

The City saves a house

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finger lakes living

By TAMAR ASEDO SHERMAN
A vacant, dilapidated house at 213 S. Plain Street has been thoroughly renovated and refurbished by the City of Ithaca and is now ready to be sold to the highest bidder.

It took approximately one year from the time the city committed itself to the project to the date sealed bids will be opened — Friday, Sept. 8.

The unprecedented project was undertaken as an investment in downtown. The city does not expect to make any money on the sale. "I'm willing to bet it will cost less than it would have to demolish the building, properly grade the site and fence it off," speculated Arthur Pearce, director of Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, the agency which supervised the rehabilitation.

A petition had been sent to the Mayor and to the chairman of the county Board of Representatives in May of 1977 complaining about the rundown house on S. Plain Street. "While the house has been in poor condition for some time, now that it is vacant it is rapidly becoming worthless. Since it became vacant, windows have been smashed through, the front door broken, the pipes have frozen and burst, and there is evidence that people are getting inside the building at night," the petition read.

When Pearce first looked at the house next door to the Southside Community Center, he saw ice seeping out the back door. Further investigation revealed that the basement crawl space was also filled with ice.

"Normally a building like this would have been sold at auction block to the highest bidder," Pearce said. It was owned by the county since the death of the owner, who had not paid taxes. What made this house different is that it was on the target block of Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services' efforts to rehabilitate housing on the south side.

"The easy way to deal with an old house is to demolish it," said Pearce. "But we didn't want to do that. To build a building of that size, with four bedrooms, two baths, a living room, dining room and eat-in kitchen, would cost at least \$50,000."

Instead, at a cost of close to \$30,000 (some or all of which will be regained at sale) the city has a house in a residential neighborhood which will pay taxes and shelter a family for many years to come.

"It is an investment in downtown, stimulating rehabilitation of the Southside neighborhood," according to Pearce.

"The kind of person who usually buys a house in that bad shape is a landlord who makes a minimal investment and rents it. That wasn't what we wanted either," he added.

And now, after five months of construction work the house has been entirely rebuilt by McCarthy Builders following plans drawn up by Robert A. Boelecke, Jr. Asphalt siding was taken off and the clapboards underneath salvaged and painted a dignified gray. The front door of the Greek Revival house was likewise restored and the old woodwork and moldings preserved wherever possible.

Other than that everything is new — the roof, the plumbing, the wiring, the walls, the ceilings, and the kitchen. The house is completely insulated and energy efficient. It has a new gas hot air furnace, hookups for washer and dryer in the large kitchen, and modern pastel fixtures in the bathrooms.

Wall-to-wall shag carpeting covers all the floors except the kitchen, where new linoleum was installed.

The deep lot is shaded by tall trees and is adjacent to the Southside People's Park.

Bids will be accepted in the city clerk's office at City Hall and at Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, 530 W. Green St. until Sept. 8. The house is being qualified for FHA mortgage which means a low down payment for the buyer.

Good credit and a steady income are required for a buyer to qualify for the federally guaranteed mortgage.

The City will hold an open house from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday to give interested buyers a chance to look around. For an appointment to see the house, call INHS at 277-4500 or Kathie Evans at Community Development Agency at City Hall, 272-1713, extension 246.



The City of Ithaca has remodeled this house at 213 S. Plain St.



The entrance and front door retain much of the charm of an earlier era.



The large kitchen has been completely remodeled with the installation of modern cabinets, new lighting fixtures and new floor covering.

Photos by Raymond Pompilio