

Rochester Post Bulletin, Local News

Is Kasson's old school historic? Some say yes, others say no

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By Heather J. Carlson

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KASSON -- Jeanne Copple is among several city residents with lawn signs posted in their yard proclaiming "Save Our School!"

From her door step she has a prime view of the 89-year-old brick building with its grand entryway punctuated with columns.

"To me, it looks like a perfectly good building. It's got a lot of character," Copple said. "It would be really nice if they could preserve it."

But is the old elementary school historic? A consultant hired by the city says no. Another consultant hired by residents trying to save the building says yes. Now the Minnesota Historical Society's State Review Board will weigh in. On Tuesday night, the board is expected to vote on whether to recommend the school for the National Register of Historic Places. It must then be approved at the federal level.

This is the latest development in a battle between the city of Kasson and the nonprofit Kasson Alliance for Restoration, or KARE, over what should happen to the school. The city wants to bulldoze the school in favor of constructing a new library and government center. KARE members argue the building is historic and should be renovated. KARE went to court to protect the building, securing a temporary injunction against demolition in Dodge District Court. A hearing is scheduled for February.

The Kasson City Council last week unanimously approved a resolution opposing placing the school on the National Register of Historic Places. The resolution notes that Kasson voters in November rejected a \$3.9 million plan to renovate the school. Mayor Tim Tjosaas will be among the city representatives traveling to St. Paul on Tuesday to voice opposition to the recommendation.

"The property owner is given the right to object to that listing and we felt given the referendum vote it made sense for us to go through with that process," Tjosaas said.

Also planning to be at the meeting are members of KARE. The organization said countless hours were put in by members to help research the school's history as part of the register nomination process, said Spencer Stevens, KARE's vice president. KARE hired Dan Hoisington of Preservation Consultants to write the nomination. He argues that the school is significant because it served as an education institution for 40 years and was the center of community life. The nomination also says the school is historically significant, reflecting an Arts & Crafts style designed by well-known Minnesota architect Nels Jacobson.

But a historical consultant hired by the city came to a very different conclusion. Robert C. Vogel, a consultant with Pathfinder CRM, writes in a report that the school was typical for a public school built during that time and "lacks individual distinction." He added there is no evidence that a specific event of "outstanding importance" occurred at the school.

Nonetheless, the school's nomination first had to win approval from Susan Roth, deputy state historic preservation officer, before moving on to the review board.

"The documentation is very well-crafted, indicating that it has been well-researched and certainly very well written," Roth said.

Even if the school is placed on the National Register, it could still be demolished by the city.

Posted Comments



aaron - 10/15/2007

Save the school. The ballot was STILL very confusing. It will cost money to save it but it was cost to get rid of it too. Just let Kare take it and keep it up. Kasson has a tendency to knock down old buildings. Govt center? ha! They think that's a good spot? They also thought a flood plane was too! Leave the school alone.



jeffathompson - 10/15/2007

I wonder how much all these "reviews" are costing us already?



jeffathompson - 10/15/2007

Jeanne, saving the old school is not a problem. Buy it, finance it, repair it and donate it to some worthy cause. That's all you need to do. I wish people would quit talking about it and just cough up the cash.