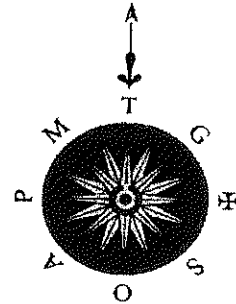


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April 24, 2013

Commissioner Dana Kjome  
Houston County Board of Commissioners  
304 South Marshall Street  
Caledonia, MN 55921

RE: Historic Preservation Assessment, Old Houston County Jail

Dear Commissioner Kjome:

We are pleased to submit to the County Commissioners the following brief report on historic preservation issues relating to the old Houston County Jail in Caledonia. My staff and I performed a site visit and conducted background research to evaluate the property's historical and architectural values. As you requested, we also carried out a preliminary evaluation of the feasibility of adaptive reuse (i.e., re-purposing) of the historic building.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

The subject property consists of a freestanding, two-story, stone masonry building that was constructed in 1875 for use as the county jail. It was designed by Charles G. Maybury (1830-1917) of Winona and is classified as an example of the Italianate Style. As built, the structure incorporated residential quarters for the sheriff (later converted to office space) and enclosed a two-story block of prefabricated steel cells. When the facility closed in 2011, it was the oldest operational corrections facility in Minnesota. It is currently vacant. The historic jail is not under imminent threat of demolition.

Overall, the old jail appears to be structurally sound and is in a good state of preservation. There are few visible signs of structural system problems and our inspection team did not find any weakened or damaged structural members in the walls, floors, and roof. Although the exterior of the building has been altered somewhat from its original appearance, all of its important architectural

character-defining features have been retained intact. Historic integrity of interior features has been compromised by alterations which have removed, obscured, or destroyed original architectural features and finishes; nevertheless, the basic floor plan has been retained and quite a bit of historic fabric remains. It is also worth noting that many of the alterations which have taken place in the course of time need to be viewed as evidence of the building's history and development, and some of these changes have probably acquired historical significance in their own right.

## NATIONAL REGISTER

The historic jail and the county courthouse were listed in the National Register of Historic Places on March 18, 1932 (Ref. No. 83000905) on the basis of the buildings' association with important events in local history and their architectural merits. The National Register, authorized under the 1935 Historic Sites Act and expanded under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), is the authoritative guide used by federal, state, and local governments, private groups, and citizens in identifying historic resources of local, state, and national significance that have been deemed worthy of preservation. The National Register is maintained by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The primary way that properties are listed in the National Register is through nominations by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) in each state. In Minnesota, the SHPO function is housed in the Minnesota Historical Society.

The National Register is an important component of many state and federal historic preservation programs. Inclusion in the National Register makes the Houston County Jail eligible to be considered for grants and other forms of financial assistance that may be used to rehabilitate or reuse the building in a way that preserves its historical significance and architectural character. The National Register is also central to a number of environmental protection programs. For example, federal agencies and local units of government that use Community Block Development Grant funds and other forms of federal aid, are required to consider the effects of their projects, and projects they license or assist, on properties listed in the National Register.

The National Register program regulations do not require Houston County to preserve the historic jail unless federal funds or permits are involved. However, if any federal funds are used, or a federal permit is required, the project would be subject to SHPO review under NHPA Section 106. Section 106 review is also required for most grant, loan, and rehabilitation tax credit programs managed by the state. (The regulations for implementing Section 106 can be found in the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 36, Part 800.)

We were unable to find any record of a federal undertaking involving the Houston County Jail that led to NHPA Section 106 review.

## STATE ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS

In Minnesota, state laws regulate the demolition of public buildings that are listed in the National Register. Preparation of an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) is mandatory for projects involving National Register-listed buildings under the Environmental Policy Act (see Minnesota Environmental Review Rules, part 4410.4300). The regulations for implementing the EAW process ensure that historic preservation values are taken into account when local government agencies make decisions that affect historic buildings and require project sponsors to consider alternatives to demolition such as rehabilitation or adaptive reuse.

The Minnesota Environmental Rights Act (MERA) provides that significant historic resources must be protected unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative. MERA, which is widely regarded as one of the strongest state environmental protection statutes in the nation, has proven to be a powerful tool that has been used by the Minnesota Historical Society, the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, and other heritage preservation advocacy groups to save publicly owned historic properties from demolition. For example, when Hennepin County announced its intention to tear down the historic Minneapolis Armory (a National Register listed property) to construct a new jail on the site, in 1990 the Minnesota Historical Society filed a lawsuit under MERA, igniting a three-year legal battle that was eventually decided (for the plaintiffs) by the Minnesota Supreme Court.

## ADAPTIVE REUSE

Adaptive reuse is a process that involves changing a disused or obsolete building into a new property that can be used for a different purpose. It is perhaps best thought of as the recycling of structurally sound but functionally obsolescent old buildings. In the context of historic preservation, adaptive reuse is at the heart of environmentally sustainable development where the quality of life in a community can be enhanced not just from the retention of historic buildings, but from their adaptation into accessible and usable places. We believe the Houston County Jail has significant adaptive reuse potential because of its location, size, durable materials, and distinguishing character.

The underlying rationale for reuse of the historic jail is the recognition that the building has value and represents an investment that should not be discarded lightly. The values which are most difficult to describe are cultural or social; simply put, adaptive reuse can restore and maintain the building's historical and architectural significance and help to ensure its survival, for the benefit of present and future generations of Houston County residents. Indeed, adaptive reuse is the only way that the building's historic fabric will be properly cared for, revealed, and interpreted, while making better use of the property itself.

One of the notable environmental benefits of reusing old buildings is the retention of the property's "embodied energy," i.e., the energy consumed by all of the processes associated with the original construction and 136 years of active use—because new buildings have much higher embodied energy costs than reused older buildings, adaptive reuse is much more environmentally sustainable than new construction. The embodied energy savings from not demolishing the building will only increase with the predicted rise of energy costs. Recycling the old building can also translate into direct economic benefits when one considers the cost of demolition, asbestos abatement, site cleanup, etc.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

First and foremost, a sustained effort needs to be made to find a compatible use for the historic jail building that requires minimal alteration of its distinctive architectural features.

As soon as possible, the county should arrange for an adaptive reuse study to identify and analyze a range of technically feasible, economically sustainable re-purposing options for the historic jail. We suggest an approach modeled on the History Properties Reuse Teams utilized by the Minnesota Historical Society and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The study needs to be conducted by qualified professionals with specific project experience and expertise in historic preservation, historic architecture, and historic property development.

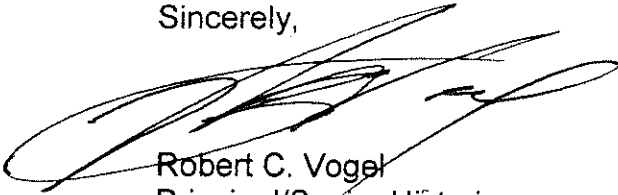
If Houston County chooses to pursue adaptive reuse, redevelopment of the jail should conform to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The preferred treatment concept is rehabilitation, which the standards define as the process of returning a building to a state of utility through repair or alteration which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions of the property which are historically and architecturally significant. There are both federal and state financial assistance programs that focus on rehabilitation of historic properties.

If the jail cannot be saved and reused, it may be possible to mitigate the loss of the heritage resource through historical and architectural documentation. In other words, if demolition must occur, the building's history and physical characteristics will need to be recorded so that a body of information can be preserved. Ordinarily, National Register-listed buildings are documented to the standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), which require recordation in the form of written historical information, measured architectural drawings, and high resolution photographs.

Thank you for the opportunity to be of service. My associates and I especially enjoyed the opportunity to inspect the historic property and we appreciate the help received from county staff. I would be pleased to meet with you and the other County Commissioners to answer questions about our report findings and

recommendations, and to further discuss the scope of historic preservation-related issues and the county's concerns over the old jail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Vogel', written over a large, light-colored circular scribble or stamp.

Robert C. Vogel  
Principal/Senior Historian

cc: Char Meiners, County Auditor  
Tess Kruger, Facilities Manager