


Cedar School owner seeks code change, allow zone exemptions for historic buildings

Created on Friday, 24 April 2015 09:49 | Written by [Katy Sword](#) | 

[1 Comment](#)

Sixteen years ago, Colleen Cahill purchased the Cedar School in Troutdale.

"It was in a horrific state of disrepair. Windows falling out, no heat in the building, just basically a barn," Cahill said of the 1857-vintage school on Troutdale Road. "Someone could have demolished it at that point when I purchased it. It might have been easier for me to tear it down."

So she spent the last 16 years fixing up the building, "one window at a time," as she said.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO: COLLEEN CAHILL - The Cedar School has been owned by Colleen Cahill for 16 years. Now shes hoping to find a way to pay for the schools cost of upkeep.

"It's been definitely a labor of love."

The school has been Cahill's home, as well as her photography studio. But with her last child out of high school, Cahill started taking a hard look at her finances — and if she can afford to keep Cedar School.

"I said I would hold onto the building and keep everything the way it was until she graduated, then I would make some life changes for myself," she said. "Even though it's a labor of love, it's been a burden."

Cahill considered selling, but that wouldn't ensure the school would remain intact.

"If I put it on the market, whoever purchased this building could do anything they wanted to and level it," she said.

"That scared the living daylights out of me that someone could take a historic home like this and demolish it."

Founded in 1857, the school was part of the Cedar District until 1940, when it was consolidated with Troutdale Schools. Cedar was then used as an overflow space until the 1950s, and intermittently by the city of Gresham and Mt. Hood Community College until 1971, when it was abandoned and returned to the heirs of William Jones.

The building has been privately owned since its sale in 1976.

That led Cahill to seek out alternative options to selling, such as renting out the space for events.

"The county said, 'Sure, that would be awesome, but you're not coded for that,'" she said.

But there's the possibility that with the review of land-use laws, Cahill could be given an exception to host events in her space.

"The biggest problem with Cedar School is it's within an exclusive farm-use zone," said Rich Faith, Multnomah County senior planner. "The EFU zone under state land-use laws is the most protected zone. The school, which is currently occupied as a residence ... is simply functioning as a non-farm dwelling. That presents a conflict with the state law in terms of what other activities you're permitted to have there."

This means the county would have to present options to the Citizen Advisory Council to review and determine the best way to allow Cahill — and other historic building owners — to use their space to raise revenue.

"We're exploring how perhaps there are opportunities under the framework of state law that might open the door for these kinds of activities," Faith said. "We are not sure of the answer yet."

The change would likely come under Goal 5 of the Oregon land-use planning goals. Goal 5 addresses a number of things, he said, historic resources among them. Cahill's request would fall under this section of the county's review.

Along with seeking county advice, and hopefully moving toward a solution, Cahill has started a petition online to gather support for her efforts.

"The petition is basically just me wanting to have some ammo to go into Multnomah County," she said. "Right now I'm

teetering on over 500 signatures. The interest is there, and people are passionate about it.”

With her outreach, she’s learned the community is more than supportive of her hope to use Cedar School as an event space. The school down the street offered to let her use the parking lot, free of charge. And her neighbor farmer said he would shut down activity when she hosted events.

“That’s so cool that the people around you are willing to do those things to help you out,” Cahill said. “It really touches your heart to know there are that many people out there that care and are willing to do things to be helpful.”

With the wheels in motion, Cahill just has to wait for the next few months until the process can move forward.

“We usually put together a background paper in some of these major policy issues for the benefit of the advisory committee,” Faith said. “Here’s the issue and potentially some ways we could address that. Then they talk about it and let us know what they think is the best way to handle that.”

CEDAR SCHOOL

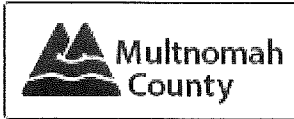
MISSION STATEMENT

Sunday morning I got a knock on my front door and Wayne Swanson of boring was standing there. He asked if I was the women in the article. I said I was and he proceeded to reach his hand toward me to hand me some money. He said that he did not have much but that he had gone to kindergarten here at the Cedar school and he wanted to donate what little he had to help save it. I did not take the money but was touched by his act of kindness and generosity. We spoke for quite some time about his memories of going to school here. This is why these historic buildings are so invaluable. They are a place that house people's memories, their history, and their emotions of a time long gone. They are a reminder of what was.

Ultimately the history is what this is all about. I guess what I am trying to compel Multnomah County to become aware of is that owning an historical building requires a lot of sacrifices on the home owners part. To maintain such a structure can be both physically and financially draining if you are not a wealthy person. It is often easier to sell and or knock the historic structure down than to maintain it to keep it standing. I believe part of what can be a solution or at least helpful to the land owners of these structures is to have written into the law ways to preserve these structures by allowing them to be self-funding or self-sustaining if at all possible or at least provide incentives for preservation over demolition. The HP (Historical Preservation) section of Goal 5 that was shelved years ago encompassed these types of ideas. Revisiting the possible resurrection of such ideas either through HP or other means is what I hope to bring to the County for discussion.

Thank you for your consideration,

Colleen Cahill



Rich FAITH <rich.faith@multco.us>

RE: Responses

Rich FAITH <rich.faith@multco.us>

Tue, Jun 23, 2015 at 3:27 PM

To: Colleen Cahill <cahillstudio@comcast.net>

Colleen,

I'll try to boil it down for you. Your property is zoned Exclusive Farm Use and state law pretty much dictates what uses are permitted in the EFU zone. If state law does not list a particular use as being allowed in the EFU zone, then it cannot be conducted there. If the County's EFU zone were to list something that is not permitted under state law, then we are open to a legal challenge. This would be true even if we were to couch in terms of trying to foster and promote preservation of historic structures.

Home occupations are a particular category of land use that is specifically allowed in the EFU zone by statute, but with restrictions. One of those restrictions is that the home occupation must be operated substantially in the dwelling (ie. an occupation occurring within the home), or within other buildings on the property normally associated with the home (ie. detached garage, storage shed, etc.) The County has some flexibility in terms of what type of uses can occur under this category. Clackamas County's Section 806 pertaining to Home Occupations to Host Events demonstrates that it is possible to include hosting of events as a home occupation activity, but subject to the restrictions of state law.

So my conclusion is that either or both approaches being used by Clackamas County offers income opportunities for historic properties to be used in adaptive ways to help maintain and preserve historic sites. The first one (Section 707) can not be applied to EFU zoned lands, but could potentially be applied to all other zoning classifications. The second (Section 806) can be applied to EFU zoned lands as well, but subject to the restrictions I mentioned above. Both of these can serve as a model for Multnomah County in adopting something similar if it is deemed worthwhile and necessary.

There are many secondary issues that would need to be sorted out before the County could adopt these same or similar type of zoning regulations. But that's a short version of it. I hope that helps.

[Quoted text hidden]