

## Summary of Hokah City Hall Renovation as of 2-17-2008

The City Hall, built in 1938 as a WPA project, has a long history as the government and social center for the city of Hokah. Prior to renovation it was also used on a regular basis by Bluff Country Learning Options and St. Peter's school for gym activities. St. Peter's has returned for the winter months. Bluff Country is now in a facility with a gym. The Hokah Public Library occupies the lower level. Also before renovation, the ceiling was missing tiles and the remaining ones were a dark brown. The floor was worn down to raw wood in many places. There were only five 20 amp outlets to use for roasters, crock pots, or coffee pots. Restrooms were down either 7 or 20 stairs. Most wedding receptions and other events that paid rent had moved to facilities in neighboring cities.

In July 2005 it was determined that asbestos was in exposed glue in the ceiling where tiles had fallen. Asbestos was also in the furnace room.

On August 27, 2005 a public forum was held on the future of the building. Facts about asbestos in the ceiling and furnace room, need for a small kitchen area, handicapped restroom on the main level and handicap access were presented. The forum also addressed the inefficient heating system and non-working air conditioners. Natural gas or LP gas is not an option. Fuel oil or electricity are the only heat sources available. Several options were presented and the overwhelming response was to remodel and renovate.

At the October 2005 council meeting, the city council approved applying for grants and planning fundraisers if a report from a structural engineer indicated the building was in sound condition. An engineers report done in October found no major problems and stated the building, if properly maintained, had at least 30 more years of use.

The roof was new in 1998. Most windows were replaced in 1996. Some of the replacements have lost their seal and the sashes need replacement.

### **RENOVATION WORK COMPLETED**

Energy efficient lights and R38 insulation were installed along with a new ceiling. New ceiling materials are designed for basketball and volleyball use. Funding was from the Webster and Marcella Fisher foundation which is associated with Security State Bank with an office in Hokah.

Fifteen 20 amp outlets added and kitchen sink installed. Funding was from donations and fundraisers.

Handicapped restroom 100% complete. Funding source a matching grant of \$10,000 from Minnesota Historical Society. Matching funds from Hokah Lions, Ace Telephone, Hokah Fun Daze, Friends of the Hokah Public Library, inkind, and various fundraisers.

Floor refinishing is 99% complete. Funding was from chili cook offs and advances from Hokah Fun Daze.

Most of the interior has been repainted. Funding was from selling antique table at chili cook off and labor from court assigned community service workers.

## **RENOVATION WORK TO BE DONE**

Heating, ventilating and air conditioning. Proposals for designing a system are between \$2500 and \$3000. \$1500 of this has been raised. A ballpark estimate from a contractor for air handling, air conditioner/heat pump for upstairs only was \$67,000.

Waterproofing outside surface and sidewalk repair estimates are at least \$9000.

Portable ramp cost is \$5000.

Painting and staining to be done as volunteer labor is available.

Rear door needs to be replaced, hopefully in 2008.

### **Possible funding sources:**

USDA community facilities grant/loan

Legislature bonding bill

HVAC system design – Virginia Sweatt Minnesota Preservation Fund,

Johanna Favrot Fund (National) and hometown annual chili cook off.

## **BUILDING STATUS**

The services of Robert Vogel, historic preservationist, were retained to assist with the application to have the building eligible to be on the National Register of Historic Places. The next step will be to move from eligible to full status.

Upon completion of this project energy savings and increased rental fees will provide for a majority of upkeep expenses. Fuel usage has decreased with improvements but price increases keep the annual heating expenses in the six to seven thousand dollar range.

## **RENOVATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Chairperson: Barbara Bissen, director of the Hokah Public Library. She has grant writing and fund raising experience and was instrumental in starting the library in 1986.

Kevin Walther, city council, Library Board and Fire department member. Kevin also has some grant writing experience.

Matt Vetsch, partner in Vetsch Construction and member of Hokah Library Board and Fire Department.

Reid Harris, senior project superintendent for Marshall Erdmann Construction

The project goal is to update the building so it becomes a center of activity that will benefit the residents and businesses of Hokah and the surrounding area. In addition, the building's historical significance must also be retained so future generations are aware of what was accomplished by the WPA (Works Progress Administration) in the Great Depression era.

The mission of committee members will be to coordinate grant application deadlines and if successful in obtaining grants work their timetables into the phases of renovation. At the same time fundraisers will be needed to raise matching monies for grants. A renovation time frame began in February of 2006. Hopefully it will be completed by the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building's dedication which will be February 20, 2009.

### **Hokah History**

The city of Hokah has a rich history. It was founded by Edward Thompson in 1851. Mills, cooper shops and railroad shops provided jobs in the 1800's. Lake Como, which was created as a mill pond to provide waterpower, became a tourist destination. The Hokah Chief, a local newspaper was well known in the area. The railroad shops were moved west to Wells, Minnesota in 1880 and the dam that created Lake Como went out in 1909. The dam was rebuilt in 1922 and Lake Como again attracted tourists. Several lake cottages were built. The lake filled in and by the 1940's was just a swamp. Today Hokah is primarily a bedroom community. St. Peter's school provides private education for Preschool to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Bluff Country Learning Options is an alternative school for ages 16 and above. It is housed in the former elementary school. Grades K-12 are transported to LaCrescent.

Headstart operates out of a building adjacent to Bluff Country. There are four churches in Hokah. There is a five hole golf course with mini golf in the former lake bed. The city has four parks; the original City Park, Como Falls Park, American Legion Park and the swimming pool is surrounded by a park area.

The city received grants from USDA and MN DEED for a new waste water treatment plant which is near completion. The August 19, 2007 flood heavily damaged the City of Hokah. Recovery has just begun. Because the Fire Department was flooded, City Hall was the emergency command center. 30-35 people and 3 dogs spent the early morning hours of August 19 at City Hall. Meals were served to several hundred people until power returned the next day.

Since June of 2007 when the floor was refinished several events and meetings have been held in City Hall. The Fire Station community room is currently not in use this month because mold is being removed as a result of being flooded in August 2007. The City Hall is the only building available for meetings, funeral lunches and other events held at the Fire Station. A new youth open gym program, started in January, is using the City Hall for its activities.



**Front View**



**View from Southwest**



**City Hall use during flood of 2007**



**Command center during August flood**



Saturday open gym



5th grade & under age group



Handicapped restroom



Computer area of Library in lower level