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Ad for bids to be prepared for demolition of school

By Randy Carlsen

Publisher/Editor

Neil Britton, QED Engineering, Inc., of Rochester, outlined a resolution approving plans and specifications and an order for the advertisement of bids for demolition of the former elementary school in Kasson. The action took place at the regular council meeting last Wednesday night.

Last Thursday a public auction was conducted to sell surplus property at the site to include lights and light fixtures, chalkboards, desks, cabinets, kitchen appliances and other miscellaneous surplus items. The auction took in \$189.

Many items were sold in bulk at the auction that lasted less than an hour. City administrator Randy Lenth said churches and non-profits were able to come in and take what they needed. One example is the dishwasher in the kitchen which was claimed by the VFW in Mantorville.

The bid for demolition will be for asbestos abatement, demolition and removal. Included will be demolition of the former Expressions building on the south side of Main Street. An alternate bid will be for removal of all footings and foundation. The basic bid calls for removal two feet below the existing grade. The second alternate bid is to salvage the decorative entrance of the school and incorporate that with a new library.

Neil Britton said the city will attempt to salvage all of the railing, which is being removed by city employees. Some of the copper can be salvaged (as a credit for the city) and brick can be saved. Lenth said he has been contacted by individuals interested in a section of the tile roof, wood flooring and iron.

Representatives from KARE (Kasson Alliance For Restoration) were also present at the meeting and asked what kind of a timeline they had for saving the structure.

Kenton Spading, a project manager and hydrologic engineer for the US Army Corp of Engineers in St. Paul (and also a K-M graduate), presented the council with a historical review of the school and background on Nels S. Jacobson Jr., the architect of the 1918 school building. He was from Owatonna (1892-1947).

In the review packet there are several examples of historic architecture with value, similar to the former school. Spading said the group would like to open up dialogue with the city even though "demolition" is hanging over their head. Each council member was given a copy of the review.

Bid letting for asbestos abatement, demolition and removal is to take place May 23. The council said if KARE can come up with a plan they would listen. Mayor Tim Tjosaas commented there have been places where saving a historic property has worked and places where it has not.

Council member Matt Nelson said his hometown of Decorah, Iowa is an example of where saving a historic school is not working in spite of a \$500,000 challenge pledge from a local businessman and \$600,000 in other donations.

The committee had a deadline of May 1 to raise \$3.2 million to renovate the school. Nelson said he too sent a donation, but they have not been able to come up with the remaining money. In fact the committee has asked for an extension until May 1, 2009.

For a private group to come up with funding to save the building for city use there are concerns about financing, ownership, maintenance, and who is going to manage it, said the Kasson city administrator.

The council unanimously voted to approve the bid letting for asbestos abatement, demolition and removal. The legal document appears in this edition of the DCI.