Historical Buildings and Sites Commission
MEETING MINUTES
February 10, 2022
5:15 pm Council Chambers

COMMISSIONERS:
Ward Warren (Chair)
Arden McConnell (Vice Chair)
Virginia Ford
Shirley Holzinger
Nathan Miller
Sandra Crowder (absent)
Cynthia Charat

STAFF/LIAISON MEMBERS:
Bradley Clark – Director Community Development
Jason Maki – Associate Planner

COUNCILLIAISON:
Joel King

GUESTS:

1. Roll Call – Chair Warren called the meeting to order at 5:18 pm.

2. Introductions: None.

3. Public Comment: None.

4. Approval of Minutes:

   a. December 23, 2021 (special meeting):

      MOTION

      Commissioner Holzinger moved, and Vice Chair McConnell seconded the motion to approve the December 23, 2021 minutes as amended. The vote resulted as follows: “AYES”: Chair Warren, Vice Chair McConnell, Commissioners Ford, Miller, Charat, and Holzinger. “NAYS”: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Crowder.
      The motion passed.

   b. January 13, 2022:

      MOTION

      Chair Warren moved, and Commissioner Ford seconded the motion to approve the January 13, 2022 minutes as amended. The vote resulted as follows: “AYES”: Chair Warren, Vice Chair McConnell, Commissioners Ford, Miller, Charat, and Holzinger. “NAYS”: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Crowder.
      The motion passed.

5. Action Items:

   a. Local Landmark Invite Letter

      • Commissioner McConnell previously had concerns about language in the Local Landmark Letter that had the potential to cause confusion when navigating the website.
      • After discussion staff made edits to the current letter to reflect the requested edits by the commission.
b. Discussion and possible action on adding National Register properties to the Local Landmarks list
   - It is proposed by the commission that properties already on the National Register list should have an easier and more streamlined process for being approved as local landmarks.
   - Staff recommended that a Development Code amendment to Article 13 be proposed to add language that would approve local landmarks already on the National Register list with only the property owner's signature.
   - Staff will create a draft of the code amendment for the HBSC to review at their next meeting.

6. Matters from Commission Members and Staff:

   a. New Member Appointment
      - The commission welcomed Cynthia Charat as a new member of the Commission.

   b. Strategic Planning Update
      - Community development Director, Bradley Clark, presented “starred” items from Council's Strategic Planning Session that related to the efforts of the HBSC.
        - There was one two star item which prioritized a goal to help revitalize the Redwood Hotel
          - One Star Items included:
            - A downtown comprehensive cleanup program
            - Develop new maps (art, historic, downtown historic, biking)
            - Increase communication between advisory committees

   c. New Local Landmark Applications
      - The Commission discussed four potential new landmark applications: 121 NE B Street, 961 SE 8th Street, Caveman Bowl (1230 Rogue River Highway), Wonder Bur (116 SW H Street)
      - Chair Warren obtained signed applications requesting local landmark status from the property owners at Caveman Bowl and the Wonder Bur
      - Chair Warren mentioned that he helped to coordinate a news story with the Daily Courier that would highlight the 4 building being considered for local landmark status.
      - Commissioner Ford made comment about how she enjoyed when the Mayor used to give an award for best landscaped yard, and posed the question if we should we bring the award back.

   d. Status of New Sign at Riverside Park
      - Staff gave a status update on the historic landmark signage project
      - Commissioners deliberated on whether the park's entrance on 6th Street was to be duplicated and to be used to replace the sign located on the corner of East Park Street and 7th Street.
      - Staff was asked to get more information and report back at the next meeting.

   e. Historic District Map
      - Staff updated the Commission on the status of the Chamber of Commerce having a small amount of historic district maps delivered.
• Chair Warren asked clarifying question about whether the Downtown Welcome Center has enough historic district maps. Staff did not know, but would follow up.

f. Downtown Taskforce Update
• Staff gave an update that at the City Council meeting on Feb 16th meeting the Council will be appointing 9 members to the Caveman Plaza taskforce
• Councilor Joel King made comment that a consultant was retained by Council to create a plan related to implementing Urban Renewal District dollars that is anticipated to benefit downtown and the Historic District

g. Redwood Empire Sign Update
• Chair Warren gave an update to the commission based on a conversation with Jason Canady and mentioned he was hopeful the Redwood Empire sign would be repaired this spring.

7. Future Agenda Building for Next Meeting:
   a. Draft Local Landmark Development Code Text Amendment
   b. Riverside Park Signage

8. Adjourn: 6:34 pm

Next Meeting: March 10, 2022

Summary minutes prepared by Jason Maki, Associate Planner, Grants Pass Community Development.

Historical Buildings & Sites Commission
Meeting Minutes February 10, 2022
Local Historic Landmark vs. National Historic Register

Overview of Potential City of Grants Pass Development Code Amendment

March 7, 2022

During its February 10th meeting, the Historical Buildings and Sites Commission (HBSC) discussed the possibility of amending the Grants Pass Development Code to provide that a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places is automatically listed as a Local Historic Landmark. The former designation (National Register) is a federal process administered by the National Parks Service while the latter (Local Landmark) is a local process administered by the City of Grants Pass through the HBSC (in accordance with State of Oregon rules and guidance).

In Schedule 13.400-2 of the Development Code, 75 properties are listed as Local Landmarks and 25 properties are on the National Register. Fifteen (15) properties have both designations. Nine of the 25 National Register properties have not been designated as Local Landmarks. Those are:

- 214 SW 4th St., Old City Hall and Fire Station
- 961 SE 8th St., Clark-McConnell House
- 906 NE 8th St., Dimmick-Judson House
- 404 NW A St., George H. Lundburg House
- 121 NE B St., Albert B. and Mary Cornell House
- 127 NW D St., Clark-Norton House
- 118 NW E St., Hotel Josephine Annex
- 143 SE H St., Rogue Theater
- 1012 SE L St., Forest Service Supervisor’s Warehouse

Article 13 of the Grants Pass Development Code outlines the process for a property to be designated as a Local Landmark. Below are pertinent sections from the Development Code and Oregon Administrative Rules that pertain to this question of allowing for an automatic listing of a property as a Local Landmark if it is on the National Register.

Definitions (from Article 13)

**Landmark (Historic Resource):** Any structure or site, any part of which is 50 years old or older which has a special character or special historic interest or aesthetic interest, or value which is part of the heritage of the City or County that has been officially designated on the Local Landmark Register (Historic Resource List) and set aside for conservation or preservation.

**Local Landmark Register (Resource List):** The list of historic resources officially recognized by the City of Grants Pass as important to its history and afforded protection under the Development Code. Local Landmark Register, Resource List and Historic Resource List are interchangeable terms.

**National Register Resource:** Buildings, structures, objects, sites, or districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (PL 89-665; 16 U.S.C. 470).
Resource List (Local Landmark Register): The list of Locally Significant Historic Resources adopted by City of Grants Pass in its Comprehensive Community Development Plan as important to its history and afforded protection under these regulations.

Significant Historic Resource: A building, structure, site, or district on the Local Landmark Register (Resource List) or a National Register Resource.

Section 13.420(2)

(2) Historic Review shall apply to the following:
   (a) Historic Districts, designated in accordance with this section; and
   (b) Conservation Districts, designated in accordance with this section; and
   (c) Landmarks, sites or signs, designated in accordance with this section.

Section 13.441 – Local Landmark Criteria

Designation Criteria. A Historic District, a Conservation District, and a Landmark may be recommended for designation by the HBSC and designated by the City Council, providing all the following criteria are addressed during consideration by the review body.

   (1) The designation of a District or Landmark serves the purpose of this section.
   (2) The boundaries of a District are adequate and suitable for designation.
   (3) Consideration of the positive and negative effects of the designation upon residents, businesses or property owners of the area.
   (4) Consideration of the historic character, value, context, and integrity of the proposed District or Landmark.

(Note: The criteria for National Register designation is outlined in Section 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and involves a comprehensive nomination process and analysis that is separate from Grants Pass codes.)

Oregon Administrative Rules (selected)

If a city chooses to protect its historic resources, it must do so in conformity with OAR 660-023-0200. (See attached.) Sub-section (6), Designating Locally Significant Historic Resource, requires that the city amend its Resource List before protecting a property as a Local Landmark. An owner must be allowed to refuse the landmark designation during the designation process (which is done through a public hearing). A National Register property does not need to be on the Resource List in order to be designated by the Federal government but a Local Landmark property does need to be on the Resource List before it is designated. It is only through designation a locally significant historic resource that the city can apply conditions to development permits to promote preservation.

Considerations for Potential Code Amendment

The City is not required to list a National Register resource on a local inventory or designate it as a Local Landmark, but doing so is not prohibited. The advantage is that it offers enhanced local protection by
being added to the Local Landmark list. OAR 660-023-0200(8) requires the city to review any demolition or relocation of a National Register property, even if it is not a Local Landmark. However, other types of review such as design review prior to exterior modification would require it be a Local Landmark and would require a public hearing. It is staff’s opinion that adding all National Register properties to the Local Landmark list cannot happen “automatically” and any National Register property must go through a separate review and approval process before it can become a Local Landmark.
For purposes of this rule, the following definitions apply:

(a) "Demolition" means any act that destroys, removes, or relocates, in whole or part, a significant historic resource such that its historic, cultural, or architectural character and significance is lost. This definition applies directly to local land use decisions regarding a National Register Resource. This definition applies directly to other local land use decisions regarding a historic resource unless the local comprehensive plan or land use regulations contain a different definition.

(b) "Designation" is a decision by a local government to include a significant resource on the resource list.

(c) "Historic context statement" is an element of a comprehensive plan that describes the important broad patterns of historical development in a community and its region during a specified time period. It also identifies historic resources that are representative of the important broad patterns of historical development.

(d) "Historic preservation plan" is an element of a comprehensive plan that contains the local government’s goals and policies for historic resource preservation and the processes for creating and amending the program to achieve the goal.

(e) "Historic resources" are those buildings, structures, objects, sites, or districts that potentially have a significant relationship to events or conditions of the human past.

(f) "Locally significant historic resource" means a building, structure, object, site, or district deemed by a local government to be a significant resource according to the requirements of this division and criteria in the comprehensive plan.

(h)

“Owner”:

(A) Means the owner of fee title to the property as shown in the deed records of the county where the property is located; or

(B) Means the purchaser under a land sale contract, if there is a recorded land sale contract in force for the property; or

(C) Means, if the property is owned by the trustee of a revocable trust, the settlor of a revocable trust, except that when the trust becomes irrevocable only the trustee is the owner; and

(D) Does not include individuals, partnerships, corporations or public agencies holding easements or less than fee interests (including leaseholds) of any nature; or

(E) Means, for a locally significant historic resource with multiple owners, including a district, a simple majority of owners as defined in (A)-(D).

(F) Means, for National Register Resources, the same as defined in 36 CFR 60.3(k).

(i) “Protect” means to require local government review of applications for demolition, relocation, or major exterior alteration of a historic resource, or to delay approval of, or deny, permits for these actions in order to provide opportunities for continued preservation.

(j) “Significant historic resource” means a locally significant historic resource or a National Register Resource.


(a) Local governments are not required to amend acknowledged plans or land use regulations in order to provide new or amended inventories, resource lists or programs regarding historic resources, except as specified in section (8). Local governments are encouraged to inventory and designate historic resources and must adopt historic preservation regulations to protect significant historic resources.

(b)
The requirements of the standard Goal 5 process in OAR 660-023-0030 (Inventory Process) through 660-023-0050 (Programs to Achieve Goal 5), in conjunction with the requirements of this rule, apply when local governments choose to amend acknowledged historic preservation plans and regulations.

(c) Local governments are not required to apply the ESEE process pursuant to OAR 660-023-0040 (ESEE Decision Process) in order to determine a program to protect historic resources.

(3) Comprehensive Plan Contents. Local comprehensive plans should foster and encourage the preservation, management, and enhancement of significant historic resources within the jurisdiction in a manner conforming with, but not limited by, the provisions of ORS 358.605 (Legislative findings). In developing local historic preservation programs, local governments should follow the recommendations in the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation, produced by the National Park Service. Local governments should develop a local historic context statement and adopt a historic preservation plan and a historic preservation ordinance in conjunction with inventorying historic resources.

(4) Inventorying Historic Resources. When a local government chooses to inventory historic resources, it must do so pursuant to OAR 660-023-0030 (Inventory Process), this section, and sections (5) through (7). Local governments are encouraged to provide opportunities for community-wide participation as part of the inventory process. Local governments are encouraged to complete the inventory in a manner that satisfies the requirements for such studies published by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and provide the inventory to that office in a format compatible with the Oregon Historic Sites Database.

(5) Evaluating and Determining Significance. After a local government completes an inventory of historic resources, it should evaluate which resources on the inventory are significant pursuant to OAR 660-023-0030 (Inventory Process)(4) and this section.

(a) The evaluation of significance should be based on the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, historic context statement and historic preservation plan. Criteria may include, but are not limited to, consideration of whether the resource has:

(A) Significant association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local, regional, state, or national history;

(B)
Significant association with the lives of persons significant to local, regional, state, or national history;

(C) Distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;

(D) A high likelihood that, if preserved, would yield information important in prehistory or history; or

(E) Relevance within the local historic context and priorities described in the historic preservation plan.

(b) Local governments may delegate the determination of locally significant historic resources to a local planning commission or historic resources commission.

(6) Designating Locally Significant Historic Resources. After inventorying and evaluating the significance of historic resources, if a local government chooses to protect a historic resource, it must adopt or amend a resource list (i.e., “designate” such resources) pursuant to OAR 660-023-0030 (Inventory Process)(5) and this section.

(a) The resource list must be adopted or amended as a land use decision.

(b) Local governments must allow owners of inventoried historic resources to refuse historic resource designation at any time during the designation process in subsection (a) and must not include a site on a resource list if the owner of the property objects to its designation on the public record. A local government is not required to remove a historic resource from an inventory because an owner refuses to consent to designation.

(7) Historic Resource Protection Ordinances. Local governments must adopt land use regulations to protect locally significant historic resources designated under section (6). This section replaces OAR 660-023-0050 (Programs to Achieve Goal 5). Historic protection ordinances should be consistent with standards and guidelines recommended in the Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation published by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, produced by the National Park Service.

(8) National Register Resources are significant historic resources. For these resources, local governments are not required to follow the process described in OAR 660-023-0030 (Inventory Process) through 660-023-0050 (Programs to Achieve Goal 5) or sections (4) through (6). Instead, a local government:
Must protect National Register Resources, regardless of whether the resources are designated in the local plan or land use regulations, by review of demolition or relocation that includes, at minimum, a public hearing process that results in approval, approval with conditions, or denial and considers the following factors: condition, historic integrity, age, historic significance, value to the community, economic consequences, design or construction rarity, and consistency with and consideration of other policy objectives in the acknowledged comprehensive plan. Local jurisdictions may exclude accessory structures and non-contributing resources within a National Register nomination;

May apply additional protection measures. For a National Register Resource listed in the National Register of Historic Places after the effective date of this rule, additional protection measures may be applied only upon considering, at a public hearing, the historic characteristics identified in the National Register nomination; the historic significance of the resource; the relationship to the historic context statement and historic preservation plan contained in the comprehensive plan, if they exist; the goals and policies in the comprehensive plan; and the effects of the additional protection measures on the ability of property owners to maintain and modify features of their property. Protection measures applied by a local government to a National Register resource listed before the effective date of this rule continue to apply until the local government amends or removes them; and

Must amend its land use regulations to protect National Register Resources in conformity with subsections (a) and (b). Until such regulations are adopted, subsections (a) and (b) shall apply directly to National Register Resources.

Removal of a historic resource from a resource list by a local government is a land use decision and is subject to this section.

A local government must remove a property from the resource list if the designation was imposed on the property by the local government and the owner at the time of designation:

(A) Has retained ownership since the time of the designation, and

(B) Can demonstrate that the owner objected to the designation on the public record, or

(C) Was not provided an opportunity to object to the designation, and

(D)
Requests that the local government remove the property from the resource list.

(b) Except as provided in subsection (a), a local government may only remove a resource from the resource list if the circumstances in paragraphs (A), (B), or (C) exist.

(A) The resource has lost the qualities for which it was originally recognized;

(B) Additional information shows that the resource no longer satisfies the criteria for recognition as a historic resource or did not satisfy the criteria for recognition as a historic resource at time of listing;

(C) The local building official declares that the resource poses a clear and immediate hazard to public safety and must be demolished to abate the unsafe condition.

(10) A local government shall not issue a permit for demolition or modification of a locally significant historic resource during the 120-day period following:

(a) The date of the property owner’s refusal to consent to the historic resource designation, or

(b) The date of an application to demolish or modify the resource if the local government has not designated the locally significant resource under section (6).

(11) OAR 660-023-0200 (Historic Resources)(1)(a) and (1)(h) are effective upon filing of the rule with the Secretary of State.

(12) OAR 660-023-0200 (Historic Resources)(8) is effective upon filing of the rule with the Secretary of State and applies directly to local government permit decisions until the local government has amended its land use regulations as required by OAR 660-023-0200 (Historic Resources)(8)(c).

(13) OAR 660-023-0200 (Historic Resources)(9) is effective upon filing of the rule with the Secretary of State and applies directly to local government decisions until the local government has amended its land use regulations to conform with the rule.

(14) OAR 660-023-0200 (Historic Resources)(10) is effective upon filing of the rule with the Secretary of State and applies directly to local government permit decisions.
Riverside Park Signage Update

March 3, 2022
Sign Legend:

#1 = add new wooden header panel to existing sign
#2 = HBSC to research and propose new sign type
#3 = Vista entry sign; use existing sign frame and replace with new panel
#4 = rock sign near restroom
6th Street Park Entrance
7th and East Park Street
Softball Field
Rock Sign Near Bathroom

Marcotte Park

*example*
More sites up for local landmark status

Lawrence Matusik of Grants Pass looks for a strike at Caveman Bowl on Rogue River Highway in Grants Pass on Thursday. The venerable bowling alley, which was built in 1956, is on track to be named an official local landmark by the city.

By Lauren Bishop
of the Daily Courier

Two historic homes and two entertainment mainstays are working their way through the process of becoming designated local landmarks.

Caveman Bowl, the Clark-McConnell House on Eighth Street, the Wonder Bar Lounge & Cafe and the Albert B. and Mary Cornell House on B Street are all on track to join a list of landmarks that have survived Grants Pass’ growth for decades — an honor the Historical Buildings and Sites Commission has been actively bestowing over the last year.

Grants Pass boasts 76 local landmarks, having added Croxton Memorial Park, Grants Pass Pharmacy, Riverside Park and Caveman Bridge to the list in the last year. Also added was the Redwood Empire sign, which was badly damaged by a careless driver in December and is now undergoing repair.

Now four more are up for the honor, which must go through Historical Buildings and Sites Commission recommendation and City Council approval.

“It’s way past due,” commission Chair Ward Warren said of the recent influx of new historic listings. “That landmark list was last done in 1981.”

Having a building on the local landmarks list increases regulations on what the building owner can and cannot do on the site, like alteration, relocation and demolition requests, which must go through the commission first.

The landmark list is meant to aid preservation, but also provide a map for tourists and locals alike to take a walk through Grants Pass’ history.

“I think that there is interest. There are people that, when they go places,

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Arden McConnell stands outside the Clark-McConnell House, her family home on Eighth Street fronting the Rogue River, where she has lived since the 1940s.
Larry Boynton, Debra Wilson, Laurie Myers (standing) and Ron Exley react to a shot at Caveman Bowl.

Built in 1925, the Cornell House is a rare local example of the Mission Revival style of architecture.

Caveman Bowl’s curved roofline and neon sign give the building a midcentury modern look.

The Wonder Bur has been a mainstay in downtown Grants Pass for several decades.

Arden McConnell talks about a photo of her home that was taken during its construction in 1936.
they like to look for landmarks and historic areas and buildings,” Warren said.

To be considered for the list, a nominee must be at least 50 years old and have some kind of social, cultural, architectural or historical importance in the development of the city. Anyone can ask a landmark be put on the list.

Caveman Bowl

The only bowling alley still operating in Grants Pass, Caveman Bowl just makes sense for the generations of people who have strived for a perfect game at those lanes.

Kevin Croucher, who has owned and operated Caveman Bowl since 1991, said the entertainment venue built in 1956 is plenty deserving of a spot on the local landmark list, considering its following.

“Me, it’s everybody’s place: All the people who have bowled there throughout the years,” Croucher said.

The building at 1250 Rogue River Highway features a curved roof, popular during 1950s construction, in the style of mid-century modern, according to Warren.

While you’re sitting in the historic building getting ready to bowl, you’re probably sitting on the original Brunswick benches.

Croucher said the whole place is nearly the same as its 1956 construction, sans a few modifications to the exterior like a new door on the east side and a few windows now filled in.

“Other than that, things are pretty much like back where they were in the 1950s.”

Croucher said he’s a history buff, so it’s been nostalgic going through the process of getting the alley on the official landmark map.

“I believe in the community, so I think it’s kind of cool, especially there on G Street with the old historic buildings. It’s neat to look back at where Grants Pass started and where it is now,” Croucher said.

Clark-McConnell House

The English cottage style home at 961 S.E. Eighth St., built in 1906 for insurance broker M.D. Clark, is purposefully asymmetrical, an allusion to English and Norman manor houses in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Ardon McConnell has lived in the house since the 1940s and recalls the property owner even before the home was built. He also remembers Clark, whom she said built replicas of his wife’s dream house in many cities he stopped in while he was managing banks.

Helen and Sam McConnell and their daughter were living in a home on L Street at the time the home that faces the Rogue River was built, and the family waited past the place to go fishing until it was for sale a second time in 1945.

“It was the house [my mother] had always dreamed of. She loved it ever since, and I have too.”

When McConnell bought the home, now on the National Register of Historic Places, from her parents in 1995, she got to work restoring it to its former glory after years of rental tenants, from the long maple floor tiles to the plastered walls and archways, to the original kitchen sink and cabinetry.

“I have had four generations of family touch the same door knob that my great-grandparents touched when they’d come to visit,” McConnell said.

“I really wanted to keep it intact, because I loved it here and it meant a lot.”

Wonder Bur Lounge & Cafe

David O’Malley and his wife Caitlin have owned the Wonder Bur Lounge & Cafe, 116 S.W. H St., since May 2009. Before that, his aunt and uncle ran the place for almost 30 years. Before that, O’Malley’s grandfather purchased the business in 1956.

Diedre and Charlie Geissel owned the bar for nearly three decades prior to O’Malley taking over during the beginning of the pandemic, and while working there Diedre started looking into the history of the building through the Josephine County Historical Society.

There aren’t extensive records on the history of the buildings and its owners, and that’s partly because some records were destroyed in a fire in 1937. The building itself was built in 1900, at least according to the historical plaque on the front that descibes when it was a grocery warehouse.

The cafe opened in 1972, and before that O’Malley said the bar served tacos out of a small back closet. Before that, the cafe side was at some point a Merle Norman Cosmetics Studio, O’Malley said.

“If you peel back the paneling in there it’s a horrible baby pink color,” he laughed.

When O’Malley took over, he updated a lot of the internal workings of the building, but tried to keep the historic feel alive.

“Effort was really made to not change anything outwardly. The reason it’s a mainstay is because things don’t change there,” O’Malley said.

It’s hard to miss the bar when meandering downtown, thanks mostly to the iconic 1960s-era neon sign, something that O’Malley intends to keep as authentic as possible.

“It’s hard to maintain these days because almost no one does neon,” he said. People have asked if he would switch to LED, but he declines because “the technology is not there where it would match. It’d be changing it too much.”

Albert B. and Mary Cornell House

Built in 1925, the Mission Revival style of architecture at 121 N.E. B St. is an example of largely undorned stucco walls, a front entry porch and roof pannels.

Owned by Tom Ford since 1990, the building has been a laundry list of businesses and will be converted back to a residence in the near future.

Some of the mechanical elements have been redone, but Ford said nothing in the interior or has changed. Wally Huntington, a well-known landscape architect, designed the gardens around the home.

“He specifically wanted people to slow down in the courtyard and look at the house,” Ford said.

The 1925 building has been on the National Register of Historical Places since 2002. According to the application for that honor, the residence even then was the only surviving building of about 200 from the 1920s on the south side of B Street between Sixth and Seventh streets.

Builder and contractor Gustave Adolph Laun crafted the home for the Cornells. Laun for nearly four decades built or oversaw construction of about 50 local buildings including the former U.S. Forest Service compound on I Street and the Oregon Caves Chateau — before he retired in 1961.

Albert Cornell was a prolific insurance agent from 1906 to his death in 1943 who worked out of his home and was also a member of the Grants Pass City Council and the Josephine County Fair Board.

Reach reporter Lauren Bishop at 541-474-3806 or lbishop@thedailycourier.com.
City signs contract with Portland firm to repair historic Redwood Empire sign

The city’s historic Redwood Empire sign, battered by a car that sailed off Sixth Street in December, rests in the city yard in Grants Pass on Thursday. Ramsay Signs of Portland was awarded the job to repair the sign at a cost of $35,415.

After $35,000 worth of restoration, it could be back next to Caveman Bridge by late May

By Lauren Bishop of the Daily Courier

The historic Redwood Empire sign, badly damaged by a careless driver in December, is heading to Portland for some much needed R&R — restoration and refurbishment.

Grants Pass inked a $35,415 contract with Ramsay Signs to fix what’s left of the 81-year-old sign, a landmark that’s stood at the foot of Caveman Bridge for decades, touting the scenic Redwood Highway and pointing tourists toward the Oregon Caves and the Golden Gate Bridge.

Ramsay Signs will pick up the metal wreckage and have it ready for rehanging in late April or early May, Public Works Director Jason Canady said. It may not be ready to reinstall until late May.

“We still have to go and put in new posts, because one of those got sheared off,” Canady said.

The Redwood Empire sign was erected in 1941 by the Redwood Empire Association, a regional tourism collaborative that was looking to tempt motorists to drive the Redwood Highway, which begins in Grants Pass and ends in San Francisco.

Weathered and worn in 2018, the sign was in danger of being scrapped by the city before a...
Sign

From 1A

groundswell of public support in favor of restoration swayed the City Council to fix the sign.

It received a complete restoration, including new neon lettering in 2019, only to be nearly destroyed by a careless driver on Dec. 19. Security cameras captured the moment the driver veered off of Sixth Street and went airborne into the sign after somehow missing a concrete wall in front of it.

The cost to restore it again was estimated in late December to be about $20,000, a sum Canady had said the driver’s insurance may be able to cover.

Canady said Thursday that the city has filed a claim against his insurance and hopes “to recover as much as possible.”

“I understand that his coverage may not cover the full repair,” Canady said.

The contract states that Ramsay Signs is to salvage the left side of the sign and create two new right sections, one for the top half and one for the bottom half.

It will then apply new white vinyl to all of the lettering and install new neon components.

“It’s a metal box; it shouldn’t take them very long,” Canady said. “The longest thing is probably going to be restoring the neon.”

Ramsay Signs is perhaps best known for building and installing the famous neon White Stag sign in downtown Portland. The sign, which was built in 1940 — one year before the Redwood Empire sign — and has undergone a number of changes over the years, currently says “Portland Oregon.”

Darin Hauer, Ramsay’s second vice president, said it does plenty of refurbishment of old signs and predicted the Redwood Empire restoration won’t prove to be a tall order.

“It’s going to be a pretty simple job for us,” Hauer said.

The company makes and restores signs nationwide, Hauer said, and Ramsay Signs has a neon manufacturing facility in its shop, so the neon lettering will be created and installed in house.

Hauer, who has been in the sign industry for 42 years, said he took note of the Redwood Empire sign during a visit to Grants Pass a few years ago. The sign was refurbished after a yearslong back-and-forth about the historic value of the sign and whether it should be kept intact as an artifact of the past or included in the city’s rebranding efforts at the time.

The restoration work by a Eugene sign company, which fixed the long-broken neon lights, cost the city $13,771.

Reach reporter Lauren Bishop at 541-474-3806 or lbishop@thedailycourier.com.
Dear Property Owner,

The City of Grants Pass’ Historical Buildings and Sites Commission would like to invite you to join with other historic building owners to designate your building as a Local Landmark. It is a special honor for a property or site to receive this designation.

A local landmark is a designation for any structure or site 50 years old or older, which has a special character, social/cultural value, historic, architectural, or aesthetic interest and represents the heritage of the City.

Grants Pass is rich with history and active citizens who work to preserve our history and provide protections for the special character and historic value of your property.

The Historical Buildings and Sites Commission is available to offer advice and guidance for your historic property and encourages protection and preservation of our treasured local landmarks.

There is no cost to the property owners to start the simple landmark process. A brief narrative describing the property and the history known to you, along with a few digital photos can get the process started. Additional information about Local Landmarks can be found on the City’s website under “City Hall - Committees & Commissions – Historical Buildings and Sites Commission – Grants Pass Historic Landmarks – Historic Landmarks – Schedule 13.400-2.”

We welcome you to join the special company of our many existing local landmark designations. Please contact Community Development Director, Bradley Clark, (Bclark@grantspassoregon.gov) at the City Planning Department or HBSC Chair, Ward Warren (Bluemoongp@gmail.com) with any further questions, or to get started with the simple Local Landmark designation process.

Sincerely,

Bradley Clark
Community Development Director
Historic Preservation Officer

Ward Warren
Chair, HBSC