

Gale School preservation group wins bid to save building

Written by Tom Caldwell



The Gale School (Courtesy photo)

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CANTERBURY — The nonprofit group created to save Belmont's Gale School from destruction gained approval from the Shaker Regional School Board on Tuesday to proceed with a purchase-and-sales agreement to acquire the building and move it from school property.

Details of the transfer have to be worked out, including whether the \$5,000 non-refundable deposit required in the request for proposals would be refunded if voters reject the sale at the annual School District Meeting.

Voters last year directed the School Board to transfer the building to the Save Our Gale School Committee and to provide school-owned property at the corner of Concord Street and Memorial Drive as a new site for the building. They also directed the School Board to set aside \$71,000 to assist in the building's relocation. The school district attorney advised the School Board last spring that the money, originally appropriated to raze the building, could not be used to assist in the building's relocation because school district funds had to be used for educational purposes.

The School Board also sought other proposals for the removal of the building and stipulated that it had to be removed from school district property, and that any sale of the building would require voter approval at the 2018 School District Meeting. The request for proposals offered \$70,000 to assist in the move. The Save Our Gale School Committee was the only bidder for the building.

Members of the committee attending the Shaker Board meeting on Tuesday urged the School Board to reconsider its position against selling the corner lot, which the group said would provide the most economical option for moving the school. In its bid documents, the committee identified other possible locations, but they are farther away and it would take time to negotiate their purchase or lease. The committee plans to move the historic building, built in 1894, to a new location where it can be converted into professional space. The Laconia Area Land Trust has agreed to purchase the building for \$1 and redevelop it, but while the bid documents say it would be used for business startups and nonprofits, Land Trust Executive Director Carmen Lorentz said it is premature to say what the ultimate use would be. As part of the bid, the Save Our Gale School Committee will fill in the hole on the current school site and clean it up for future school district use.

A guarantee that the \$5,000 deposit would be returned if the voters should reject the sale is important to the committee, which currently has slightly more than \$2,000 in its account. Two committee members have agreed to make up the difference as long as they have a guarantee that the money would be returned if voters prevent the plan from going forward.

Now that the School Board has awarded the bid, the Save Our Gale School Committee can move forward with a major capital campaign that seeks to raise \$100,000 by August 2018.