

Exploring Asylum Hill – 85 Sigourney St

A few months ago we featured 85 Sigourney St with a photo from 1981, which was right before Aetna built their training center there. Employees from all over the country came on a regular rotation to have their skills and knowledge of the “Aetna way” updated and refreshed.

Since then, the building, all 367,406 sq’ of it, has served several purposes.

It was the Hastings Hotel until the end of 2003, when it abruptly closed. It was then the Connecticut Culinary Institute until CCI was bought by Lincoln Educational Services.

It continued as Lincoln Culinary Institute until a change in Federal funding for for-profit education caused them to close their doors in 2016, even though the Weaver’s Culinary program was temporarily there while the Weaver High School building was being rebuilt. The current owner, Peoples United Bank has engaged CBRE to find an owner/developer to come up with a viable use for the building.

To that end, several members of the AHNA Board and staff toured the building to see first hand what is involved.

Considering all of the cooking and hospitality that has happened there over the past decades, some related use would certainly make sense. Lincoln was very happy there, and the sudden change in funding for trade schools came as a real blow to them, and by extension to the City and Asylum Hill.

A lot has changed in the past five years, and most especially in the last eighteen months. There are many new ideas and new ways of seeing the world that would be ideal for change. That this property has a full size hardwood basketball court, is just one of the many amenities that make it unique as a school, as a hotel or as a training center.

The popularity of “farm to table” dining as well as hydroponic and aeroponic food production could be a practical use for the two large atrium areas, as could some of the many classrooms. It’s possible that the kitchens could be rented out to food truck operators, and the proximity to the interstates 84 & 91 as well as CTfastrak would make for great efficiency.

Something like this was proposed a few years ago with the Comet Diner as the hub. This has the potential to be much larger.

It’s also reminiscent of the Veeder Place effort, which began in 1996 and may soon come to an end. There are a lot of reasons why 85 Sigourney would have a much better chance of succeeding, not least of which would be lessons learned.

Let’s hope an experienced visionary can be found to do this right.

More photos are available at; <https://photos.app.goo.gl/T6FsJdGyLHRurjHe9>

