**History stands: Hunt Hall demolition comes to fruition**

An excavator works at Eastern Oregon University clearing debris at the site where 78-year-old Hunt Hall formerly stood. (Cherise Kaechele) 6703870

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Two red excavators worked at Eastern Oregon University clearing debris at the site where 78-year-old Hunt Hall formerly stood.

The heavy equipment broke concrete into smaller chunks and separated rebar from concrete. They were preparing for the arrival of a crusher, which would break the concrete into pieces the size of three-quarter-inch gravel.

From a nearby sidewalk, Luke Aldrich watched the excavators working noisily on the other side of a construction fence. Aldrich is the manager of EOU’s North Campus Restoration project, which includes the removal of Hunt Hall, adding Americans with Disabilities Act-approved pathways, creating additional parking, restoring campus landscaping and opening up the view of the surrounding mountains.

The total cost of the project is $2.9 million. The university is paying for the project with state capital construction bonds allocated by the legislature, according to EOU’s webpage for the project.

The iron, steel, pipes and rebar were recycled as were some large wooden beams. The hall’s old basement will be backfilled with the crushed concrete. However, much of the material from the old residence hall was hazardous and could not be recycled. When the first wing of Hunt Hall was built in 1939, it was common construction practice to use materials made with asbestos.

Before the exterior structure could be demolished, a hazardous materials team was contracted to remove asbestos tiles and other hazardous material from inside the building. Aldrich said that project took more than eight weeks and was so extensive that it ended up doubling the estimated hazmat contract.

Aldrich said the project goal before winter sets in is to finish cleaning up the debris, smooth the ground into a gentle slope, bring in topsoil and plant grass seed.

During the winter, the site “may still have some concrete around it. And a fence,” Aldrich said.

“Before the project started, the biggest question was ‘Can we save the building?’ That’s been talked about for decades,” he said. “Yeah, you can save anything with enough money. If someone would have come up with $30 million, we could have saved it.”

“Let’s go out and save Hunt Hall,” Aldrich said about how he initially felt about the project. But when he stepped inside the old building, he saw the reality. Many parts of it had not been used in decades.

“I hadn’t been in the building 10 minutes when I knew we couldn’t (afford to) save it,” Aldrich said.

**Hunt Hall history**

Hunt Hall, a residence hall, consisted of four wings that were built from the 1930s to the 1960s. Eventually, the building had four stories. Because of concerns about safety and the expense of repairing the building’s systems, the oldest wing was vacated in the 1970s.

By 2014, the last portion of Hunt Hall was shuttered.

“It had really become an eyesore. An attractive nuisance,” Aldrich said. “People were breaking into the building and stealing stuff.”

Because of its age and historical significance, demolishing the building required meetings and conversations with an archaeologist, the State Historic Preservation Office, local tribes, Restore Oregon, the Historic Landmark Commission, La Grande’s city planner and more.

Eventually, the existing parking lot will be shifted east to where Hunt Hall’s “A” wing used to be. When the project is completed, there will be more parking spaces than there were before.

The hillside where Hunt Hall stood will not be as steep. Instead, the hillside will be smoothed out and new pathways that meet ADA standards will connect the new parking lot, Gilbert Events Center, Pierce Library, Ackerman Hall and Inlow Hall.

Looking toward the heavy equipment, Aldrich added: “The campus has done a good job of managing historical buildings. We just weren’t able to save this one.”