

**Rochester Post Bulletin**

**Legal action suspends demolition of vacant Kasson school**

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**By Heather J. Carlson**

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KASSON -- A last-minute legal move has spared the former Kasson elementary school from the wrecking ball -- for now.

The Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE) filed a motion in Dodge District Court on Wednesday seeking a temporary injunction to prevent demolition of the 89-year-old elementary school. The court filing came just hours before the Kasson City Council met to vote on bids to demolish the school.

KARE Vice President Spencer Stevens said before the council meeting that the organization had no choice but to turn to the courts.

"It got to a point where we're not going to get anywhere," Stevens said. "They are not giving us any options."

Due to the court action, city staff advised the council not to award the demolition bids at the meeting. However, the council unanimously passed selecting a demolition plan. The low bid of \$198,000 would include asbestos removal, demolition of the building, removal of all the building's footings, and preservation of the building's front entrance which says "Kasson Public Schools."

A court hearing is scheduled for 10 a.m. June 5 in the Dodge County Courthouse. Once the legal matter is resolved, the City Council can approve bids. City Administrator Randy Lenth said the plan is for demolition work to begin July 9.

Kasson resident Barb Pike asked the council to save the building.

"It will be a sad, sad day if May 23 is a day we destroy more history in Kasson," Pike told the council.

Mayor Tim Tjosaas said he is sensitive to the sentimental value of the school to some residents in the community. But he noted that voters in November had rejected a \$3.9 million plan to renovate the school into a municipal building that could have housed a library. If the demolition moves ahead, a new library could be built on the site.

KARE has been fighting to preserve the former school since January. The organization's leaders have argued that it is historically significant. Their efforts got a recent boost from the Minnesota Preservation Alliance, which included the school as part of its 2007 Ten Most Endangered Historic Properties list.

But a consultant hired by the city told council members that he doesn't believe the building is historically significant. Robert Vogel, a senior historian and managing partner of Pathfinder CRM, which is based in Spring Grove, Minn., said his research concluded that the building would not meet the standards to be placed on the National Registry of Historic Places. He said there is no evidence that any event of historical significance took place at the school and that the architecture is fairly typical for the time period.

Based on Vogel's report, the council approved a resolution rejecting the need for an environmental assessment worksheet before demolition can take place. KARE members had petitioned for the worksheet.

City officials agreed that they would like to have archival photos of the building taken and make sure its role in Kasson's history is documented.

Tjosaas added, "There are ways for us to honor the history of this building."



**Saved ... for now**

The façade of the former elementary school in Kasson, which says "Kasson Public Schools," would be preserved under a demolition plan approved Wednesday by the Kasson City Council.