

It's Time to Fix Oregon's Broken Preservation System

OREGON'S HISTORIC PLACES ARE AT RISK BECAUSE OUR SYSTEM FOR DESIGNATING AND PROTECTING THEM IS BROKEN.



Back in the 90s, a law was passed that requires “owner consent” for historic designation. It denies the public or local government a voice in deciding whether buildings and neighborhoods are worthy of designation and protection from demolition. It also doesn't take into account a building's age, significance to our culture or history, or the potential to provide affordable housing and business incubation. Communities are helpless to stop the demolition of homes and buildings that are historic and define the character of that community.

Virtually all other states utilize a Local Landmark process to protect important historic resources. Designation and protection come through a public process where both the owner and community have a voice, private rights and public benefits are weighed, and a decision is rendered by the local government.

But because of owner consent, Oregon uses the National Register of Historic Places to confer protection. The National Register was intended to be largely honorific and inspire protections at the local level. It lacks the public process and engagement that should accompany the establishment of demolition and design protections. Because only an individual owner can consent to designation on the National Register, it met Oregon's owner consent requirement. However, for historic district nominations, the National Register utilizes a majority "opt out" process by property owners that has become rife with confusion and conflict. It also generally by-passes local government, which should be a participant in decisions that affect land use.

Because of owner consent, historic buildings like Portland's United Workmen Temple are demolished – a significant loss to the community – and neither the public or local city council have any say in the matter.

Because of owner consent, demolitions are chewing up neighborhoods and pitting neighbor and against neighbor over historic district nominations.

Because of owner consent, unscrupulous developers can hold local landmarks for ransom, like the Ocobock House in Portland.

Because of owner consent, tenants have no voice at all in what happens to historic places in their neighborhood.

Compounding this problem is Oregon's lack of sufficient state financial incentives for preservation and reuse. Many owners of historic buildings can't afford to do the rehab, seismic, and code upgrades necessary – especially in smaller towns where lease rates remain modest.

It's time to spur investment & economic opportunity across Oregon

To spur investment and economic development, most states offer a 20% historic tax credit, which has been proven to create jobs and increase state and local tax revenue. Oregon does not. Oregon currently offers a property tax freeze, which over time has become diluted and less effective as a stimulus for preservation. Our "special assessment" program, which expires in 2020, provides no funds to offset construction costs.

We MUST fix how we designate and protect historic places in Oregon, making it fair, transparent, and rational. To do this, we need real financial incentives for restoration and seismic retrofitting so we can revitalize our Main Streets, retain more of our historic fabric, and increase public safety.



Neighbors rallied to "ransom" the Ocobock House from a developer who planned to demolish it. Plans are underway to convert it to multi-family housing.

The National Trust has called Oregon's owner consent law the "worst practice" in the U.S. No other state has this statute.



The United Workmen Temple could have been restored as low income housing. Instead it was demolished in August 2017.

Restore Oregon calls on the legislature to make Oregon's preservation system more equitable, flexible, and relevant:

- Replace owner consent with community consent, employing a public process for historic designation
- Shift protections to Local Landmark designation
- Create a state historic tax credit to promote investment in historic buildings, help pay for seismic upgrades, and curb demolition

It's time to bring preservation in Oregon into the 21st century

We need to embrace all communities. We need to make buildings and downtowns resilient. We need to overcome real and perceived concerns about equity. And, most of all, we need to make sure that Oregon's big cities, main streets, and rural communities do not lose their souls during this period of rapid change.

Passage of this legislation would change the face of preservation in Oregon, engage more people in the process, and give communities a voice to decide what historic places matter and should be protected. Ultimately, it will SAVE MORE historic places. With your support Restore Oregon can replace owner consent with modern historic preservation practices.

About Restore Oregon



Founded in 1977, Restore Oregon is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization which advocates for sound preservation policy and legislation. Our mission is to preserve, reuse and pass forward the historic places that create livable communities. Each year, we provide statewide educational programming and technical assistance, while working to save the sites and structures featured on our annual list of Oregon's Most Endangered Places. We hold over 40 conservation easements on historic properties, protecting them in perpetuity. Visit restoreoregon.org to learn more. 🇺🇸