

# Figo house to stay standing

TriMet to work around Jackson St. house, after dropping plans to buy it

**Published:** Wednesday, February 13, 2008

**Updated:** Monday, July 14, 2008

TriMet has quit its effort to buy Randall Acker's 19th century home, a building the Portland transportation giant said they would have to move or demolish to continue development of the MAX Green Line and to build a new Portland State housing building.

TriMet officials say their decision to leave the house alone is based on the public's disapproval of the plan to buy it, as well as the realization that TriMet and PSU can develop around the house without having to own, move or demolish it.

"Frankly, we heard a lot of support for the development. That was good," said Neil McFarlane, TriMet's executive director of capital projects and facilities management division. "We also heard a lot of people saying, but can't you save that house? We decided well, yeah, we can."

TriMet will continue work on the Green Line--the newest lightrail line that will run from Union Station to PSU campus--without impacting Acker's home, McFarlane wrote in a letter to Acker on Feb. 8, when TriMet announced its decision. Portland State administrators have said from the start that they could build the housing building around Acker's home.

Acker's house is one of the last buildings in the area TriMet was trying to acquire to build a turnabout that will give Green Line trains a spot to park and turn around. The area, the two blocks south of Southwest College Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, will also house equipment and break rooms, and the PSU housing building for Portland State.

Since 2006, TriMet has discussed buying Acker's house, a Queen Anne built in 1894 that he calls the Figo House and uses as his law firm's office building. In order to force Acker to sell his house, which qualifies to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, TriMet had to prove that there was no feasible alternative to buying, moving or destroying the house.

"TriMet recognizes that there is a 'prudent and feasible alternative' to such acquisition," McFarlane wrote in the letter to Acker.

Acker said he is very happy with the decision. He said he is grateful to the community members who gave input at a TriMet public forum in late January, which was meant to obtain feedback about their development plans for the area and Acker's house.

Acker said over half of the people at the forum were wearing pins he made that read "Save the Figo House."

"I've really been overwhelmed by the support from the community," Acker said. "I've really been impressed and proud to be a Portlander."



**Promotion:** A button that Randall Acker created to raise awareness for his property.

Acker, the head of his law firm Acker and Associates, said he told McFarlane early last week that he was willing to take the situation to court. Around the same time, Acker said he sent links to news articles about his bout with TriMet written by the *Vanguard* ["Last house standing," Jan. 25], *The Oregonian* and *Willamette Week* to the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and the Federal Transit Administration.

Although Acker credits the public input as having the largest impact on TriMet's decision, he said he thinks his actions last week helped intimidate TriMet.

Documents obtained by Acker show that TriMet did not intend to go after Acker's property when it first began work on the Green Line in 2005. By as early as May 2006, internal e-mails show officials had changed their minds.

Although TriMet says it will no longer try to obtain his property, Acker said he still plans to remain cautious.

"I'm definitely celebrating," he said, "but I'm going to watch my back."

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