

After delays, historic house takes its place

By BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

When Wayne Elliott offered to move and restore a historic house that would have otherwise been demolished, his idea was greeted with enthusiasm by Farmington Hills city officials, the church that owned the house, area history buffs, and others who lived near its new home.

But a summer full of problems, including complaints from neighbors and the city and problems with the original house mover, has left Elliott somewhat puzzled by the change in attitude toward his project.

"When I was moving it, the city bent over backwards to help out," said Elliott, who is a builder. "Now the city has kind of wiggled out on me."

Elliott's not-so-excellent adventure started in May, when he worked out a deal with the First Presbyterian Church to remove the 5,000-square-foot Kirby White House from church property at 11 Mile and Farmington to his property on 10 Mile and Farmington.

The church gave Elliott \$15,500 toward the move, which is how much it would have paid to de-

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molish the house. The city and Detroit Edison helped clear the way down Farmington Road on a sunny Wednesday and except for a few tense moments when a power line came down, the move went smoothly.

But then the troubles started. Because of rainy weather, the mover had trouble getting the house over the hole for the basement.

"I don't think they were really prepared as they should have been at the site," said Hills assistant city manager David Call.

On that point Elliott agrees. But he insists that was not his fault.

"He (mover John Westerman) was in charge of the move," Elliott said. "I found out later that he should have done it differently,

that we could have used plates."

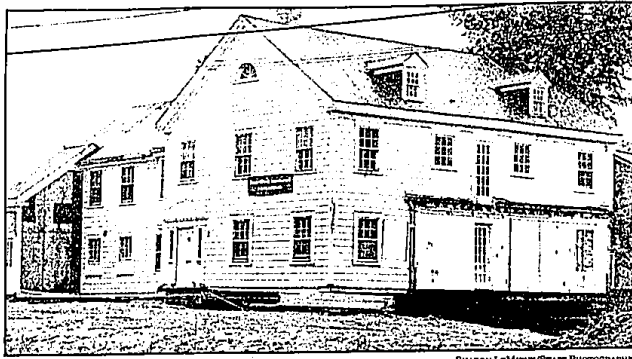
Westerman told Elliott he was going to complete a few small jobs and then finish putting the house in its proper place. But after three months without progress, Elliott had to hire another mover, D.B. Davis of Port Huron, to complete the move — some 80 feet, for a fee of \$10,600.

In the meantime, motorists complained about the house being so close to the intersection that it was creating a traffic hazard. Neighbors complained about the debris and lack of progress on the site, and the city became more actively involved, setting deadlines on the project.

"This is a construction site," Elliott said. "To a certain extent it's going to be messy. Once it's finished it's going to be a beautiful home. But this takes time, and because of the mover I'm behind schedule."

Elliott plans to put a lot of time and money into the house, where he and his wife, Cindy, plan to eventually live. But he added that he hasn't let the project keep him from other jobs.

"I've known people who built their dream house and wound up without a job," he said.



SHARON LEMIEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Kirby White House: Builder Wayne Elliott moved the historical house to the corner of Farmington and 10 Mile roads. Some people are concerned about the status of the project.

A truck belonging to Westerman has been impounded by the city, debris has been removed, and more will be removed this week, Elliott said. In addition, the basement walls should be poured by week's end and the business of

renovating the house can begin.

Elliott said he hasn't lost his enthusiasm for "this old house," but added that he could not have foreseen the obstacles the project has presented. As he demonstrates the Lego-like, state-of-the-

art basement insulation he's using, Elliott added that despite the headaches, he is glad he took on the project.

"It's really been a lot of fun," he said. "There is nothing I enjoy more than building."

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