

Kasson Alliance Email News, Vol. 3, No. 6, Final Report: 1918 Kasson School Reuse Study Posted on the Web

KARE Supporters,

The final report on the 1918 Kasson School Reuse Study has been posted on the Kasson Alliance website at: http://www.kassonalliance.org/kassonschool_reuse-study.htm

The report is made up a main report section and 4 appendices. The first five (5) pages of the main report section contain a summary of the report. That summary is pasted below in this email message for the benefit of readers who do not have ready access to the website. You can request a complete hard copy of the report by replying to this email message or calling the KARE office at the number listed below. Copies of the report will be available at the Kasson Library or you can contact City Hall (507-634-7071).

The reuse study team lead by John Lauber and Company will formally present the final reuse study report to the study co-sponsors at the Kasson City Council's regularly scheduled 6:00 PM meeting on Wednesday October 28, 2009 at City Hall in Kasson 401 5th St. S.E. (507-634-7071). The presentation will occur after the council's normal business meeting. The study is co-sponsored by the City of Kasson and the Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE). The final report includes information and adjustments that resulted from comments provided by a diverse group of stakeholders and citizen reviewers. The public is welcome to attend all council meetings.

Information on the entire reuse study process and the rest of the study team can be found on the Reuse Study Website at: <http://kassonschoolreuse.net/>.

The school was designed by architect Nels Jacobson Jr. of Owatonna, MN and it won praise for its design soon after it was completed. The school joins the Eureka Hotel, the Kasson Municipal Building, the 1895 Limestone Water Tower and the Jacob Leuthold Jr. home on the list of Kasson's buildings on the National Register.

Thank you for your continuing support. Our membership and support from citizens and the business community continues to grow.

The Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE) is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization formed in January 2007. KARE's mission is to preserve historic buildings, structures and properties to serve as landmarks

of Kasson's' heritage along with being a source of education in the importance of historic preservation. For more information Phone, 507-365-8324, or email KassonAlliance@Kmtel.com or visit

<http://www.kassonalliance.org>.

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Note: The media is welcome to use all or portions of this announcement and any attachments.

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Kasson Alliance for Restoration

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School Reuse Study:

<http://kassonschoolreuse.net>

A Historic Properties Reuse Study of the Kasson Public School

John Lauber and Company, SMSQ Architects

20 October 2009

Contents

Executive Summary.....2

Chronology.....6

Introduction.....8

The Physical Plant.....13

Issues Analysis.....17

Needs Assessment.....25

Disposition Alternatives.....29

Conclusions.....36

Appendix A: The Building.....40

Appendix B: Concepts and Costs.....71

Appendix C: Financial Analysis.....83

Appendix D: Outside Developers109

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past six months, the five members of the Kasson Public School reuse team have been involved in an intensive effort to gather, analyze and synthesize a mountain of information that will enable us to make a reality-based recommendation about the future of the 1918 building. Our information has come from two main sources—the building itself; and the residents of Kasson and the surrounding area. Well aware of the prolonged and often difficult debate that has raged over the fate of this property since it was vacated in 2005, the team sought to develop and apply a process that was systematic, thorough, inclusive, transparent, impartial, and practical.

The team began its investigations by taking a hard look at the building itself. The two architects and team leader spent one entire day in (and on) the building, examining its structure, exterior envelope, site conditions, spatial characteristics, mechanical systems, materials, and ornamental features. The building has a few problems, as do all buildings, old or new—but the building is eminently reusable. It is an asset whose quality of design and construction could not easily be duplicated in Kasson or anywhere else today, and it should not be discarded

As the team made its way through the weeks of interviews, phone conversations, e-mail exchanges, and meetings that went into the production of this report, it soon became evident that the possibilities for the future of this longstanding local landmark had been reduced to just two: preserve it or tear it down. This reduction of what should be a vast spectrum of possibilities for a building of this quality and character to merely black or white, seems attributable more to the polarization, posturing, and hard feelings that inevitably arise from lengthy conflict than from any innate attributes of the building, the community, or the economy.

Over the past months, the team has listened to the community's concerns, has taken careful note of the community's expressed needs, values and desires. Team members have considered a variety of new uses for the building and site, have discussed a range of alternatives ranging from "do nothing" to demolition, and have sought to identify some middle ground that would enable the people of Kasson to utilize an existing asset and work together to accomplish a common goal.

Summary of Findings

As the team went over the list of ideas provided by Kasson-area residents, it immediately became apparent that there was very little local interest in utilizing the school building or site for an income-

generating function. The list of ideas fell squarely into the realm of public use. Consequently, as team members began to formulate their recommendations, they began with the assumption that whatever happened to the school/site, projects that would fulfill a generally agreed-upon public purpose would have the greatest potential for success.

The one exception to the public reuse option came in the area of housing. Although there are numerous obstacles to such a reuse, including current market conditions, city zoning requirements, the city's interest in retaining ownership and control of the school site, and neighborhood concerns about the compatibility certain types of housing with surrounding residential areas, several housing scenarios are explored in this report.

It also became evident that, for a project at the site to succeed, it would have to do more than simply preserve a historic building. In looking back through the information gathered over the past few months, the team also began to identify goals that had repeatedly been articulated by individuals, officials, and in published materials such as the city's comprehensive plan, in an effort to find a creative use/reuse of the site/building that would reflect community values and satisfy stated goals, including:

- The city's official commitment to historic preservation
- A strongly expressed interest in maintaining the 1918 School site for public use, and a desire to control development at that location.
- A general awareness of the need to expand and improve the public library, as well as widespread support for the idea.
- A clearly articulated interest in creating a community center for the citizens of Kasson, and perhaps the surrounding area.

An ideal reuse of the school/site should keep the site in public hands, be politically viable, be attainable within a reasonable window of time, and be possible to complete in a fiscally responsible manner. It should also contribute to the vitality of the community's traditional downtown, help to provide the community with a much-needed new library space, provide a venue for public gatherings of all sorts, and be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

Recommendation

In formulating its recommendation for the Kasson School building, the reuse team assigned priorities to options that would:

- Keep the largest number of options open.
- Reflect community values.
- Enable the community to achieve as many of its stated goals as possible.
- Fill unmet needs that have been identified and supported by a large segment of the public.
- Be economically or socially viable. An economically viable project is defined as one that would generate sufficient revenue to be self-sustaining. A socially viable project is one that serves a generally acknowledged public need, and that citizens would be willing to subsidize through the tax structure.

The reuse team recommends that the community of Kasson should accept the challenge of rehabilitating the 1918 Kasson Public School Building as a multi-use library/community center.

Implementation

-Mothball the building. The city of Kasson should take immediate steps to halt further deterioration of the 1918 building by mothballing the building as outlined later in the report.

-Appoint a citizen task force to oversee a systematic planning effort for rehabilitating the former Kasson Public School as a multi-use library/community center. Because the school building and site are city-owned property, the task force should be comprised entirely of individuals residing and voting in the city of Kasson. The task force should have the authority to direct and draw upon the expertise of appropriate city staff and outside experts. The task force should be provided with a sufficient budget to complete its work.

-Undertake a systematic, thorough, and inclusive planning effort for the project. Under the leadership of the local task force, and in consultation with appropriate outside professionals the community should develop a comprehensive architectural program for a multi-use library/community center. The planning process should be designed specifically to include representatives from the library board, the city council, and other individuals and groups with a direct stake in the planning process.

-Examine the potential for both a phased and total rehabilitation of the school building. As noted earlier, a phased rehabilitation would offer the potential advantage of allowing the community to meet its objectives of improving its public library facilities and creating a community center in a shorter period of time and at lower cost than either a full rehabilitation of the school building, or construction of an entirely new facility.

-Investigate ways to complete the rehabilitation either as a publicly financed project or as a public-private development partnership. The task force, with the help of city staff and outside experts should fully investigate the range of incentives, grants, and other financial instruments that could be employed to reduce the cost of completing a rehabilitation of the school building.

-Assemble a package of local incentives that could be offered to a private developer. Working with the city council, the Kasson EDA, Dodge County, and other staff and officials, the task force should assemble a package of incentives that could be offered to a private developer as part of a public-private development plan. A public/private option could move the project timetable ahead, would allow the city to retain control of the site, and could enable the community to complete the project at a lower cost than it could with public financing. The task force should also reopen discussion of forging a joint-powers agreement with surrounding communities to complete a community center project.

-Market the building to potential development partners. Once the planning is in place, and a package of incentives has been assembled, the community can determine whether or not it makes sense to pursue the option of completing the rehabilitation as part of a public/private collaboration. If so, the task force should actively market the project to developers.

-Allow time for investigation. At this point, efforts to create a community center appear to be at a standstill. City officials have indicated that, given current economic conditions and competing capital improvement priorities, completion of any sort of new library facility is at least five years away. With that horizon in mind, the task force should be give ample time to complete its work in a thorough, systematic, and transparent way without fear that the building will be demolished in the interim.

-Engage and educate the public about the potential for rehabilitating the school for a new public purpose. The task force should make a concerted effort to provide information about the potential services that could be provided in a rehabilitated school building. The group should provide information about the actual physical condition of the building and how problems would be solved. The task force should outline and publicize steps and a timeline for the project. The group should

clearly define the amount of taxation, if any, that a property owner would incur if the project were to move forward.

-Allow the public to weigh in. Regardless of whether the project is completed as a public effort or as a public-private collaboration, the citizens of Kasson should be given an opportunity to participate in the planning process, should be given accurate and plentiful information about facilities, financing, and timing, and then should be given an opportunity to decide how to proceed.

End of Summary, see at: http://www.kassonalliance.org/kassonschool_reuse-study.htm for the complete report.