

SHIPLEY SCHOOL IS TAKING FIRST STEP FOR BEECHWOOD HOUSE RENOVATIONS

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Date: March 25, 1999

If you renovate it, we can use it.

That's the word from the **Shipley** School, which recently relented on its controversial plan to demolish a 19th-century building on its campus after a prolonged battle with local historic preservationists.

Yesterday, the school welcomed several architectural firms into the aging **Beechwood House** and asked them to pitch their best ideas for how to renovate its rooms for school use.

However, the school did not ask the architects to pitch their bills for the work to **Shipley's** accountants. Someone else will be paying for the renovations.

As agreed in negotiations with the school, a group of **Shipley** alumni, preservationists and others who want to save the building have the job of raising the necessary money - possibly as much as \$1 million - by Jan. 1, 2001. If they fail, **Shipley** reserves the right to tear **Beechwood** down.

But if the group can leap that hurdle, school officials are ready to make good use of the old building.

``Honestly, I hope it happens," said **Shipley** principal Steven S. Piltch. ``It will be interesting to see what they do [with **Beechwood**]."

Piltch said school officials would like to see the second and third floors renovated as faculty apartments. The first floor, he said, could be used for school offices, social gathering areas and possibly space for student tutoring.

The private school, which has students from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade, is in the midst of a capital fund drive for \$12.5 million and has raised \$7 million so far.

When **Shipley** first presented plans to demolish **Beechwood** last summer, it argued that the building was not suitable for educational use, that it was too expensive and impractical to renovate, and that it would not fit into the school's development plans. At the time, the school was seeking township approval to build a new academic building and gym.

After months battling neighbors, preservationists and some alumni who opposed the school's plans, **Shipley** negotiated a settlement in January that scaled back its development and provided the opportunity to save **Beechwood**.

If **Beechwood** is renovated, it could be used to make up for some of the space lost when the school agreed to scale back the size of its planned new buildings.

Local preservationists remain hopeful.

``If it does come back into some educational and residential use, used solely for the school, hopefully they will work with us in raising some of the funds," said Jean K. Wolf, a local preservationist, who walked through **Beechwood** with the architects yesterday. Wolf has been a vocal opponent of the demolition.

``The critical issue now is the financial aspect," she said.

PUBLICATION: Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)

EDITION: CWEST

Section: NEIGHBORS

Page: B02

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