

Dodge County Independent News

October 18, 2007

Kasson School Receives State Approval for National Register

The 1918-era Kasson Public School moved one step closer tonight to being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Minnesota Historical Societies' State Review Board for the National Register unanimously approved the nomination which was written and submitted by Dan Hoisington of Hoisington Preservation Consultants, Roseville, MN.

The nomination will now make its way through administrative channels at the state level before being submitted to the National Park Service in Washington D.C. The final review at the federal level will take approximately 2 to 3 months. The Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE) is working to find an economically viable reuse for the historic school so this important part of Kasson's historic heritage can be preserved for future generations to use, admire and enjoy.

An important step in that process is the placement of the school on the National Register which makes the redevelopment costs for the school eligible for federal tax credits, grants and other investment incentives.

Over one dozen members of KARE and 5 representative from the city of Kasson attended the review board meeting. The City of Kasson was represented by Mayor Tim Tjosaas, Administrator Randy Lenth, Planner Mike Martin, Library Board member Bonnie Adams and the cities' attorney Shelley Ryan.

Susan Roth, State National Register Officer, opened the discussion with a slide show presentation of the school's architecture and structural integrity along with a discussion of the school's unique history. Objection letters and resolution from the city, written by Randy Lenth and the cities preservation consultant Robert Vogel, were then read into the public record along with a letter of support from a Kasson citizen. Mr. Hoisington and Bonnie McDonald of the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota then gave brief talks on why the school should qualify to meet the National Register criteria. Kenton Spading, KARE Director, spoke to the board in regards to the large base of citizen and business support for the nomination. Mayor Tjosaas then addressed the board with a review of the cities' stance outlined. He stated "demolishing the School is in the public's best interest". Ms. Ryan urged the board to delay their decision due to the fact that it could affect the February 2008 court case during which a judge will hear testimony on whether or not the school is an historic resource. It was implied that the National Register approval would clearly determine that issue.

Numerous review board members then commented on the nomination while making it clear that their decision is based solely on whether or not the school qualifies for the National Register based the criteria spelled out in federal guidelines. They carefully pointed out that the cities' desire to demolish the building, and/or the pending litigation, are not factors in their decision. The board members went on to comment that some of Mr. Vogel's register eligibility comments did not following National Register guidelines and that the building and the nomination were among the finest they have seen for a school. Board member and historian Dave Ebnet commented: "local history is as important as national history due to the fact that it occurs where people are living and spending their day-to-day lives so it is very important to recognize it." The board then voted to unanimously approve forwarding the nomination up the chain for a final review.

In early 2007, KARE requested that the City of Kasson partner with them to further investigate reuse options for the school. When the city decided to open demolition bids on May 23, KARE filed a legal action the same day to prevent the City from demolishing the 1918-era school.

A court hearing was held on June 5th and the Honorable Judge Casey J. Christian of Owatonna signed a court order on June 7th granting KARE a temporary injunction to stop the demolition

provided KARE could post a \$50,000 bond by June 19th. KARE posted the bond on June 18th. As a result, the injunction will remain in place until a February 11, 2008 court trial during which the court will hear evidence as to whether the school qualifies for protection under state law, and whether it should issue a permanent injunction preventing the demolition.

The Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit historic preservation organization formed in January 2007. KARE's mission is to preserve historic buildings, structures and properties to serve as landmarks of Kasson's heritage, along with being a source of education in the importance of historic preservation. KARE's mailing list totals 350+ with over 20 supporting businesses. For more information, visit KARE's website at <http://www.kassonalliance.org>.