

# Farmhouse: Clatsop County looks for buyer for historic home

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“We always had the question: What are we going to do with this old farmhouse?” Autio said.

Since 2010, the Fair Board has discussed repurposing the house into office or event space, storage, or sleeping quarters. But structurally, the home has proved to be challenging: small rooms, old wiring, load-bearing walls that cannot be easily knocked out.

In 2013, a construction bid to bring the home up to code without any major changes came in at around \$150,000.

“What we would have gotten from the \$150,000 was a charming looking farmhouse. That’s the good point,” Autio said. “The bad part of it is you’d be getting a charming farmhouse.



The home does not have working plumbing or electricity and the interior of the house would require extensive renovation.



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Small rooms, load-bearing walls ... (it’s) not really useable for those purposes that we thought we’d be able to use it for.”

For the past five years, the Fair Board focused on completing other proj-

ects outlined in the strategic plan. The farmhouse never became a priority.

Lewis doesn’t like the idea of “wiping away” history, but sees selling the farmhouse as an opportunity to open up more space for a

county fair that continues to grow. Although the site is more than 100 acres, only about 10 acres are useable for fair operations.

The farmhouse site could be used for a new office, more event space or much-

needed parking, Lewis said.

He also believes there are people in the community who will breathe new life into other homes by salvaging the rare, old-growth timber that makes up the bones of the house.

Commissioner Pamela Wev said she came into the meeting ready to fight to preserve the building, but had a change of heart after hearing about the process the Fair Board went through to arrive at the decision.

“Especially in rural Clatsop County, which has such great, old architecture ... I’m always in the mood to save,” she said.

Commissioners were supportive of the surplus, but urged the Fair Board to do all they could to make sure the historic wood is preserved and repurposed.

“I’d love to give you the authority to do whatever you want with it. But I also feel strongly that we have to treasure the wood,” Wev said. “I mean, we’re at a point where we have no old-growth trees left ... You changed our mind, but please save the wood.”

# Warrenton: New subdivision project proposed by former mayor

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In that same report, Cronin recommended approval of the project with conditions.

Gil Gramson, represented by retired city planner Skip Urling, argued against a condition by city planning staff to build a secondary access road to the development.

A road connecting the Clear Lake subdivision to nearby Ridge Road could not be fully developed on Gramson’s property, Urling said. It would require crossing several different property lines. While there have been plans for development at one of the neighboring properties, which could help extend a secondary road to Gramson’s property, nothing has gone forward yet.

But Bridgens contended that secondary access to a subdivision that will be at the end of what is already a very long, dead-end road is

crucial and falls in line with city transportation goals. If the project cannot supply this road, it should be denied, she said.

Commissioner Ryan Lampi noted that even to extend Kalmia Avenue for the new subdivision was “a variance on a variance.”

Gramson had previously developed a 17-lot subdivision and an 11-lot subdivision on the same stretch of road in 2013 and 2016. Both projects required variances to extend the dead-end road, but without creating a secondary access or public street connection. The new subdivision will require yet another extension of the road.

But though Lampi and other planning commissioners agreed with Bridgens about the importance of a secondary access road, they were reluctant to deny the application.

“I don’t want to see the



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Volunteers are briefed on the plan to plant trees at the Clear Lake property as part of a wetland restoration project near Warrenton.

developer not be able to develop,” said Paul Mitchell, the commission’s chairman.

He ultimately made the motion to approve the project after the commission rejected motions by Bridgens to deny the applica-

tion or set conditions on how the access road would be constructed.

Instead, Mitchell proposed they approve the project with a condition suggested by Cronin.

Cronin suggested the

Planning Commission consider an existing gravel road that opens at Ridge Road and crosses adjacent properties before it hits Gramson’s property as a secondary access. If Gramson obtains easements from the other property owners to use and improve the road, it would be open only to emergency vehicles.

The road would not meet new city road standards.

“I don’t see how we can approve something that is substandard, I don’t get that,” Bridgens said before the vote. She felt it was “irresponsible and reckless of this commission.”

Rod Gramson and consultant Will Caplinger, a former planning manager for Clatsop County, both opposed the project. They plan to appeal the Planning Commission’s decision to the City Commission.

Not only were they concerned about the access road

and how people would evacuate in an emergency, they noted that the development will occur in an area defined by the city as a significant wetland.

In 2013, the North Coast Land Conservancy acquired a neighboring 47 acres at Clear Lake from Rod Gramson to preserve as wetland habitat. At the time, Clear Lake was the last remaining lake in Warrenton that had not either been conserved or developed.

When Gil Gramson’s subdivision was proposed earlier this year, the land conservancy asked that a wildlife fence be put in place between the properties to protect the habitat.

As part of the approval of the overall project Thursday, the Planning Commission also approved a wetlands hardship variance allowing Gil Gramson to fill in portions of the wetland on his property in order to develop.

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