

Retention and Reuse of Historical Structures in Winsted 2/18/94

By Community Lawyer Charlene LaVoie

Several developments have occurred which are gratifying to the effort to restore and reuse the YMCA house on 486 Main Street. The first is the recent clarification of the position of the Yale Urban Design Team on the rehabilitation of the house. Alan Plattus, Dean of the Yale University School of Architecture and director of the Charrette design process, wrote to the Connecticut Historical Commission to reaffirm the view of the Yale team. His letter states,

"...The house at 486 Main Street has an interesting history which citizens should know. The following is a brief review of the architectural and historical significance of the YMCA property at 486 Main Street..."

"It has come to my attention that, in the context of a request to demolish the house, some reference was made to an opinion associated with the Yale team to the effect that the house was of little significance or value. I wish to point out that this was in no way an official position presented by the study. On the contrary, we were at great pains to emphasize the importance of maintaining the continuity of buildings fronting Main Street and, in particular, discouraging their further replacement by parking or strip-style development. Our study [in Winsted] points out both the desirability and the possibility of finding alternative parking solutions to serve Main Street businesses and institutions. ... We are generally supportive of proposals to find appropriate uses which would support the restoration of that historic property."

The second development is the August 5, 1994 letter from the Connecticut Historical Commission to the Northwest YMCA which states, "...[A]s stated in the Town of Winchester's Historic and Architectural Resources Survey, which was completed in 1987, 486 Main Street is of some interest architecturally as an example of the Queen Anne style, a very popular type of house in the late 19th century. In addition, the information submitted with [the YMCA] correspondence of July 18, 1994, indicates that the building is structurally sound and that there are feasible and prudent alternatives to the proposed demolition. Therefore, we discourage the demolition of this structure in order to provide space for a parking lot, and we strongly recommend that it be retained, rehabilitated and reused."

The house at 486 Main Street has an interesting history which citizens should know. The following is a brief review of the architectural and historical significance of the YMCA property at 486 Main Street prepared by Community Technologist Susan McGee and Ami Gadhia, the summer intern with this office. As you will read, the name Stevens House is a misnomer as the house was built in 1891 by Samuel A. Herman, a lawyer, state senator and prominent Winsted citizen. The house should be referred to as the Samuel A. Herman House.