

10 Most Endangered Historic Places

2010

Preservation Alliance of Minnesota ❖ www.mnpreservation.org

When Jackson County bought the former Jackson High School building from the local school district in the late 1990s, it appeared to be modeling “adaptive reuse”—housing county social service agencies inside the 1938 structure. But now the Jackson county commission wants to replace the former school building, which sits on three adjacent blocks immediately west of the restored 1908 county courthouse, with a new service center. The county claims that a new building would be less expensive than renovation, although all rehabilitation proposals have addressed only the non-historic 1962 and 1983 wings of the old school; in each scenario, demolition of the town’s only remaining historic school building has been assumed. The county has never actively marketed the building for sale or issued a request for proposals for its rehabilitation.



Although the former Jackson High School building is not listed in the National Register of Historic Places, it clearly has significance for generations of Jackson citizens. The school was a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project, and many of its builders were members of its first graduating class who went on to become the “Greatest Generation.” The building exterior has inscribed stone ornamentation characteristic of the Art Deco style, while the interior features wrought iron railings, decorative tilework, dark oak cabinetry, and a 700-seat auditorium-gymnasium with wood seats and stylized light fixtures.

In February, Jackson County residents objected to a bonding proposal that would fund demolition of the high school and construction of a new county office building. A petition with more than 500 signatures was submitted to the county board, who decided to overrule the wishes of the citizens by hiring a construction manager for the project and scheduling a special election on the bond proposal. Jackson County residents will vote on May 25, 2010 whether to authorize bond funds for a new resource center. Given the new state historic rehabilitation tax credits and Legacy Grant funding, a preservation alternative—for public or private use—might still be viable, and should be explored.

Action Steps

1. Initiate or sign a citizen petition to require an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for the school building.
2. Form or join a non-profit organization to fight for preservation of the historic school and other historic resources in Jackson County.
3. Make a financial contribution to a local non-profit organization or municipality to fund preparation of a National Register of Historic Places nomination, reuse study, or condition assessment for the school building.

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Jackson County Resource Center