

To: Oregon NFB members

From: Sherryll Johnson Hoar, Salem Hospital Community Relations

Salem Hospital would like your input as we develop ways to commemorate the history of the Oregon School for the Blind, its students and staff. We also want to let you know about a meeting the city is holding for alumni.

Background:

Salem Hospital bought the former OSB property when the state put it up for sale. We now call the site our Church Street property.

We will be replacing our outdated rehabilitation facility on Center Street with a new building on the Church Street property. It will sit roughly on the footprint of the former OSB dining hall, infirmary and admin building. And we will be adding accessible parking sort of over the old school footprint.

Additionally, our plans call for a half-acre commemorative garden, to replace Howard Hall. It would sit over Howard Hall's basic footprint at the corner of Mission and Church. At the suggestion of the OSB Alumni Association board, our architect toured Oral Hall and has woven many of its blind-friendly concepts into the plan.

The commemorative garden would serve three purposes:

1. Therapy garden: An outdoor area to provide people using wheelchairs, or who have difficulty walking, the ability to navigate common obstacles such as gravel and uneven terrain. Hospital therapy staff could take patients there to help them safely develop the ability to tackle those barriers. It could also serve as a prime location for working on mobility and orientation skills for the blind.
2. Adaptive, inclusive playground for therapy and general play for our pediatric patients: Play is a critical part of a child's development and the adaptive playground seeks to provide an environment where any kid can be a kid. This element would continue the site's focus on children with disabilities. The public could also use this site.
3. Commemorate OSB. We would re-use materials from Howard Hall and also build interpretive walls that tell the history of OSB. Those would be at the three entrances of the garden (at the street corner, along the east edge facing the parking, and along the north edge facing the rehab center).

Howard Hall is the only remaining building on the campus, because it is on the city's historic landmarks list. It is on that list due to its connection with the school and the age of the building.

Salem Hospital tried to salvage Howard Hall. We hired an engineer to determine if the building could be moved, but because of how it was built and the state's neglect of the building, it wouldn't survive a move. We also tried to find someone to develop it for some other compatible use but no one responded to our offer. Experts told us the building is too small for historic redevelopment, it's not in the right location and there just isn't money for it.

We have submitted a request to the City of Salem to demolish Howard Hall and replace it with the commemorative garden. We think continuing to use the site to serve children with disabilities and also making the site available is of higher value to the community.

Although we primarily see this as a collaboration between Salem Hospital staff and the OSB Alumni Association, as we move forward with our plans we want to make sure that we are involving other former OSB students and staff. We want to hear from you. How would you like to have your experience at the school commemorated? What plants should we include? What stories should we tell?

Also, the city is holding a meeting in early May and will make the 3-dimensional model of the commemorative garden available to former OSB students and staff. It looks like that meeting will be at 1 pm on Monday, May 5. If you are interested in attending, let me know and I can get you the details.

Please let me know your ideas and ask me any questions you have. You can reach me at 503-561-2738 or sherryll.hoar@saalemhealth.org.

Thank you.

Sherryll Johnson Hoar
Strategic Communications Administrator
sherryll.hoar@saalemhealth.org
503-561-2738