

Move on to reclaim heart, spirit of do

By JENNIFER REIDY
Register Citizen Staff

WINSTED — In the Flood of 1955, Winsted lost half of Main Street, the commercial and cultural heart of the town.

Thirty-eight years later, there is a new move to reclaim Main Street from its fate as an impersonal state highway, and return it to a lively, pedestrian-oriented thoroughfare.

"After the flood, there was no design, no vision for Main Street, which now appears lopsided" without the stores and buildings that once lined the Mad River, said Andrew Meyers, who coordinated a recent study of the town by architects and planners.

"Main Street became a highway (Route 44), and people passed through Winsted as a way of getting to other locations," he said.

The perception of Winsted as a place to "pass through" goes deeper than the town's physical plan, he said.

"The Winsted character is rather skeptical and pessimistic," said Meyers, noting town politics and economic problems as well as the flood. "But underneath the

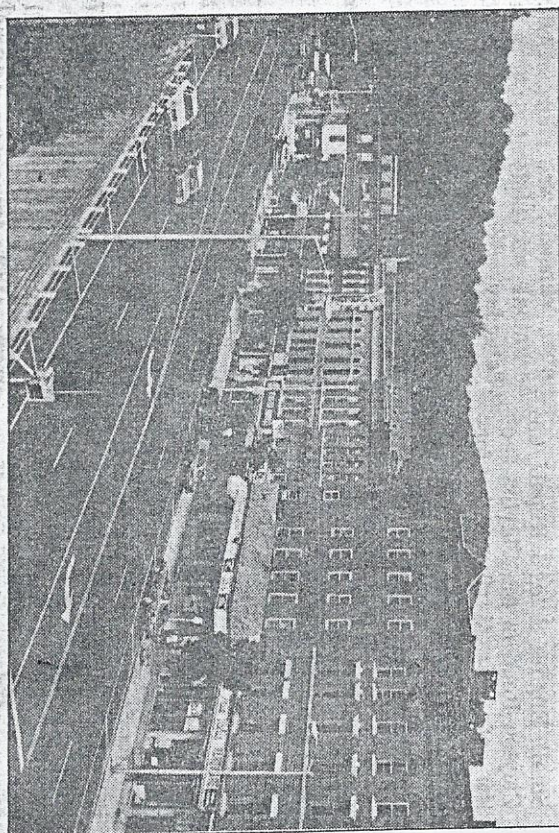
skepticism there is optimism, and a surprising idealism."

In order to help reclaim the heart of downtown, citizens have been working with a team of faculty and students from the Yale School of Architecture and professional architects, planners and landscape designers, among others.

The team spent four days (May 6-9) surveying the town and talking to residents during a "charrette," an intensive session of design and study. The Winsted Design Coalition, a group of residents and local professionals, assisted in the project. The coalition also raised money for the charrette that was matched by a grant from The Shafek Nader Trust for the Community Interest.

The team's premise was to enhance the town's existing assets without making much of a change. Their ideas about parking, lighting, landscaping and zoning are meant as a springboard for the town, which is hoping to secure government grants for such improvement projects.

The charrette ended Sunday with a public forum on its prelim-



File photo
The flood of 1955 wiped out much of Winsted's Main Street and its businesses. At one time stores lined both sides of the street where a state highway now passes.

inary report, which provides some practical advice on town problems, particularly parking. The team presented an array of drawings and renderings of downtown, and the forum was aired on public access channel

Mad River TV 13.

About 40 to 50 people attended, including the Naders and a number of design professionals from neighboring towns. There were very few public officials, and none of the selectmen attended.