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Potential buyers learn about historic properties

09.27.09 - 08:57 pm

East Durham Open House visitors get advice, eyeful

By Cliff Bellamy

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DURHAM -- Some floorboards inside the two-story home at 402 Clay Street are buckled, showing signs of age and neglect. Upstairs, a window in one of the rooms has been removed, exposing the sturdy lathe wall construction -- this was decades before drywall -- of this 1900 house.

It needs work, but looking at the house from across Clay Street, the house, with its wraparound porch, already shows initial signs of new life. Preservation Durham, which owns the house, has scraped the old paint, exposing wood siding in good shape.

The Clay Street house was among five Preservation Durham houses that are for sale and were open for inspection Sunday during the East Durham Open House Event. In addition to Preservation Durham houses, visitors also could tour several homes owners have restored and now occupy, and several houses for sale by area Realtors.

The first stop-off for the tour was 201 S. Driver St., the home of Kim Sage and partner Karen Sage. The purpose of the tour was to let potential buyers know about the historic district tax credits and loans available for restoring the historic properties, and to "dispel some misconceptions about the area," said Aidil Collins, a Vale Street resident. One misconception is that this part of East Durham is not family-friendly, when in fact many families live in the area and maintain homes.

The Sages have been in their home since 1988, and did about 95 percent of the restoration work themselves, said Kim Sage. While the area had some tough times in the 1990s, in the last few years she has seen the neighborhood reviving house by house.

"We fell in love with the house," Kim Sage said. "We wanted to live in an integrated neighborhood. We were looking at starting a family. ... We bought it."

Other organizers of Sunday's event were Up Lift East Durham, Preservation North Carolina and residents in East Durham.

Potential urban pioneers received plenty of advice about fixing and financing. Over at 118 S. Driver St., Todd Hershberger, who works for Trinity Design/Build, was volunteering, and gave visitors a demonstration in window restoration. Hershberger, using pry bars, pulled moulding away from a window, revealing some water damage underneath. He explained that a major challenge in restoring old windows is getting them to work as originally intended, and an

enemy of that is layers and layers of old paint.

Legacy Green, a local organization that seeks to provide "environmentally sensitive, economically inclusive housing options in traditionally underserved communities," is fixing up 102 S. Driver St. for sale. Tiffany Elder showed visitors the vaulted ceiling revealed after a drop-ceiling was taken out. Elder told visitors the area she was standing in would be transformed into a commons and kitchen area with a high ceiling. Legacy Green had papers available explaining financing for someone who might want to buy the house when it is restored.

Elder pointed to recent renovations in the Burch Avenue neighborhood and examples of Legacy's success. "I believe that socio-economically mixed neighborhoods are the best neighborhoods," Elder said.

The Gardener House at 1817 Vale St., also a Preservation Durham House, still has vinyl siding covering the original work, old baseboard heaters and a broken window. Volunteer Lisa Janes pointed out how a room near the entrance could be converted into a nice parlor, with another entrance that could be cut away from the wall. "There's just so much potential," Janes said.

More information at www.PreservationDurham.org, www.presnc.org,
www.legacygreen.com

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