

Rochester Post Bulletin

Kasson elementary school demolition on hold until February

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KASSON -- A group of residents has posted the \$50,000 bond required to prevent demolition of the city old elementary school.

That means the Kasson Alliance for Restoration, or KARE, will have nearly eight months to work on proving its case that the 89-year-old building is historic and to develop plans for the school's future.

"We've got all sorts of ideas, everything from housing to creative retail. But number one on our list is to ask the community what they would like to see in (the building)," said KARE President Diane O'Brien-Berge.

Kasson Mayor Tim Tjosaas said he was disappointed with the ruling, but continued to express his confidence in the city's argument.

"The delay has the potential to increase the costs to the city; of the demolition and new city library and attorney fees," he said. "We continue to work on our plan to build a new library on that site."

The city had been planning to demolish the old school in July with the idea that the site could one day house a new library. But a district judge's ruling on June 8 granted KARE a temporary injunction against the city to prevent the building's demolition -- provided the group post the \$50,000 bond by today in Dodge District Court. The court trial has been set for Feb. 11, 2008.

Members of the nonprofit alliance stepped forward providing the collateral for the bond, O'Brien-Berge said. The bond was required by the judge in case the city wins the case to help cover additional costs for demolition caused by the delay.

Voters in Kasson rejected a \$3.9 million proposal in November to renovate the old school into a library and government center. In January, residents formed the nonprofit KARE group to save the old school. As part of the temporary injunction, KARE attorneys argued that the building is protecting under the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act because it is a "historic resource" and cited the opinions of state historical experts supporting their arguments. Meanwhile, the city's attorney argued the city already gave voters a say on the building's future and that a historian hired by the city found the old school had no historical significance.

In the coming months, KARE will launch a reuse study for the building, which will include establishing a reuse study team including community leaders, developers, historic preservation experts and local residents. The group will also plans to hold public meetings to gather input, O'Brien-Berge said. In addition, the group is hoping to get the school on the National Register of Historic Places.

While there have been rumors that KARE wants to put low-income housing in the old school building, those are false, said O'Brien-Berge. However, the group is open to other ideas including making a new library part of the project. She added that she would like KARE to be able to work with the City Council to develop the project.

For more information on the Kasson Alliance and the city of Kasson, go to postbulletin.com/weblinks.

Kasson Alliance for Restoration <http://www.kassonalliance.org/>

City of Kasson <http://www.cityofkasson.com/>