
FUNDS RISE TO SAVE SHIPLEY BUILDING \ A DRIVE TO SAVE BEECHWOOD HOUSE IS GOING WELL, SAID ITS LEADER. THE SCHOOL CUT BACK CONSTRUCTION PLANS.

Patrick Kerkstra, INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

Preservationists trying to prevent the demolition of the Shipley School's **Beechwood House** sound confident that they will raise enough money to renovate the structure, saving it for continued use at the school.

``It's going well," said Heather Hillman, a Shipley alumna and lead organizer of the effort to find money to restore **Beechwood**. ``It's looking very promising. We should know more in another month."

In 1998, the school announced a plan to demolish the historic structure as part of an extensive construction program.

Faced with fierce opposition from preservationists and some graduates, Shipley officials later agreed to let the **Beechwood House** stand if money was found outside the school to pay for its renovation by January 2001.

Hillman, cochairwoman of Shipley Alumni and Friends to Save **Beechwood**, would not say how much money the group had raised.

She did say that it was seeking large donors and that there would probably be news on the fund-raising drive within weeks.

Initial estimates put the cost of the renovation at \$600,000, though the final cost of renovation had not been determined.

Designed by Philadelphia architect Addison Hutton, the **Beechwood House** requires a host of expensive improvements but little structural work.

If the **Beechwood** fund-raising effort is successful, Shipley will take over the costs of maintaining the structure. Shipley principal Steven S. Piltch said that the top two floors of the building would be used as faculty apartments and that the ground floor would be a reception area for school and community gatherings.

While the fate of the **Beechwood House** is not yet certain - Shipley has reserved the right to demolish the building if funds are not found to renovate it - there were other signs that the rancor stirred up by the school's construction plans is subsiding.

The original plan, which called for squash courts, a larger parking lot, a swimming pool and additional classrooms on the Montgomery Avenue campus, outraged neighbors as well as preservationists.

But those tensions were absent Monday night when a sharply scaled-back construction plan was shown to the Lower Merion Planning Commission. The current blueprints met with the general approbation of once-irate neighbors.

``We think the compromise is a good thing for the school, a good thing for the community and a good thing for neighbors," said Hank Edmunds, who represented the neighbors.

In professionally mediated discussions in early 1999, the school and neighbors reached an accord. The school dropped the swimming pool and squash courts, reduced the size of the classroom construction, and struck the deal to keep **Beechwood** if funding was found.

And while Shipley preferred its initial plan, school officials say they are also satisfied with the reduced version, which will formally go before the Planning Commission next month.

``We've worked, I think, remarkably well together," Piltch said of the school's negotiations with neighbors. ``We would have liked to have had the original project we put forth, but this is one that will meet the needs of our kids as well."

Next month, township staff are expected to present formal conditions for approval of the plan - a standard practice - and all signs point to speedy commission approval after that.

Print

PUBLICATION:

Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)

SECTION:

NEIGHBORS

DATE:

November 3, 1999

EDITION:

CNORTH

Page:

B03