



Photo by Bobbie Lo

The former Alpha Tau Omega House, 1143 Oak St., was built in 1910. The two-and-a-half story Craftsman style residence almost came face to face with a wrecking ball a few years ago until it was rescued and renovated. A medical of-

How much power the review board actually has was underscored in October of last year when the Eugene Water and Electric Board tore down the Eugene Mill and Elevator Co. Building to make room for expansion. Unlike the Mayflower and Animal House cases, the Elevator Building was a designated city landmark.

According to Daley, EWEB argued that it had to tear down the building to expand its headquarters. The Historic Review Board turned down EWEB's request, she says, but the Planning Commission reversed the board's decision on appeal.

Bennett says the decision to tear down the building was correct.

"I don't think there was the public support needed to save that building. There comes the point where the community is not willing to do what's needed financially to save the building," he says.

There has been some success in Eugene in recent years in renovating old buildings, although it doesn't approach the accomplishments felt elsewhere in the state. The Eugene Hotel was renovated for an estimated \$2.6 million, the old Ax Billy Department Store (Downtown Athletic Club) for \$5.5 million and the old Alpha Tau Omega fraternity house for \$270,000.

Some in the community, including The Register-Guard, believed the mansionlike fraternity house should have been torn down and a parking lot built



Photo by Bobbie Lo

fice stands where the A.W. Patterson House, also known as Animal House, used to. The building was demolished before the Eugene Historic Review Board had an opportunity to discuss its fate.

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— Eric Eisemann

in its place. Bennett believed otherwise, and today the building is full of tenants.

"We took the position that with some incentives, that we could create above-average office space and preserve the building. I think it's turned out to be an asset to the community," Bennett says.

But for being the second-largest city in the state, Eugene has not kept pace. A check of the National Register of Historical Places for the Eugene area reveals only 17 buildings, four of them on the University campus. And of the 110 projects undertaken statewide from 1982 through 1985, only four occurred in Eugene.

Part of the reason, according to Eisemann, is that historic buildings have served as a scapegoat during bad economic times.

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Review Board in Eugene about ordinance redevelopment, spoken with them, and met with people on different sides of the fence. And I've heard people voice the opinion that preservation is not what Eugene needs because it's obstructionist.

"And I really think that that's a terrible mistake. Because it's not the old buildings that are standing in the way of redevelopment. All you have to do is look at any other community that has taken advantage of its history, and you can disprove the argument," he says.

Jacobson, on the other hand, believes the issue centers around simple economics. "What happens is that it's hard sometimes to rehabilitate a historical building. For example, you have a building that is historical, but it needs a lot of work. And it's just too expensive sometimes to rehabilitate. And

it's cheaper to demolish it and build something in its place," he says.

One problem Eugene has in trying to change public attitudes toward historic preservation is that there are few examples of how preservation works, such as the success Old Town and the Yamhill District have enjoyed in Portland, Daley says.

"I don't think we've had that kind of success in Eugene, so it's harder to convince those that aren't hard-core, die-in-the-wool preservationists," she says.

According to Eisemann, "Using historic resources takes vision. A way of looking at a piece of property in its rundown condition and envisioning what it will look like when you're done." ■

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