

The Hour

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A two-story house on the Farm Creek property in Rowayton is demolished Monday.

Hour photo/MATTHEW VIN

Derelict house cleared from Farm Creek property

NORWALK

By **ROBERT KOCH**

Hour Staff Writer

A magnificent view over Farm Creek and beyond was opened Monday with the tearing down of a two-story house at 34 Sammis St. in Rowayton.

And, unlike is often the case, another structure will not be going up in its place.

"That area where the house is, or near the house, will be like an observation deck, where people can go and look out over the scenery," said D. Seeley Hubbard, a member of the Norwalk Land Trust board of the directors and also the city's Conservation Commission. "We'll have a nature preserve there ... what we set out to do. What's left afterward is to restore the barn. That will be the final phase."

On March 3, the land trust bought the former Hart Castle property from Charles Schoendorf, and made good on a promise to create a contiguous, 16.2-acre contiguous public nature preserve. The 2.2-acre property was combined with the city-owned Hart Peninsula and four other acres already owned by the trust.

For the Sammis Street parcel, the plan calls for saving the 100-year-old stone barn but demolishing the clapboard house. Indeed,

removing the house was important as saving the barn in that plan.

"It has taken imagination and vision to see a 25-year-old house, blocking the view of Farm Creek beyond, and see a nature preserve," said Marny Smith, land trust president. "Now with the house down, that view of Farm Creek and its wildlife inhabitants will be visible to all."

The house was built in 1983, three years after a fire burned down the Hart Castle. By Monday afternoon, all that remained of it was a chimney.

"The land trust is very excited that the house has finally come down, that we've been able to finalize our plans for the property" Hubbard said. "It will be a spectacular asset for Norwalk."

Michael Barbis, 6th Taxing District commissioner, labeled the removal of the house "a big turning point." That's because the house had been a big blocking point.

"With the house down, you're going to have this open vista that never existed before," Barbis said. "With this house gone, you've got this amazing vista over Farm Creek, Bell Island Bridge and Tavern Island, and then beyond that you can even see Peck's Ledge Lighthouse."

F&G Construction Inc. of

Rowayton and Fox Hill Builders Inc. of Darien tore down the house and are hauling away the debris pro bono, according to Barbis. He estimated the effort has saved the land trust, and others still raising money as part of the Campaign for Farm Creek Preserve, about \$50,000.

The two companies are not the only entities that have donated time and labor to meld the former Hart Castle Property into the larger nature preserve. Last month, Boy Scouts cleaned out garbage and laid out trails.

Under the March sale, the land trust closed on a \$4.5-million agreement to purchase the former Hart Castle property. Schoendorf sold the property to the trust for \$2 million in cash and a \$2-million mortgage.

Hubbard said Monday that the land trust must raise another \$1.3 million to pay off the mortgage and close out the Campaign for Farm Creek Preserve.

Since June 2006, the land trust raised about \$3.5 million toward the purchase. That figure includes donations and pledges from 643 residents, \$125,000 from the 6th Taxing District, and a \$500,000 grant through the state Department of Environmental Protection.