

## **KARE Email News, Vol. 2, No. 1, 09 January 2008: Kasson School, Presentation to the City Council**

### **Kasson Alliance Supporters,**

Over one dozen Kasson citizens attended the Kasson City Council meeting on Wednesday, January 09, 2008 to show their support for the city exploring adaptive reuses for the historic Kasson School. Local citizen and Kasson businessman John Buckingham spoke briefly to the councilman and presented them with the attached files. Attached to this email you will find:

1. Notes on John's presentation to the council.
2. A letter to the Mayor asking the council to meet with members of the Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE) to discuss and pursue the adaptive reuse options that citizens have researched for the historic school. In addition, the letter requests the city to partner with the non-profit KARE volunteers to submit a reuse study grant application to the Minnesota Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).
3. A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and answers regarding the historic school, its history, the legal issues, the school's condition etc. Read this to get up-to-date on the process.

Mayor Tjosaas responded to John's presentation by stating that the cities legal council (Hoff, Barry and Kozar Inc.) has advised the council to not discuss the school with anyone. City Administrator Randy Lenth further advised the council members to refrain from commenting due to the pending legal issues that the city is pursuing in its continuing attempt to demolish the school.

In other developments, the law firm recently sent letters to all the developers, architects etc. that KARE has spoken to about the reuse of the school. The letters request that each individual forward copies of all their correspondence related to the school. The law firm is doing this to collect whatever evidence they can before the February trial. The letters were mailed immediately after the sworn testimony the law firm collected from Susan Roth of the Minnesota Historical Society and KARE representative Kenton Spading (see the KARE email update dated Dec. 15, 2007).

In the meantime volunteer citizens continue to prepare for the February trial in consultation with KARE's attorney. The attached Frequently Asked Questions review the basics surrounding the trial. The trial is open to the public. The details are:

**Where, Dodge County Court House, Mantorville, MN**

**When: February 11, 12 and 13, 2008 (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday)**

**Time: The trial starts at 8:30 AM (no jury, the judge presides)**

During the June 2007 court hearing, the School supporter side of the court house was packed with local citizens. You are encouraged to attend the trial and hear the expert testimony on whether or not the school is an historic resource protected by Minnesota law. If so, the judge will issue a permanent demolition injunction. Mark your calendars now.

The legal case for further protecting the school is strong but we still need your help. Citizen support is needed to save the school. Thank you to all of you who have sent letters of support to the mayor (Mayor ([mayor@cityofkasson.com](mailto:mayor@cityofkasson.com)) and councilmen and copied in the Dodge County Independent ([dci@kmtel.com](mailto:dci@kmtel.com)). If you prefer mailing addresses are listed on KARE's website under NEWS in the December 19, 2007 email update. **Thank you** for all of you who already sent in letters. Your letters are very important.

**Do the attached Frequently Asked Questions answer all your questions? If not, please reply to this email and ask other questions so we can update the FAQ list. We will be issuing more news as the trial data approaches.**

Note: The media is welcome to use all of portions of this announcement.

**Thank you,**

**Kasson Alliance for Restoration  
122 West Main Street, Suite No. 2  
Kasson, MN 55944  
507-365-8324  
507-696-6769**

**Email: [KassonAlliance@Kmtel.com](mailto:KassonAlliance@Kmtel.com)**

**Website: [www.KassonAlliance.org](http://www.KassonAlliance.org)**

**The Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization formed in January 2007 to raise awareness about the contribution the historic Kasson School and other Kasson properties have made to our community and to promote their preservation.**

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# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1918 Kasson School

### **When was the Kasson Public School (now known as the Kasson Elementary School) constructed? What is its history?**

The school was completed in 1918 to replace a school that was destroyed in a fire on the same site. Both the elementary and high school classes were housed in the building. In 1958, the high school students moved into the school north of town. The 1918 school continued to be used as an elementary school until approximately 1996 and as a community learning center until approximately 2004.

### **Who owns the building?**

The City of Kasson obtained title to the building in 2006 in exchange for assessments that the School District owed the city for work done in conjunction with expanding the school north of town.

### **Did the citizens of Kasson vote to demolish the school in 2006?**

No. In November 2006, Kasson's citizens voted down a \$3.9 million bonding proposal to "defray the expense of the renovation, expansion and equipping" the school for city hall, library and other government services. The vote lost by a very narrow margin of 1,026 to 904 (122 votes). This was NOT a vote to demolish the school. The voters based their decision on the price and the proposed plan which included "expansion". A different plan and cost, perhaps without expansion, could easily yield a different result given the virtually tied vote.

### **How was the decision made to demolish the school?**

The Kasson City Council voted on November 27, 2006 to demolish the school without further input from the public. In a subsequent Dodge County Independent newspaper poll 61 percent of the voters said the council made the wrong decision regarding the decision to demolish the school.

### **Who is the Kasson Alliance and why is there a legal action involving the school?**

After the Council voted to demolish the school, concerned citizens formed an historic preservation non-profit in January 2007 called the Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE). KARE members began appearing at numerous council meetings. KARE made two presentations to the council in April 2007 to encourage the councilmen to work with Kasson's citizens to explore other options for reusing the building. When the council chose instead to open demolition bids on May 23; KARE was forced to file an injunction in the Dodge County Court House to stop the demolition scheduled for July 9. A court hearing was set for June 5, 2007. KARE now has over 300 members and supporters to include many business leaders.

### **What was the outcome of the legal proceedings?**

Historic resources are protected from harm by Minnesota State Law in the same manner that wetland, lakes and rivers are protected resources. After the June 5 court hearing, the judge signed a court order on June 7, 2007 temporarily stopping the cities' demolition plan. A court trial (only a judge with no jury) was set for February 11, 2008 during which the judge will hear testimony from experts on whether or not the school building is an historic resource protected under Minnesota law. If the evidence presented supports the school being an historic resource, the judge will grant a permanent demolition injunction.

### **Why did KARE sponsor the effort to place the school on the National Register of Historic Places?**

The June 7 court order clearly states that the February 2008 trial will be focused on whether or not the school building is an historic resource protected from harm by Minnesota State Law. The placement of the school on the National Register of Historic Places, which occurred on December 6, 2007, serves to answer the historic resource question. Based on that and other evidence, the judge will decide whether or not to issue a permanent demolition injunction protecting the building.

In addition, the National Register listing qualifies the building for numerous federal, state and non-profit rehabilitation funding options. The effort to find an economically feasible reuse for the building is greatly facilitated by the listing. If the judge issues a permanent injunction, the process of finding an adaptive reuse for the building can then begin in earnest.

### **Can any building be placed on the National Register of Historic Places?**

No. A building is placed on the National Register only after a rigorous examination of whether or not the property qualifies under one of four criteria defined in Federal guidelines. The Minnesota Historical Society and the Federal government determined that the Kasson School qualified for the National Register under Criterion A. Buildings qualify in this category if it can be demonstrated that they were associated with events that made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history either locally or nationally. The Kasson School was placed on the Register after careful review of the school's nomination by both State and Federal historic preservation experts and scholars.

### **Is it necessary to find a reuse for the building before the February 2008 trial?**

No. The June 7th court order does not require that. However, KARE has consulted with a number of developers, architects and preservation experts who are interested in the building. Those discussions

have remained preliminary in nature in anticipation of National Register listing and the judges' decision in February 2008 regarding a permanent demolition injunction.

**Does the current condition of the school building lend itself to renovation?**

Yes, the general condition of the building is very good. The foundation is solid, the lines are straight, the brick is of high quality and intact and the roof is in good shape. The overall structure is strong. Architects and engineers familiar with older buildings have expressed surprise at the integrity and the generally sound condition of school given it's age and use for over 80 years. The cities own architecture firm, Kane and Johnson Inc., in part stated in their 2005 report:

The reuse of the old Elementary School would serve to preserve and restore a major piece of Kasson History.....The exterior of the building is in good condition considering its age and with minor work could be restored.....The interior of the building would require major renovation but we anticipate that this could be more cost effective than construction of a new building on a new site.

**When will it be known if an adaptive reuse for the building can be found?**

If the judge grants a permanent demolition injunction in February 2008, pursuing a reuse for the building can then begin in earnest. A partnership between the City of Kasson and citizen volunteers and experts to explore reuse alternatives would be a prudent course of action.

**Have the options for finding an adaptive reuse for the school improved since the November 2006 vote?**

Yes. The National Register listing opens the door for numerous federal, state and non-profit rehabilitation funding options. In addition, community support for reuse has been heightened.

**Is there support in the community for exploring reuse alternatives?**

Yes. Over 900 citizens voted in November 2006 to save the school. The Kasson Alliance has over 300 citizens and 20+ business supporters. Dozens of letters to the editor and letters to councilmen have been written supporting reuse. There has been no comparable voice of opposition to the city council taking time to explore reuse options with the area's citizens.

# **Presentation to the Kasson City Council**

## **Partnership Request**

### **Historic 1918 Kasson School**

**January 9, 2008**

#### **John Buckingham's Statement:**

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the council.

I am appearing before you tonight to request that the city council set up a meeting with Kasson's citizens to discuss and pursue adaptive reuse options for the historic Kasson School.

I have provided you a list of frequently asked questions regarding the historic school.

I have also provided you a letter that discusses the reuse study proposal in more detail. The letter formally requests a response from you by close of business January 18, 2008.

Thank you.

**January 7, 2008**

**Hand delivered to the Jan. 9, 2008 Council Meeting**

**Tim Tjosaas, Mayor**

**City of Kasson**

**401 5th Street S.E.**

**Kasson, MN 55944**

**Honorable Mayor Tjosaas,**

This letter serves as a formal request to the City Council to meet with members of the Kasson Alliance for Restoration (KARE) to discuss and pursue adaptive reuse options for the historic Kasson School. KARE has spoken with a number of developers, architects and historic preservation experts and would like to share that information with the council.

In addition, I request that the city partner with KARE volunteers to submit a reuse study grant application to the Minnesota Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The State Historic Preservation Office is encouraging KARE, in partnership with the city, to apply for a reuse study grant for the historic 1918 Kasson School. See the attached sheet for more information.

The aforementioned SHPO-assisted reuse study would explore the potential for reusing and preserving the historic school in considerable more detail than the cities' previous efforts. For example, the study would employ a professional reuse study investigator who would interview citizens, government officials, historic preservation developers, financial experts and other stakeholders. A professionally managed study, in concert with input from the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, the Minnesota Historical Society and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, would explore all reuse avenues. Combining this with the work KARE volunteers have already done will lead to a plan for financing, managing and maintaining the building that can be presented to the area's citizens for consideration.

The financial picture related to preserving the school has changed considerably since the school was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Register listing provides for many historic preservation funding streams that significantly increase the odds of finding an adaptive reuse. These funding mechanisms have proven successful in rehabilitating many schools in Minnesota to include schools in Red Wing, Cannon Falls, Little Falls, Brainerd, Winona and many others.

In summary, I encourage the city council to meet with KARE volunteers to discuss a partnership. A professionally managed reuse study, with input from the aforementioned stakeholders and experts, would provide a good base to start from. I welcome your leadership in assigning selected council members to a reuse study steering committee which would also include citizens. Kasson's citizens would gladly participate in a series of meetings where the interests and concerns of all sides could be explored in an effort to find common ground and

understanding (avoiding further litigation). I welcome your leadership in furthering that cause and the proposals in this letter.

I request a response from you personally by close of business January 18, 2008.

**Sincerely,**

**Place a KARE Members Name Here**

**Member's address**

**Kasson, MN 55944**

**CF: Mark Anfinson, Attorney at Law**

**Dodge County Independent**

**Minnesota Historical Society  
State Historic Preservation Office  
Co-Sponsored Building Reuse Studies**

**Introduction**

Reuse studies of threatened historic properties explore new uses for them. While a study does not guarantee that a property will be saved, it assembles a team of experts and guides an orderly, informed process to decide the property's future. That process, adapted by the Minnesota SHPO from a National Trust model, is summarized below.

The SHPO may cosponsor a reuse study if the property meets these five criteria:

- The property must be threatened, vacant or underused.
- It must be listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.
- A unit of government, public agency or nonprofit organization must own it.
- The local sponsor must provide funding.
- The local sponsor must be willing to co-sponsor the study.



## The Process

The reuse study process is locally initiated, independent, objective, analytical and inclusive. It typically unfolds in four phases over a period of months.

### 1. Startup

- Identify a local liaison to serve as a point person for the local sponsor (a city, agency or nonprofit organization).
- Hire a principal investigator (PI) to plan and conduct the study.
- Gather information including community demographics, market studies, planning and zoning information, site information, historical information, blueprints, photographs, historic structures reports, and development proposals.
- Assemble the team, which typically includes the PI, a preservation architect, development specialist and other specialists as required for study of the particular property and situation.
- Schedule on-site activities such as orientation tours, interviews and a public meeting.

### 2. On Site

- Tour the community and surrounding area to get a feel for unmet market needs, trends and potential tenants.
- Assess the building's condition and site, noting special features or problems, and begin to estimate rehab requirements.
- Conduct confidential interviews with community members representing many points of view.  
Goals:
  - to gauge public sentiment;
  - identify local issues that may affect the future of the property;
  - identify market opportunities that the property might serve and;
  - identify local resources to tap for rehabilitation.
- Hold a public meeting to hear from people not interviewed earlier. (At this point the team does not yet share its preliminary findings or opinions.)

### 3. Analysis/Synthesis

- Analyze the findings, identifying needs and opportunities.
- Form recommendations within the context of physical, economic and political constraints.

- Produce a final report for consideration by the community.

#### **4. Implementation**

Once the consultation is completed and the report issued, it is the responsibility of the community/local group to determine which recommendations can and should be implemented.

### **Reuse Study Funding**

#### **1. How much do reuse studies cost?**

They range from \$5,000 to \$14,000. Grants from the Minnesota Historical Society of up to \$5,000 are available.

**2. State Grants:** Each year the Minnesota SHPO works with a number of partners on reuse studies for selected properties. Priority is given to projects in which a reuse study will likely reverse a threatening situation for an endangered property while increasing a community's awareness of the importance of its historic resources.

### **3. Grant Eligibility Criteria**

- The property must be threatened, vacant or underused, and must be listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.
- The applicant must be a unit of government, public agency or nonprofit organization willing to host the reuse study team, facilitate the information-gathering process, and assist in the preparation and presentation of the report. Matching funds and/or services are required.
- The applicant must demonstrate an ability and commitment to implement recommendations made in the study.

### **4. How to apply for a grant**

Letters requesting a reuse study matching grant may be submitted at any time during the year and will be reviewed as they are received. Letters of application should:

- address the review criteria listed above, and
- summarize information about the property to be examined, including ownership. Consent of the property owner is required to give reuse study team members access to the property.

### **Examples of schools that have been reused:**

Examples of schools that have reused in Minnesota and nationwide, some of which used the aforementioned process, can be found at:

[http://www.KassonAlliance.org/kassonschool\\_reuse-study.htm](http://www.KassonAlliance.org/kassonschool_reuse-study.htm)