Ye Old
Westport Trucker

Issue #94, May 10, 1976 Published by the Mother Love Tribe of Westport, Missouri FREE!

HARRIS HOUSE/FREE CLINIC BUILDING TO BE SOLD

FUTURE OF WESTPORT HEALTH CLINIC IN DOUBT

Two very important buildings stand near the corner of 40th and Baltimore. The old Harris House, built before the Civil War, acts as a reminder of Westport's hold on Kansas City's retinue of Heritage. Next door stands housing for the Westport Free Health Clinic which, in its sixth year of operation, is an inspirational model for health care education and delivery.

The past and the future stand side by side, both housed in buildings in sad shape.

A house next door to the Clinic was ignored so long that the city ordered its demolition. All three properties are under one title, and now there are two houses... and one large garden plot maintained by the Clinic.

One might think that two such important facets of the community would be well sheltered **and protected. Unfortunately,** the succession of the block's landlords, now the Small Business Administration, have not given high priority to regular and consistant maintenance of the homes. As a result, though the structures are sturdy, a generous person might note the block to be "a bit weathered."

While the property has in general been ignored, the Clinic has specifically directed its labor and a good part of its money for materials to fix up its house. At one point, in May 1974, the city gave the Clinic less than a month to vacate because of their roofs damaged eaves. The Clinic decided it was cheaper to completely bring the house up to exterior code standards than to find a new location and move the facility. Did you ever try to move an entire neighborhood medical and dental health center?

This year an intresting change occurred. The Neighborhood Improvement Program provided for the aquisition and restoration of historical property in several areas of Kansas City. On February 27th, the Westport Historical Society (WHS) submitted an amendment to the Program asking to take charge of the Harris House. It was approved by the city council, and thus, WHS fell heir to $75,000 from Community Developement Block Grant funds for outright purchase of the property. The approval, of course, meant that WHS must provide funds for the entire restoration and future maintenance of the property. That means beafing up their quiet campaign which thus far has produced $25,000 over the last few years.

Now where does all this leave the house next door? The Clinic never has had the money to buy their house, although that remains a long felt desire. The sale is imminent, and the Past becomes the new landlord of the Future. Next question: are they compatible?

When asked about plans for the Clinic, a spokesperson for WHS said, "At some point, we will use the house for storage of historical items. We could use it as rental property or we could take the house apart and sell it, leaving space for parking and gardens."

Parking could be a rather touchy issue. Especially since there are several large parking lots on the very same block where other viable houses have gone down. It boggles the mind to believe that the Westport Historical Society would bulldoze the Clinic building for a dozen parking spaces. And from another point of view, we are told that demolition would mean loosing one of the last cut-stone, slate roofed buildings in the area.

"You have to think about parking, but personally I'd rather we negotiate with existing lots in the neighborhood, which are certainly not fully utilized, than have to build yet another one," said the WHS member. "I can't see tearing down the area just to have your own big parking lot." But even minus the parking lot, "...the grounds surrounding the Harris House could be entirely used for herbal gardens and flowers and a vinyard and walks. There's really no more room for a parking lot here." Or the Clinic either, it seems.

A Clinic person said in response, "Of course we know we might have to move, but the more time we've got the better. I hope we could find a place as good as this one for our patients. The house may be a bit funky, but it is central, has good parking, space to move around and low rent. Almost perfect."

So the Clinic may have to move sooner or later. It has demonstrated its importance to the neighborhoods vitality and deserves **a viable** location for its needs. If **they are forced to move,** they should be eligible for substantial relocation money, since the money for the Harris House project comes indirectly from federal sources.

So now it's the Westport Historical Society's turn to play landlord over the Clinic Building. Will they play more generously than past ones?

FEDERALLY OWNED HOUSING ROTS ON CENTRAL STREET

Recap: U.S. Post Office and their dog houses.

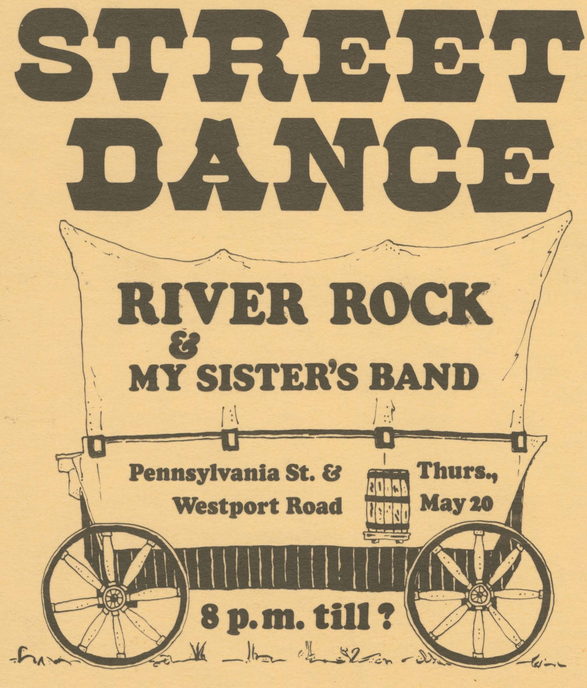
August, 1974 — Post Office acquires 7 houses within sight of Westport Road. Plans to raze the 7 houses, all viable residences, in order to produce 20,000 square feet of asphalt surface.

May, 1976 — Post Office still holds the 7 houses, now 7 ugly houses, having been boarded up for 21 months. Still no parking lot.

Early last year, suit was filed in Federal District Court asking for an injunction against the demolition of the houses. After a series of hearings, the injunction was finally granted by Judge Oliver, pending completion of an Environmental Impact Statement. The Post Office never undertook the environmental study, and for the $30,000 they said it would cost, the matter is still in limbo.

Result: the U.S. Post Office spent almost $100,000 on a project ill-conceived from the beginning. Not including the cost of having 7 dwellings sit vacant AND deteriorating in the city's historical sector.

Perhaps it is time to do some reviewing of priorities, for the Post Office to look at what is best for the immediate neighborhood, rather than being attracted to the luxury of a motorized facility in a non-expandable section of town.



fot

kansas city . 1st