

Lincoln School debate rages on

By Catherine Hawley
Emerald Reporter



Photo by Elisa Lichtman

The Lane County Fair Share plans to take the battle over Lincoln School to the courtroom when the city sells the property to a private developer.

A battle over the fate of one of Eugene's oldest remaining schools may move from city meeting rooms to city courtrooms if the property is sold to private developers.

Rich Reuter, community advocate for Lane County Fair Share, said Fair Share will challenge in court a city council decision to sell Lincoln School in west Eugene to Lorig Associates, a Seattle development firm.

"Our goal is to keep public land in the public realm," Reuter said. Reuter is a founding member of Friends of Lincoln School, an offshoot of Fair Share formed last year to prevent the destruction of the school.

Last summer Friends of Lincoln School proposed to the Eugene City Council that the school be used as a community center with space for child care, recreation, meeting rooms and offices for nonprofit organizations.

The council voted instead to accept a proposal from Lorig that would convert the building into moderate-income housing.

That decision was made for financial reasons, said Ruth Bascom, city council president. She said although the council liked the idea of a community center, the proposal was expensive and had no specific plan for funding.

"You just can't say it's a great idea; you've got to find a way to pay for it," Bascom said.

Reuter said selling Lincoln School to a private developer is a misuse of the public funds the council used to buy the school from School District 4J last year.

"It's a HUD scandal," Reuter said. "It may not be an illegal use of funds, but it's not in the public's best interest."

The city used \$50,000 from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to make a down payment on the property. The balance of the \$180,000 price was paid for in services from the city to the school district, including engineering, design work and construction.

Selling Lincoln School to a private party is not necessarily a misuse of HUD grant money, Council member Rob Bennett said.

"That's a technical legal question," Bennett said. "The city attorney says that's not a breach."

Bennett said he supported the idea of a West-side community center, but he thought Lorig's proposal better suited Lincoln School.

"I strongly support historic development when it has a chance to succeed economically," Bennett said.

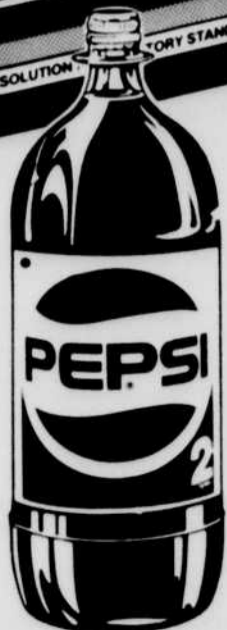
Bascom said that some community needs will be served under the Lorig proposal.

About one fourth of the structure, not included in the sale to Lorig, is reserved for housing for people with head injuries, which will be built with federal funds.

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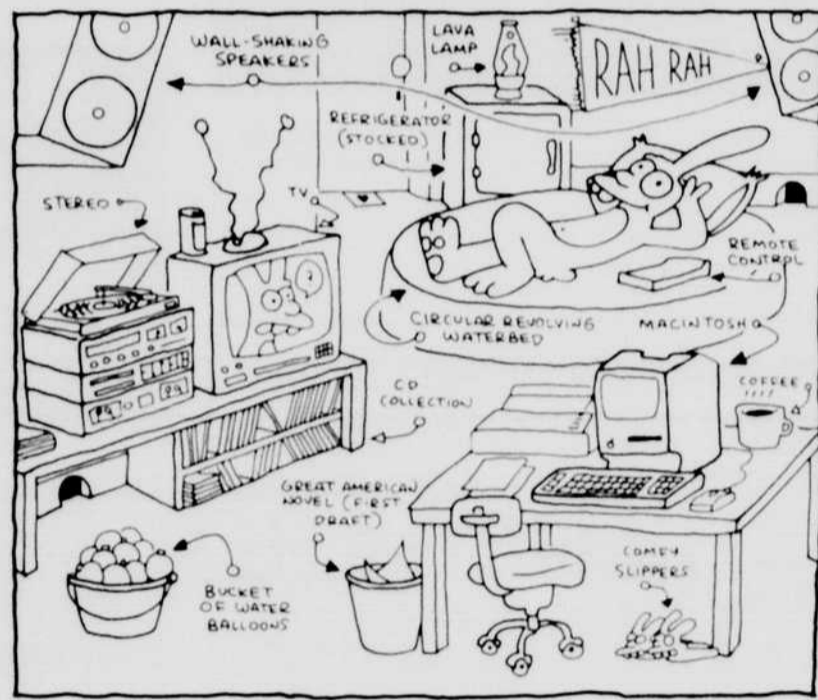
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