

# Bills could help preserve historic buildings



## Your Turn

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Guest columnists

Oregon's historic buildings matter to all of us. They're part of our shared culture, our neighborhoods, and our distinct identity.

But, today, decisions about the demolition or preservation of arguably historic buildings are left to the property owner alone – sometimes, an out-of-state owner with no interest in the rich stories that have built every community in Oregon, many in the Willamette Valley.

Right now, there are two bills in the Oregon Senate that can help influence property owners to think twice before demolishing the buildings that give our region its identity.

SB 927, the Public Participation in Preservation Act, brings the public into important discussions about historic designations.

By including the community in these decisions, instead of just owners, Oregonians will have a say about which historic places are worthy of official designation and protection from short-sighted demolition.

SB 929, the Preservation, Housing and Seismic Safety Act puts preservation and restoration practices to work. It proposes the auction of state tax credits to fund a "Rehab Rebate" to offset the high cost of restoration and seismic retrofitting, so our distinctive historic buildings are stable, habitable and productive. Importantly, it gives priority to projects that create housing – think apartments above retail on main street, a school converted to affordable housing, or a large residence divided into multiple units.

We've seen what can happen when older buildings are updated for modern use with an eye to preserving their historic character.

The 1916 McGilchrist and Roth Build-

ings in downtown Salem, once empty, now have 40,000 square feet of office space, restaurants and apartments. Across the street, the colorful restoration of the 1891 Gray Building has created new space for local small businesses and shared creative ventures.

Today's young entrepreneurs crave authenticity in their working and living spaces, in both urban and rural communities. Co-working spaces in Stayton and Independence are turning historic building spaces into centers for economic development, launching ideas into tomorrow's businesses.

Not every important structure has been saved; we mourn the loss of the mid-century marble-clad bank building designed by noted architect Pietro Bulluschi a block north on Liberty Street.

Oregon has a proud history of being first. We were first to have a bottle bill, first to provide for universal beach access, first to vote by mail and first to value culture with a statewide Cultural Trust.

But in terms of historic preservation, thoughtfully retaining places that connect to our roots, we're woefully behind.

No other state uses Oregon's one-sided process for historic designation. Thirty-five other states already use tax credits for historic rehabilitation which return a significant profit to state coffers.

The character of our entire state is at stake, and it's time to bring Oregon into the present by preserving our past.

Contact your state senator and representative today to urge them to support SB 927 and SB 929.

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