Hunt Hall with its distinctive A, B and C sections as it stands today on the campus of Eastern Oregon University. (Cherise Kaechele/The Observer)

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EASTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

**Eastern Oregon, La Grande residents initiate drive to save Hunt Hall**

Organizer sees it as a symbolic effort to salute university icon

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The historic photo has started many a conversation at the desk of Jeff Davis in the Eastern Oregon University admissions office in Inlow Hall. The photo shows Eastern’s campus in the early 1940s, and a prominent part of the image is Hunt Hall, then named Dorion Hall.

“Quite a few people comment on it,” said Davis, an office specialist in the admissions office.

The historical significance of this photo may soon increase, something Davis considers unfortunate. Hunt Hall is set to be torn down this summer because it has fallen into a state of disrepair due to its age.

Davis is launching an effort to stop the demolition project. He thinks Hunt Hall, which has been totally closed the past two years, could still be useful to EOU and is a campus icon.

“It is such an important part of Eastern’s history,” Davis said.

Davis knows the campaign to save Hunt Hall is largely a symbolic gesture because plans to take it down are quite far along.

“I know that it is (probably) too late, but I want Hunt Hall to be remembered,” Davis said. “It is important that people know what is going on.”

He has not given up, though. Davis said he hopes the campaign will motivate people to step forward with donations that could cover the costly renovation work Hunt Hall needs.

EOU’s decision to remove the Hunt Hall complex, which includes three buildings constructed between 1939 and 1960, was well publicized, said Tim Seydel, EOU’s vice president for university advancement. He said the university made many efforts to keep people informed about its plans for Hunt Hall.

“It was not a quick, arbitrary decision,” Seydel said. “We have been talking about what do with Hunt Hall for 10 years.”

Seydel said that for EOU to reverse course now and decide not to remove Hunt Hall would hurt the university’s reputation.

“If we stopped now it would bring up a lot of questions. People would be scratching their heads,” Seydel said.

He explained that the Legislature authorized Eastern to sell nearly $3 million in state-backed bonds for the project two years ago. If Eastern were to renege on its commitment to the project, money from the bonds could not be spent, since it could go only toward the Hunt project.

Backing out now “would hurt our credibility,” Seydel said.

A key reason Davis wants Eastern to reconsider tearing down Hunt Hall is that all three of the university’s residence halls — Alikut, Daugherty and North halls — are filled to capacity. This means that Hunt Hall might be needed in the future to house a projected increase in students.

Seydel said reopening Hunt Hall to house additional students is not a viable option, however. He said the cost would be prohibitive because of the extensive restoration work that would be needed. For instance, he noted that the building’s electrical and plumbing systems are in need of major repair.

“It is not as simple as just opening it up again,” Seydel said.

Much of the repair work would be quite time consuming and costly because the steam pipes and plumbing fixtures are under concrete. This means walls would have to ripped out and then replaced in the process of making repairs.

“We would essentially be reconstructing the building,” Seydel said.

The cost of fully renovating Hunt Hall, Seydel said, would be greater than the expense of tearing it down and replacing it with new buildings.

Hunt Hall’s history dates back to 1939 when its A section, the northeast building, was constructed. The A section, which closed about two decades ago, was originally named Dorion Hall, lasting until 1958, when a new Dorion Hall was built on the west side of campus, according to a story in the May 2, 2014, edition of The Observer.

Hunt’s B and C sections were built in 1947 and 1960, respectively, Davis said. Its B section housed several labs for the Oregon Health Sciences University School of Nursing at EOU, and the C section housed Northeast Oregon Area Health Education Center offices until about two years ago.

Prior to that, the B and C sections provided student housing for many years.

Davis said Hunt Hall’s history should be saluted, especially as the university approaches its centennial year, 2029.

“It is a shame that Eastern cannot preserve its history for future generations to enjoy,” Davis said in a letter to the campus committee helping to plan the demolition.

Those who lived in Hunt Hall as students include Alassane Diagne, now an admissions counselor for Eastern, who lived in the building about five years ago. Diagne said he has tremendous memories of the residence hall.

“I have an emotional attachment to it,” he said. “I just loved it. My friends were super close.”

Diagne said he understands why Eastern has decided to remove Hunt Hall, and he agrees the reasons are good ones. Still, he said he would save it if he could.

“If I won the lottery I would (save Hunt Hall),” Diagne said.

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