

Rochester Post Bulletin

Local News

Kasson school makes National Register of Historic Places

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By [Heather J. Carlson](#)

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KASSON -- The city's old elementary school has officially been placed on the National Register of Historic Places thanks to the efforts of a local preservation group.

"We're all just very, very happy that not only the state of Minnesota has seen (the school) is a historic resource, now we've heard from the federal level, too," said Diane O'Brien-Berge, president of the Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE).

The news comes less than two months before KARE and the City of Kasson square off in Dodge District Court over the school's future. City officials want to demolish the 89-year-old school to build a new library/government center. That decision came after voters in November 2006 rejected a \$3.9 million proposal to renovate the old school.

City Administrator Randy Lenth said he was somewhat surprised by the federal decision. But he said the new distinction would not prevent the city from demolishing it.

"We can still tear it down. We just need to jump through more hoops," Lenth said.

But first, District Judge Casey Christian will weigh in. The judge in June granted KARE a temporary injunction against the city to prevent the building's demolition. On Feb. 11, KARE will argue in a Mantorville courtroom that the injunction be made permanent because the building is a historical resource. The nonprofit has launched a reuse study and has been working with developers interested in the project. Possible uses could include housing, an art center or a community center.

The city has turned off water, sewer and heat to the building. The Federal Bureau of Prisons and a Rochester Community and Technical College law-enforcement class were using the vacant school this year for training. That included participants firing BB guns and using fake explosions as part of the training. Participants also fired paint balls at targets in the school.

When KARE learned about the training from neighbors, O'Brien-Berge said KARE's attorney asked the city to stop allowing the exercises.

"I got a couple of frantic phone calls from the neighborhood people living right across the street asking me, are they blowing up the school? What is going on? There's gunfire," O'Brien-Berge said.

Lenth said no major damage was done to the school's interior. He said the city did agree to stop allowing the training. The last exercise took place in August. He said more damage was done to the school by the asbestos inspector, who had to tear apart walls to determine the extent of the problem.

Even so, O'Brien-Berge said KARE wanted to see that training stopped.

"I felt (allowing the training) was somewhat vindictive behavior," she said, "and of course the possibility existed that they could cause some real damage, but they didn't."

Other Kasson sites on the National Register of Historic Places

Eureka Hotel

101 Third Ave S.W.

Brick hotel built in 1894 alongside the railroad tracks

Added to the register in 1982

Kasson Municipal Building

12 W. Main

It was built in 1917 in the Prairie School architectural style.

Added to the register in 1982

Kasson Water Tower

Fourth Ave. N.W.

Built in 1895 by a local contractor

Added to register in 1976

Jacob Leuthold, Jr., House

108 Second Ave. N.W.

Home built for one of the founders of the historic Leuthold's clothing store.

Added to register in 1982

Information from Historic Places in Minnesota: A Guide

Web links

- [National Register of Historic Places listing](#)