



## FROM THE MAYOR

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# Preserving our past on road to future



By Mayor  
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In the last 3 ½ years, we as a community have devoted considerable time and energy to ensuring the future success of Prior Lake. If you have visited our revitalized downtown or enjoyed our enhanced system of parks and trails, you will recognize the impact of this forward-thinking approach and the momentum it has created in our community. But in our contemplation of the future, we must not lose sight of our past.

The first sentence of our new 2030 Vision and Strategic Plan describes the Prior Lake of 2030 as a “city which emphasizes its historical roots” and one with “the feel of a small town located within the heart of a vibrant suburban setting.”

As we move into the summer months, two golden opportunities to preserve some of the heritage and small-town feel of our community have materialized. I speak, of course, about the former Kop homestead and the building that now serves as our city hall.

For different reasons, it appears that these buildings cannot be kept. But we must retain what they represent, and take those things with us as we move forward.

In our last two meetings, my colleagues on the City Council and I have effectively dealt with the future of the former Kop homestead, which until Meda’s death earlier this year was held in life estate by Meda and her late husband John, in accordance with the terms of the city’s purchase of the property in 1999.

Of all the structures on that homestead, the one with the most historical significance to our community is the two-story house. Building Official Robert Hutchins provided a comprehensive report on it and the other structures on the property during the June 6 meeting, clearly documenting their deteriorating conditions. A representative of the Scott County Historical Society seemed to indicate that the house does not meet the criteria for historic preservation.

That said, we should strive to create something there that will serve as a remembrance of this 150-year old building – probably the oldest in Prior Lake – and in honor of the Kop family who lived in it for 80-plus years.

As a City Council, we set the wheels in motion Monday night, giving staff direction to create a plan to preserve the heritage of the house before its potential removal later in the year. It could be a gazebo or pavilion, or something utilizing the bricks and fireplace stones of the house. In talking to John and Meda's daughter, Jesse Kop Juola, after the meeting, she told me she was pleased with the resolution and the direction that the council has taken.

Meanwhile, just a short walk down Main and Dakota from the Kop property sits a building with some historical significance of its own. Today it houses our city hall and police station, but at one time it was a hub of a far different sort -- one through which many Prior Lake residents passed on their way to adulthood.

It opened in 1941 as a school building for urban District 49, and was used as a grade school, a junior high school, and as the home to administrative offices before becoming a municipal building in the 1960s. In 1984, the building was expanded to meet the demands of our already growing population. Today, in addition to being unable to serve our current needs, the city hall building suffers from numerous deficiencies associated with its age, construction style and materials.

With plans to build a new police station and city hall on the existing site and the three properties on the north side of Dakota Street, it is unfortunate but also unavoidable that this structure, too, must be removed.

As in the case of the Kop property, the challenge facing us now is, how can we take some of elements of the existing city hall along in our transition to a new city hall and police station over the course of the next two years?

Residents with ideas about how elements of these two historic properties might be preserved are asked to share them with staff immediately so that we as a City Council can react to them at the July 18 meeting.

The final paragraph of our 2030 Vision reinforces the importance of our community's shared identity, which is reflected in our "small town values of family, education, courage, pride and human worth."

For that reason, it is our charge to do everything we can to both preserve and celebrate the rich heritage of the Kop family, our community, and elements of two of our community's oldest buildings.