



Erick Bengel/The Daily Astorian

Preservation enthusiasts, enrolled in Oregon Main Street's workshop on revitalizing buildings, inventory the exterior flaws of the M&N Building in downtown Astoria.

M&N Building: Blueprints were found in attic of Flavel mansion

Continued from Page 1C

"Our built environment today is really a reflection of 1920s architecture, and that's what's made us unique, is that we are a bit of a snapshot in time architecturally," City Manager Brett Estes said at a recent Oregon Main Street Awards ceremony.

The M&N housed an assortment of businesses before Sears, the last tenant, abandoned it in 1996. Many locals consider the building an aging blemish on the strip, a continual annoyance for those who value a pristine city center.

Field work

But, during the workshop, the M&N was an object of serious study — less of an eyesore and more an opportunity to reclaim the building's past and rediscover its promise.

It doesn't take trained eyes to see the structure is in pretty

rough shape. For field work, the students took stock of the building's exterior flaws.

Windows are broken. Some of the original brick facade is slowly separating from the structure. A number of deep cracks have cut into the facades. The foundation has settled, producing noticeable dips that extend to the sidewalk.

John Goodenberger, a local historian and preservation expert who co-hosted the workshop, explained a theory of the M&N's sagging: The concrete columns supporting the building likely sit atop old wood pilings that may actually be rotting.

Because of structural concerns — and because the interior is full of lead, asbestos and leftover debris — students peered through the windows and poked their heads into a doorway but were not allowed inside.

While noting the critical issues, however, the stu-

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a Clatsop Community College instructor and workshop host

dents saw great potential and were invited to imagine what they would do with the relic. (Another brew pub or pot shop?)

Joan Wessel, director of the Downtown Corvallis Association who participated in the workshop, said it will take the Liottas "some time and some money" to refurbish the site.

The plumbing and electrical systems must be replaced, the transom windows restored, the drop ceiling removed and the foundation repaired. A serious seismic retrofitting may be in order, along with other code upgrades.

But, Wessel added, there is almost nothing wrong with the building "that they can't fix up."

Marcus and Michelle Liotta, who purchased the building for \$135,000 last summer, said they hope to establish their own businesses in two or three of the five storefronts and lease the others. Rickenbach Construction is scheduled to begin structural and facade work on the M&N early next year.

Archaeology

It isn't enough to know the M&N's shape; the Liottas

need to know the story — the circumstances of its birth and how the building arrived at its condition.

Fortunately, the original blueprints were recently recovered from the attic of the Flavel mansion on 15th Street and Franklin Avenue, another former Flavel property under restoration.

"If you can find those, you're lucky," said Lucien Swerdloff, a Clatsop Community College instructor and workshop host. "A lot of buildings, you don't have that."

The faded blueprints are almost illegible, but they give the owners something to work with, helping them determine where the elevation has dropped, how the rooms have been reconfigured, and which improvements are realistic and feasible.

"It gives you a real leg-up in talking about the restoration, because you have drawings, you have measure-

ments, plans," Goodenberger said. "And buildings are not always constructed the way they were drawn, but it gives you something to start with."

Swerdloff and co-host Jay Raskin, a Portland architect who helped found the community college's historic preservation program, encourage restorers to dig through microfiche, newspapers, fire insurance maps and vintage photographs to know the many phases of the property.

"It's like archeology," Swerdloff said. "You want to look at these old buildings and see what has changed, what's original."

Debbi Reeves, a workshop participant and executive assistant to the Tillamook Urban Renewal Agency, said the M&N will look beautiful when the Liottas are done with it.

"It's got good bones," she said.



9-1-WHAT?

THE BEST OF THE WORST CALLS TO ASTORIA 911 DISPATCH

Land shark

We fear that sharks may be drawn to our coast because of all those delightful sea lions, but Warrenton? Must be those big-box stores ... From emergency dispatch: "Report of someone in a shark costume."

Follow reporter Kyle Spurr on his 9-1-What? Twitter watch, where a few of the sometimes head-scratching calls to area dispatch take center stage. The full feed is at www.twitter.com/9_1_WHAT.

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT Following

{9/19 @ 8:57 p.m.} Caller reported their son was offered marijuana while at a bus stop. #Warrenton

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT Following

{9/21 @ 10:47 p.m.} While the caller was piloting a ship down the Columbia River someone shined a laser in his eyes. #Astoria

7:48 AM - 27 Sep 2016

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT Following

{9/24 @ 5:51 p.m.} Report of someone in a shark costume. #Warrenton

7:49 AM - 27 Sep 2016

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT Following

{9/26 @ 6:59 a.m.} Report of a man jumping out of the bushes and scaring children. #Warrenton

7:51 AM - 27 Sep 2016

9-1-WHAT? 9-1-WHAT Following

{9/25 @ 6:54 p.m.} Cow on the shoulder of U.S. Highway 101. #Warrenton

7:50 AM - 27 Sep 2016



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