



2017 TFG  
Conference

# What Can I Do With My Barn? (And Other IEDs in the Form of a Question)

*Charles Bultman*

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*Ann Arbor, MI*

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Invoking preservation and agricultural heritage, barns are being re-imagined as gathering places for commerce and celebration, frequently without an understanding of the regulations that affect that vision. This presentation will explore the issues of converting barns to new uses in the 21st century, including the impact of zoning and building codes, choices of materials and tactics, and the risks that might be associated with those choices.

Building codes have been around for a long time. And for most of that time they were ethically driven. We built well because we should take care of each other. And if we did not there would be consequences.

However, our building codes have morphed from doing things well, to specifically how to build. That is, codes became prescriptive. Today you basically tell the code what you want to build, and it tells you all of the limits of materials and occupancy as well as height and area. And this is true for all types of buildings...except one.

In most states all buildings are regulated by our building code, except agricultural buildings on farms. This was a decision that made sense - in the 19th century. Barns were stout structures that were manipulated by farmers to accommodate their needs and had more in common with machines than buildings. Today though, the barn and the farm is at the center of a quietly growing agri-tourism industry consciously looking to bring people to the farm for events.

The discussion will include examples of successful and unsuccessful conversations, how different states are handling this question, and an open discussion of examples attendees may know about. The talk is directed to barn owners mulling a conversion, timber framers who will be asked to implement the conversion, and architects and engineers contributing to the process.

## **About the Speaker**

### **Charles Bultman**

Charles Bultman is an architect with experience in construction, education, and photography, along with architecture and historic preservation. For the last eighteen years, Mr. Bultman's practice included rehabilitating and converting unwanted timber framed structures, working with more than forty antique barns in the process. Many are houses; others are offices, restaurants, and artist studios. Some are still barns, even. Mr. Bultman is the vice-president of the National Barn Alliance, serves on the Michigan Barn Preservation Network's Technical Advisory Committee, and is active with the Friends of Ohio Barns. He also serves on AIA Michigan's Government Affairs Committee.