

Snoops asking \$100,000 to redo mansion

By Fern Shen
Evening Sun Staff

In an unusual move, state officials today are seeking emergency approval to bypass standard procurement procedures to make \$100,000 available to be spent immediately on wall coverings, floors and landscaping at the Governor's Mansion.

The request, which will come before the Board of Public Works, specifies that the work is to be competitively bid, but state officials confirm that a New York firm has already been selected — without competition — to do a major part of the job.

Hilda Mae Snoops, Gov. William Donald Schaefer's longtime companion and the official hostess of the mansion, plans to obtain wallpaper and other items from Scalamandre, a Manhattan company that specializes in period wall coverings, according to Earl F. Seboda, secretary of the Department of General Services.

Snoops, who has been directing the massive redecoration of the mansion, appears to be applying Schaefer's "Do It Now" philosophy to the project. She has already begun working with a Scalamandre designer designated as her primary consultant, Seboda said.

Legislators have complained that Snoops has not yet provided state officials with projected costs for the wall coverings and other work, but Seboda said she would give him the information this month.

Competitive bidding was not necessary, he said, because Scalamandre could be justified as a sole source contractor, chosen by Snoops because of the firm's special expertise.

"Since Scalamandre has done 17 governor's mansions, it was her opinion they were highly qualified to do this job," he said. "This kind of project is not the same as decorating a regular state office building.

"The only legal requirement on an expedited request is that you at-



HILDA MAE SNOOPS

"We have to start now"

tempt to obtain a competitive bid," he said.

Snoops has refused to be interviewed about her work on the mansion.

The request makes \$100,000 immediately available as needed for "miscellaneous renovations and landscaping." The request allows the state to seek bids for the rest of the work in area newspapers, sidestepping the more lengthy procedure of publishing formal notices in the Maryland Register.

The money, part of the \$413,693 the state is spending on mansion redecoration and repair this year, is needed quickly because Snoops wants the 51-room Annapolis landmark ready for visitors by September, according to Seboda. Today's expedited request, Seboda said, was precipitated by a July 1 meeting of the Governor's Mansion Trust in which Snoops stressed the urgency of the project.

See MANSION, D3, Col. 1

Dan Rodricks is on vacation.

Snoops seeking \$100,000 for mansion

MANSION, From D1

"We have an ambitious plan, but we have to start now," Snoops told the group, assembled in the mansion's formal dining room. "You know the governor's only there for four years — we've got to move."

The trust, which Seboda chairs, gave Snoops approval to order wall coverings from Scalamandre.

But some members of the panel, which was reorganized this year by the legislature to give the governor more control, balked at having to make such decisions at the new group's first meeting.

"The reason everyone is not acting like a cheerleader and saying 'rah, rah' is that this is a bit too much to take in at once," said Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., a voting member of the trust.

Miller complained that Snoops, who showed the group wallpaper patterns and color schemes she had chosen for the public rooms, was moving too fast.

"Why do we need a trust if we're going to have everything decided for us?" asked Miller, D-Prince George's. He also objected to the lack of cost estimates.

"As an elected official, as a state official, I don't know if I've ever voted for anything I didn't know the cost of," Miller said.

But Miller and the rest of the group finally gave Snoops their approval — providing she tells them the projected costs this month.

The trust also gave Snoops approval to proceed with plans to have a rug custom-loomed in a pattern incorporating the state seal and possibly the state flower, the black-eyed Susan.

Snoops also offered no cost estimates on that project. But she said during the meeting that the 14-by-14 rug, to be placed in the mansion's reception room, would likely cost three times as much as an antique Oriental carpet of the same size.

"I'm very good with money," said Snoops, who accepted the hostess job without pay. "The legislature gave me X dollars and I won't go beyond that."

Miller is not the only legislator with questions about the conduct of the mansion project.

"Nobody talked to us or anything like that," said Del. Charles J. Ryan, D-Prince George's, reacting to the \$100,000 request.

Snoops, by all accounts, has been deeply involved in the mansion redecoration and has waged a campaign to raise \$700,000 in private donations. She serves as the governor's designee on the trust.

Previously, the members consisted of the gallery committee of the Maryland Historical Society. Under the new restructuring, the trustees with voting privileges consist of: the secretary of the Department of General Services, the governor or his designee, the House Speaker, the Senate President and the director of the Maryland Historical Trust.

July 1, when the meeting was held, was the day the bill took effect and was the first day the trust could legally meet.