

# So You Own An Old Barn...

## A Practical Guide to Researching, Designating, and Preserving Your Barn

### Introduction

Agriculture has driven Oregon's economy and shaped its history since before the 1840s. According to the U.S. Census, there are an estimated 11,400 barns built prior to 1960 in Oregon. The vast majority have not been documented or designated, and many are in need of rehabilitation or adaptive reuse.

There is symbolic value in saving heritage barns because they are often the visual anchor for the state's venerable farmsteads. To lose the barn would be to lose the integrating icon of a family farm. Saving and rehabilitating heritage barns conserves existing resources, preserves aesthetic appeal, and secures the key role these buildings play in tourism, promotion, and community identity.

As utilitarian structures, barns have often been deemed obsolete on modern farms. Because they were built for very specific purposes, barns are frequently difficult to repurpose for today's agricultural operations. There are scarce funding opportunities to rehabilitate barns, and zoning regulations can make reuse options limited. However, Oregon has many opportunities to identify and protect those rural buildings, structures, and landscapes that define the state's agricultural heritage. To help advance the preservation of barns, Restore Oregon has compiled the following resources for use by the property owners that steward the state's agricultural heritage.



*Hillcrest Orchard, located in Medford, has reused their barn for a wine tasting room and special events venue. Built c. 1900, the barn today demonstrates one of the different adapted uses that a barn can transform into. (Photo Courtesy of Hillcrest Orchards)*

### Barn Preservation Programs in Oregon

There are several organizations in Oregon that can help you with your barn, from researching the history to conducting a historic resource survey.

- **Restore Oregon.** With a mission to preserve, reuse, and pass forward Oregon's historic resources to ensure livable, sustainable communities, the organization's Heritage Barns Taskforce conducts an annual barn workshop and assists with general barn questions received from around the state.
- **State Historic Preservation Office.** SHPO manages and administers programs for the protection of the state's historic and cultural resources and can assist with designating, surveying, and providing grants for barns.
- **Century Farm and Ranch Program.** A statewide recognition program honoring farmers and ranchers who have worked the same land for at least 100 years, the CF&R Program celebrates those families that steward Oregon agriculture.
- **Local Historical Societies.** Most counties have historical societies that can assist with researching the history of barns and farmsteads by using historic photos, land deeds, oral histories, and other records.
- **Planning Offices.** Every community has a land use planning or community development office that is responsible for local land use zoning and historic resource programs. These offices are often helpful in planning preservation projects.

### Learning About Your Barn

There are many different ways to investigate the history of your barn. A great place to start is the online "Oregon Historic Sites Database," which allows you to input an address or the name of a property to see if it has been inventoried as part of a previous historic resource survey. While the vast majority of older barns have not been inventoried, there are many tools to aid in barn research such as county records, community histories, historic newspapers, and magazines. For an in depth description of the many other ways to research your barn, download Heritage Bulletin #11 provided online by the State Historic Preservation Office.

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## Historic Designation

The historic significance of your barn can be captured in many ways, but historic designation often provides the most lasting form of recognition. In Oregon, designation requires the consent of the owner, but then stays with the property even if it is sold.

The first step in capturing the historic significance of your barn is to complete a heritage barn survey. This entails describing elements of your barn, from the condition to the floor plan. It is also a way to document your barn for future use and start the process of receiving grants and other forms of funding. A survey form can be found on the State Historic Preservation Office's website and explains the steps to conduct the survey. A survey is not itself a designation, and no regulations are involved in submitting the form.



*The Shipley-Cook Barn located in Lake Oswego has successfully secured funding to rehabilitate and repair critical structural issues. This National Register-listed barn is a great example of how private dollars and grant funding can be assembled for a pioneer-era barn.*

The next, and more extensive, step in the designation process is to list your barn on the National Register of Historic Places. Although some jurisdictions have local landmark designations, the National Register has become the baseline designation in most of Oregon's communities. It is the nation's official list of districts, buildings, and structures significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, and culture. The two components needed to be eligible for designation are historic significance and retention of physical integrity from the historic period. National Register listing requires extensive research and an in-depth description of your barn. For assistance with the National Register and how to start the process, the State Historic Preservation Office can explain requirements and refer you additional resources.

Beyond the recognition it confers, National Register listing can help open the door for funding opportunities that can be applied to the restoration of the property. For more information on the National Register and how to list your barn, see Heritage Bulletin #4 provided online by the State Historic Preservation Office.



*Winn Barn, located in Weston, has been reused as a wedding and other special events venue. It demonstrates one of the more common adapted reuses that a barn can transform into. (Photo Courtesy of Winn Homestead Events)*

Although historic designation provides the basis for preservation regulations, not all communities have adopted alteration or demolition regulations for historic properties. This is especially the case in many of Oregon's unincorporated areas, where only minimal rules typically apply to historic properties. However, if you accept financial incentives for preservation, standards are likely to apply. Under no federal, state, or local rules are property owners required to open their property for public access.

Local land use planning offices can refer you to the rules, if any, that apply to historic properties in your jurisdiction. As with all major construction activities, your local building code official may need to approve significant work to ensure it is safe and code-compliant.

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## Funding Your Barn

Funding barn stabilization and rehabilitation can be challenging as there are limited funding sources available for financing preservation work.

- **Grants.** The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) offers a matching grant, the Preserving Oregon Grant, for National Register-listed properties. Another grant offered by SHPO is the Diamonds in the Rough Grant, which helps in the restoring or reconstructing of facades of old buildings that have been heavily altered over the years. Both grants offer a maximum of \$20,000.
- **Tax Incentives.** There are tax credits available at the federal level that can significantly aid in the rehabilitation of your barn. The Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit provides 20% of the rehabilitation cost for commercial historic properties designated on the National Register and a 10% tax credit for properties built before 1936.
- **Special Assessment.** Oregon's Special Assessment of Historic Property program offers an owner a property tax break for committing to a significant preservation plan for a National Register listed property for a period of ten years. To learn more, visit the State Historic Preservation Office's website.
- **Owner Investment.** For properties in good condition, traditional mortgages or equity loans are available for purchase and remodeling. Because barns are often considered "fixers" by banks, this can result in a more complicated process to finance the acquisition and rehabilitation of deteriorated buildings. In these cases an interim acquisition and improvement loan will likely be required prior to securing a permanent mortgage. Ultimately, the primary source of funding for barn rehabilitation will be an owner's private investment.



*The Neacoxie Barn, located in Gearhart, has been reused as a community space, including learning center and church. It was built in 1890 as the livery stable for the first Hotel Gearhart, and is the last surviving structure of the original commercial development known as Gearhart Park.*

## Reuse and Restoration Considerations

When considering the option of reusing your barn for another purpose, it is critical to understand the land use zoning for the property. Some jurisdictions will not allow you to change the use of your barn beyond what is allowed in a farming or timber zone. In some land use zones, however, designated historic properties are provided additional use flexibility. To find the zoning of your barn, contact your city or county planning department.

If zoning and the structure itself are amenable to adaptive reuse, there are many different avenues to take. Here are a few creative ways to reuse a historic barn:

- Art gallery
- Commercial meeting hall
- Education center
- Farm brewery/winery
- Farmers market
- Garden center or farm store
- Wedding venue
- Roadside market
- Dance/music studio

There are a number of issues that many barn owners face in common when working to preserve their historic properties. Moisture penetration, for example, often presents the biggest maintenance challenge for barn owners.

Keep in mind that if you plan on using grants or financial incentives to restore your barn or if your local government regulates alterations to historic resources, physical changes need to respect and retain the historic integrity of the barn. There are many contractors available that understand maintaining historic integrity, and the State Historic Preservation Office has compiled a list of consultants and contractors who can assist with the needs of your historic property.

Because of the sensitive nature of historic building materials, it's important to carefully select consultants, contractors, plans, and materials. Before even seeking proposals, it's important to define your project, including the scope of work, timeline, and budget. Once you are seeking proposals, be sure to solicit multiple bids through a written request for proposals.

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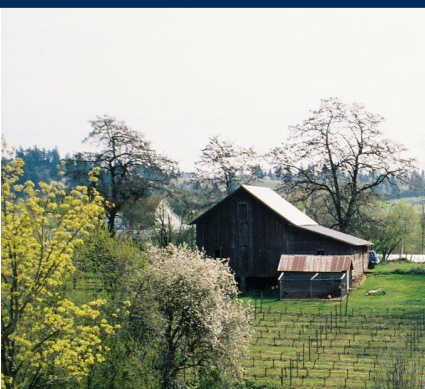
## The Preservation Process

While many of Oregon's barns are stylistically and functionally similar, each one presents unique challenges and opportunities for the property owner. While there are many different strategies for approaching a barn preservation project, there are some general best practice steps that should be considered.

1. **Heritage Barn Survey.** The first step in determining if your barn is worthy of investment and designation is to understand its basic characteristics and relative historic significance. This can be done by a property owner or a preservation professional.
2. **Condition Assessment.** A high-level professional assessment of structural and condition deficiencies can help orient a property owner to a barn's most pressing needs and the relative costs associated with stabilizing and/or restoring the barn. A preservation contractor is best suited to perform a condition assessment.
3. **National Register Nomination.** Listing on the National Register is often an important step in receiving recognition, financial incentives, and thorough documentation of a barn. The nomination process often takes a year from start to finish, and can be completed by a preservation professional or dedicated property owner.
4. **Reuse Study.** For barns that must be adapted to a new use, a reuse study (also called a feasibility study or capital needs assessment) is often an important component of identifying how best to rehabilitate the building for a new use. A reuse study often provides a framework for receiving incentives, loans, and private investment. An experienced preservation specialist is best suited to prepare a reuse study.
5. **Rehabilitation.** Because the rehabilitation process can be daunting (and expensive), oftentimes a phased approach to resolving structural and condition issues provides the best path for barn owners tackling a preservation project.



*The Stein-Boozier Barn, located in Wilsonville, has been reused by the City's parks department as a community space for weddings, events, and other special activities. Built in 1901, this barn has been updated for accessibility and structural safety (Photo Courtesy of Wilsonville Parks and Recreation)*



*This information is intended to be used as a reference guide. For more information or to make a donation to, contact:*

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