

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, 2007.

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