

Frequently Asked Questions 1918 Kasson School

When was the Kasson Public School (now known as the Kasson Elementary School) constructed? What is its history?

The school was completed in 1918 to replace a school that was destroyed in a fire on the same site. Both the elementary and high school classes were housed in the building. In 1958, the high school students moved into the school north of town. The 1918 school continued to be used as an elementary school until approximately 1996 and as a community learning center until approximately 2004.

Who owns the building?

The City of Kasson obtained title to the building in 2006 in exchange for assessments that the School District owed the city for work done in conjunction with expanding the school north of town.

Did the citizens of Kasson vote to demolish the school in 2006?

No. In November 2006, Kasson's citizens voted down a \$3.9 million bonding proposal to "defray the expense of the renovation, expansion and equipping" the school for city hall, library and other government services. The vote lost by a very narrow margin of 1,026 to 904 (122 votes). This was NOT a vote to demolish the school. The voters based their decision on the price and the proposed plan which included "expansion". A different plan and cost, perhaps without expansion, could easily yield a different result given the virtually tied vote.

How was the decision made to demolish the school?

The Kasson City Council voted on November 27, 2006 to demolish the school without further input from the public. In a subsequent Dodge County Independent newspaper poll 61 percent of the voters said the council made the wrong decision regarding the decision to demolish the school.

Who is the Kasson Alliance and why is there a legal action involving the school?

After the Council voted to demolish the school, concerned citizens formed an historic preservation non-profit in January 2007 called the Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE). KARE members began appearing at numerous council meetings. KARE made two presentations to the council in April 2007 to encourage the councilmen to work with Kasson's citizens to explore other options for reusing the building. When the council chose instead to open demolition bids on May 23; KARE was forced to file an injunction in the Dodge County Court House to stop the demolition scheduled for July 9. A court hearing was set for June 5, 2007. KARE now has over 300 members and supporters to include many business leaders.

What was the outcome of the legal proceedings?

Historic resources are protected from harm by Minnesota State Law in the same manner that wetland, lakes and rivers are protected resources. After the June 5 court hearing, the judge signed a court order on June 7, 2007 temporarily stopping the cities' demolition plan. A court trial (only a judge with no jury) was set for February 11, 2008 during which the judge will hear testimony from experts on whether or not the school building is an historic resource protected under Minnesota law. If the evidence presented supports the school being an historic resource, the judge will grant a permanent demolition injunction.

Why did KARE sponsor the effort to place the school on the National Register of Historic Places?

The June 7 court order clearly states that the February 2008 trial will be focused on whether or not the school building is an historic resource protected from harm by Minnesota State Law. The placement of the school on the National Register of Historic Places, which occurred on December 6, 2007, serves to answer the historic resource question. Based on that and other evidence, the judge will decide whether or not to issue a permanent demolition injunction protecting the building.

In addition, the National Register listing qualifies the building for numerous federal, state and non-profit rehabilitation funding options. The effort to find an economically feasible reuse for the building is greatly facilitated by the listing. If the judge issues a permanent injunction, the process of finding an adaptive reuse for the building can then begin in earnest.

Can any building be placed on the National Register of Historic Places?

No. A building is placed on the National Register only after a rigorous examination of whether or not the property qualifies under one of four criteria defined in Federal guidelines. The Minnesota Historical Society and the Federal government determined that the Kasson School qualified for the National Register under Criterion A. Buildings qualify in this category if it can be demonstrated that they were associated with events that made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history either locally or nationally. The Kasson School was placed on the Register after careful review of the school's nomination by both State and Federal historic preservation experts and scholars.

Is it necessary to find a reuse for the building before the February 2008 trial?

No. The June 7th court order does not require that. However, KARE has consulted with a number of developers, architects and preservation experts who are interested in the building. Those discussions have remained preliminary in nature in anticipation of National Register listing and the judges' decision in February 2008 regarding a permanent demolition injunction.

Does the current condition of the school building lend itself to renovation?

Yes, the general condition of the building is very good. The foundation is solid, the lines are straight, the brick is of high quality and intact and the roof is in good shape. The overall structure is strong. Architects and engineers familiar with older buildings have expressed surprise at the integrity and the generally sound condition of school given it's age and use for over 80 years. The city's own architecture firm, Kane and Johnson Inc., in part stated in their 2005 report:

The reuse of the old Elementary School would serve to preserve and restore a major piece of Kasson History.....The exterior of the building is in good condition considering its age and with minor work could be restored.....The interior of the building would require major renovation but we anticipate that this could be more cost effective than construction of a new building on a new site.

When will it be known if an adaptive reuse for the building can be found?

If the judge grants a permanent demolition injunction in February 2008, pursuing a reuse for the building can then begin in earnest. A partnership between the City of Kasson and citizen volunteers and experts to explore reuse alternatives would be a prudent course of action.

Have the options for finding an adaptive reuse for the school improved since the November 2006 vote?

Yes. The National Register listing opens the door for numerous federal, state and non-profit rehabilitation funding options. In addition, community support for reuse has been heightened.

Is there support in the community for exploring reuse alternatives?

Yes. Over 900 citizens voted in November 2006 to save the school. The Kasson Alliance has over 300 citizens and 20+ business supporters. Dozens of letters to the editor and letters to councilmen have been written supporting reuse. There has been no comparable voice of opposition to the city council taking time to explore reuse options with the area's citizens.