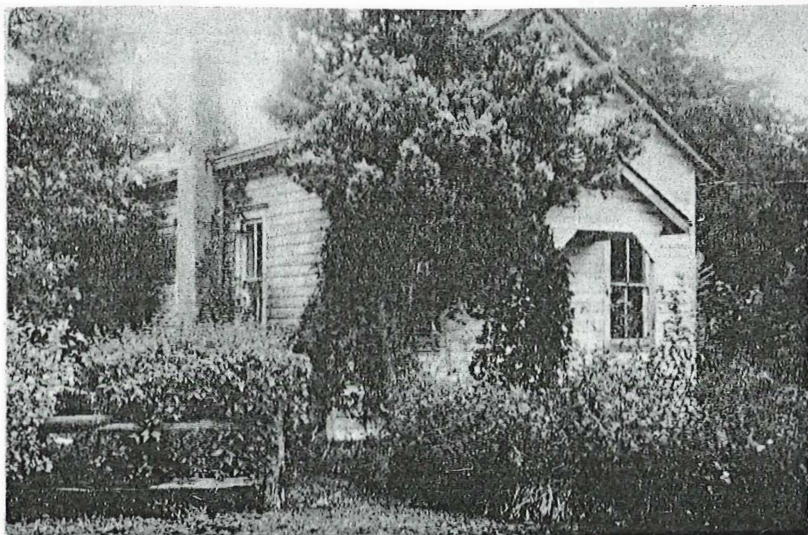


COMMUNITY ACTION PUBLICATION

Vol. I, No. 9

September 1970



The Lawrence Township Neighborhood Center as it appeared before renovation in the fall of 1967. The building was owned by the Seventh Adventist Church.

NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER CELEBRATES THIRD YEAR ON LANDOVER ROAD

The Lawrence Neighborhood Center is celebrating another anniversary this month. It's now three years ago that we moved into the present location. The Community Action Council had its beginning two years earlier--the first meeting was called by Mayor Charles Connell on May 27, 1965 at the Municipal Building. CAC meetings continued there until February of the following year, when they were moved to a location in the target area--the First Baptist Church on Hillcrest Avenue. A problem with funding caused a reversal to the Municipal Building until a suitable building could be found in Eggerts Crossing.

The history of the decision to begin a neighborhood center and where to set it up is somewhat lengthy but interesting. In a report submitted in mid-September 1965, Rev. Dana Fearon cited the need felt for a community center in

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 1

the Eldridge Park-Eggerts Crossing area: "A place for meetings, discussions, community and political action, and athletics is sorely needed." The suggestion was made that a community effort, drawing on the resources of the whole Township, could be made to erect such a center. Rev. Fearon noted that the Eggerts Crossing Civic Association had purchased a lot for the building of such a center. He also recommended an information center in the Eldridge Park area.

Discussing the question, "From your vantage point, what are the needs of the disadvantaged in Lawrence Township?" A member of the trio of articulate panelists proposed that the CAC "attack the feeling of isolation with a community center to which people could come and in which they could feel comfortable."

Later plans included the first clear formulation of the purpose and program of such a center: "to provide a center for a Concerted Services Program." At a CAC meeting on November 18, 1965, related advantages were cited: other Township groups could sponsor or volunteer to carry out programs located there. Also, "it would be a convenient place to begin and a good way to involve the disadvantaged directly." It was at this meeting that Mr. Robert Van Wagner came up with the plan which eventually gained acceptance--that the Council rehabilitate a house in the area for use as a community center. This would provide "a striking illustration of the aid offered."

The Council then focused on the mechanics of implementing a "community center" plan by setting up suitable committees to handle all the aspects--investigating the location and possible funding of such a project, contacting O.E.O. to discuss funds and methods, and looking into rehabilitation projects.

The question of where exactly to locate the center was taken up at the meeting in December. Should it be in the Eggerts Crossing or Eldridge Park area, or on the borderline? The suggestion of using the old Lawrenceville R.R. Station for activities was made at this point. In general, this was regarded as too far from the population the CAC wanted to reach. Next the possibility of multiple centers came up; most of those who commented agreed that one center to start with seemed the prudent course of action.

The entire discussion resulted in the decision to make

the Eggerts Crossing area the target one. A special meeting to be held there was soon proposed and carried out. The group met at the First Baptist Church for the first time in February and again in March with a well-planned program concerning Medicare and the manpower training projects in Mercer County.

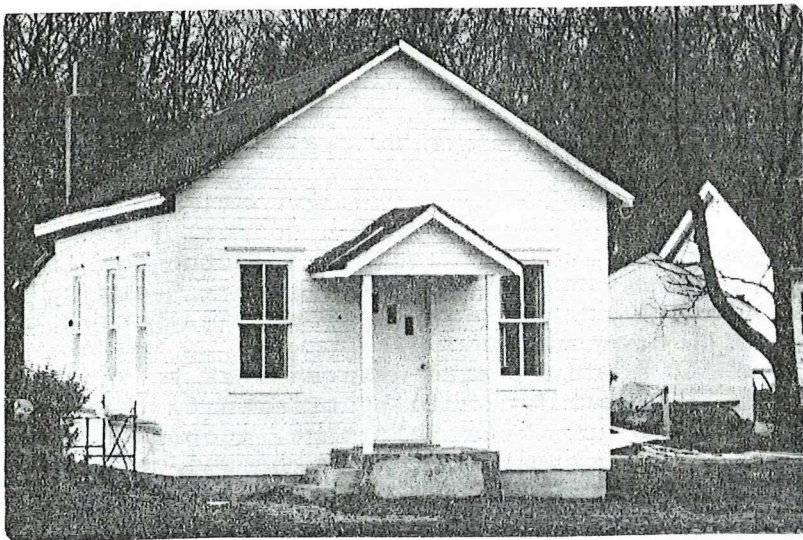
The letter from the Lawrence CAC requesting a speaker from the Mercer County Community Action Council for this program, interestingly enough, also talks of the possibility of obtaining land and constructing a building: "Larger facilities will be needed and, in the long run, better facilities will be desired."

In May the CAC meetings were changed back to the Municipal Building until something could be offered to residents of the Church neighborhood. By this time, people in the area were involved in planning for the proposed center, and the first neighborhood aide, Mrs. Leola Ford, had been hired.

At this point, the Mayor of Ewing proposed a joint Ewing-Lawrence neighborhood center located at the Ewing Park School at Somerset and Pennington Roads. The disadvantage of distance and the consequent need for buses "would not satisfy the fluid 'come and go as you please' atmosphere" the CAC hoped to create. A member proposed the use of the American Legion Hall as a community center, but no specific proposal was acted upon that night.

Specific suggestions for local building sites included the Crossing Inn, a 20' x 15' building on Johnson and Albermarle, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church on Landover Road. A memo dated March 27, 1966 relates a four-man tour of the neighborhood looking for suitable land. The store on Johnson Avenue and the church on Landover were considered usable for a meeting hall but not for day care or recreation programs which were being seriously considered. Several other places outside the key area were visited by committee members: Lawrenceville Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church, the American Legion Post, the Armory.

The Neighborhood Center funding was actually approved July 1, 1967. The director and secretary did not start work until September 1, 1967. Rehabilitation started two weeks later after contacts were made with lumber companies, hardware stores, paint and glass companies, individuals who wanted to donate material and anyplace where we thought we



The Lawrence Neighborhood Center as it was photographed shortly after the work of rehabilitation was completed in September 1967.

Continued from preceeding page _____

could solicit material that would make rehabilitation possible.

It took us approximately one month before we could move in. At that time we did not have sewerage or water; those came a month later.

We used boys who were working in the Neighborhood Youth Corps program and those individuals in the community who had the time to help. There were six people who participated altogether.

The condition of the building was very bad. All the windows were broken; we had to partition the rooms off; it had to be rewired for electricity; we had to get light fixtures; there were no utilities in the building at all. We had to paint inside and out. The roof leaked. Weeds were as high as the building and there was no heat. Excluding the heat, electric and hooking up to the sewer, we spent a little over five dollars for all the material that was needed.

The Center opened officially during the month of September, 1967.