

North Idaho

Conservatory supporters stringing together plan to acquire Romer building

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Sunlight poured through the Romer house picture windows, catching the strings on Maria Dance Clayton's violin as she warmed up with a little Bach. The light seemed to dance on the orange walls of the old dining room.

Clayton plays professionally for the Utah Symphony and brought a borrowed violin to the old house to

test the acoustics.

"It's really live in here," Clayton said to her mother, Julienne Dance.

Dance aims to start a music conservatory in the old house on Government Way in Coeur d'Alene, providing space for youth and adult lessons and performances.

"My mom definitely has a vision for it," Clayton said.

Tuesday afternoon the duo toured the house

to prepare a budget for the project. Dance will present her plan for the music conservatory to Kootenai County commissioners in mid-March. The county owns the property and had planned to demolish the house to expand county facilities.

Zoe Ann Thruman helped form the Government Way Historic Commission to try to preserve the building. She is excited by recent momentum

within the city of Coeur d'Alene to start a historic preservation commission.

"If they can move the White house, they can restore this house," Thruman said.

Thruman said Deborah Mitchell, local history enthusiast, recently discovered that an international pianist used to live in the house.

"Julienne's vision here, it's a perfect fit," Thruman said.

Kootenai County

Buildings & Grounds Director Shawn Riley and local architect Cory Trapp provided insight into the work that will need to be done to bring the building up to code.

Asbestos testing, updating stair railings, electrical repairs, constructing two exits from the basement, and dry rot and mold remediation, among other repairs, will likely cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"I want to make sure I know the cost of bringing things up to code," Dance said.

A group of 15 or so people interested in the project met at the Art Spirit Gallery to brainstorm fundraising ideas Tuesday night.

"People are excited and I think we need to be honest on [the costs] all the way down the

road," Dance said.

"She's always been dedicated to cultivating rich arts in whatever community she's been in through finding really good teachers and bringing together musicians," Clayton said of her mother. "She's always believed in the potential of children and youth to be artists or be enriched through artistry."

Clayton has played in the Austin Symphony and the Honolulu Symphony, but she grew up playing in old houses, where the background noise of other musicians practicing informed her own practice. On Tuesday, Clayton's violin was the only sound within the old Romer walls, but with enough community support that could soon change.



LOREN BENOIT/Press

Maria Dance Clayton plays the violin in the old dining room of the old Romer house off Government Way. Maria's mother, Julienne Dance, aims to start a music conservatory for youth and adult lessons and performances in the house.