp) headquarters and the old gymnasium," said Michael Hebeiser, an architect who presented a preliminary plan of the park to the council. Hebeiser is also a member of the Neill family by marriage.

As proposed, the city would not abandon the street but retain the right of way.

Debra Neill, who is Edwin II's widow and is chief executive officer of Neill Corp., said the park idea came about after suggestions that a bronze statue be erected in her husband's honor, but she said the park

seemed like a better idea because it was more in keeping with Neill's progressive ideas about creating spaces for the public to enjoy.

Although the council took no action on closing West Hanson Tuesday, the reactions were positive.



NEILL

"I very, very proud to be a part of this," Council President **Nicky Muscarello** said.

Councilman **Tony Licciardi**, in whose

District 2 the park would be built, was also supportive.

Licciardi asked the council to hold off on introducing an ordinance to close West Hanson until the Neill Corp. was ready to pull permits to start the project.

Edwin Neill III, one of Neill's elder sons who has taken over as president of Neill Corp., said the city would pay to break up the street and grade the site. Neill Corp would do the rest.

Edwin Neill III estimated that Neill Corp. would be ready to seek permits in about six months.

Mayor **Mayson Foster** noted that the new name for West Hanson was selected by Neill Corp. employees from among several suggestions.

"We did it Edwin Neill's way," Foster said.

In other business, the council introduced an ordinance to make boarding houses a conditional use in all zoning districts where they are currently allowed.

The change, which would amend the zoning ordinance, will come up for a public hearing and possible final vote Jan. 18.

The proposal comes in reaction to neighborhood opposition to a homeless shelter proposed in the Reed Street area on the south side of the city.

Call Mitchell at 254-7828.