
Group suggests new use for Gale School

By KRISTA MARRSkmarrs@citizen.com | Sep 12, 2013

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BELMONT - Members of the Save the Gale School Committee gave a new idea to the Shaker Regional School Board: move the building and have the library be housed inside.

Ken Knowlton and Pret Tuthill spoke on behalf of the committee during Tuesday night's regular School Board meeting. The pair pitched the idea to gauge if school district officials would even entertain the possibility of moving the Gale School to a lot on Concord Street.

Knowlton said each Town Meeting residents vote to save the structure, but then do nothing with it. He said now is the time to utilize the building.

"Quite frankly, it was frustrating to me and I think it was quite frustrating to a lot of people," said Knowlton.

The Gale School, which sits behind the Belmont Middle School at 58 School St., was built back in 1894 and in 1985 the school was determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historical Places, being one of Belmont's most architecturally significant buildings, according to recent letter from NH Division of Historical Resources.

The building is owned by the Shaker Regional School District. It has been used only for storage since 1985.

Back in June, Code Enforcement Officer Steve Paquin conducted an inspection of the building and reported that it was decaying to the point it was probably not economically viable for rehabilitation. Although it has a lot of sentimental value, he reported that the structure really has no historical or architectural value.

The Save the Gale School Committee, which had its own structural report done on the building, had some funds, said Tuthill. Omega Structural Engineers, PLLC conducted the evaluation.

According to the report by Alex Azodi, P.E., Omega Structural Engineers, "the existing building appears to be in a structurally sound condition." The report goes on to say, "considering the age and the lack of maintenance in recent years, the current structural framing, in my opinion, appears to be in excellent condition and better than average when compared to similar buildings of this age and this type."

"I found this building to be one of the most architecturally significant and notable of the buildings I have seen in this area," he wrote.

Azodi's report noted that if the Gale School were to be reused, especially for a public building, it is in need of structural improvements such as to the foundation system, the flooring and framing and shear walls. With the plan to move the school

to the Concord Street location onto a new concrete slab, one of the issues would be solved.

"The other items, although it is very likely that they will require structural improvements of the existing structure, will most likely be relatively easy to accomplish," Azodi wrote.

Tuthill said that, when the Gale School was first looked at many years ago, the idea was to house the SAU office inside. However since space is no longer a concern for that entity, Tuthill said the idea of making this the new library space came about.

"The library is currently pursuing a redesign for expansion," he said, adding that they need about 5,000 square feet of space and that is the amount of space the Gale School would provide.

While noting this is a very preliminary idea and he isn't even sure the library would want to relocate to a lot on Concord Street inside the structure, Tuthill said the committee at least wanted to hear if the School District would even consider it an option.

He reported that the estimated cost to tear down the Gale School - barring any hazardous materials inside - is about \$40,000.

He said one idea is that the town could pay \$1 to purchase the school from the district, and the school district would pay to have the structure relocated to the Concord Street lot. At last estimate, it could be \$60,000 to move it.

Both Tuthill and Knowlton said they would help seek any grants or funding available to help offset the cost to the school district.

Getting back to the space issues within the town of Belmont, Tuthill said he is under the idea that the town would like to move the town hall offices over to the Belmont Mill. So if the library didn't want to use the Gale School and the town offices are relocated to the Mill, Tuthill said the Belmont Senior Center and the Lakes Region Child Care Service's program will need to be moved out of the Mill and into a new home. Perhaps he said, this is another option for the use of the Gale School - housing the senior and day care centers.

Knowlton said the main objective is for the discussion to take place as to a viable option for the use of the Gale School

"This would give them an option," he said of the senior and child care center's possible relocation. "Whether we can sell it or not, I don't know."

Shaker Board Chair Heidi Hutchinson said she would like a current estimate on the cost to move the Gale School. She also asked if the lot on Concord Street was the only location being envisioned for the structure.

"Without tearing down power poles and stuff, yes," said Tuthill.

Wrapping his presentation, Tuthill asked for the Board's consideration and taking the issue under advisement and pass along any decision to the committee.

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