

Gale School to come before voters in three different warrant articles

By GAIL OBER, LACONIA DAILY SUN



BELMONT — Voters in the Shaker Regional School District will have three opportunities at this year's School District meeting to do something with the Gale School building.

The first, submitted by petition, calls for a total of \$242,878 and would relocate the school to the corner of Concord Street and restore it. Of that \$242,878, \$5,027 would come from the Gale School Expendable Trust, \$65,000 would come from the facilities trust fund, \$50,000 would come from the unassigned fund balance and \$122,878 would come through new taxation.

The second article, also submitted by petition, calls for a total of \$187,978, would leave the Gale School in place and would put a foundation under it as well as rehabilitate it for possible use by the school district. To leave it in place would cost \$77,979 in new taxes or \$44,899 less than moving it.

The third warrant article was submitted by the School Board and asks for \$71,000 to tear it down. Members said it was the same proposal as last year's, which failed, adjusted for inflation.

The members of the Save Our Gale School Committee, led by Diane Marden and Ken Knowlton, generated by petition the two warrant articles that, if passed, would save the building. The warrant article to demolish, but save the bell and the bell tower, was generated by the school district.

Marden told the people who attended Belmont portion of the School District meeting on Thursday that moving the building has its positives in that the district would have the use of the space behind the middle school, it would be safer, and that a new location would mean all the people could see it sitting on the corner of Concord Street. She said the possible negative aspect of moving it is its structural integrity. If moved, it could not be put on any historical register.

Marden and Knowlton bemoaned what they said is a lack of interest on the part of the current School Board to try and save the late 1800s school building. After voters at last year's School District Meeting declined to save it or tear it down, two members of the board were assigned to participate with the Save Our Gale School Committee to study the matter.

Marden said that while Superintendent Maria Dreyer had worked with them, the board hasn't put any effort into it at all. She noted that at some point the school district removed the foundation, further compromising the building, and never finished installing a fire suppression system.

"It would be a huge mistake and a huge injustice to the citizens of Belmont (to continue to let it degrade in place)," said Marden.

Knowlton was a little more direct and said the School Board had not been a good custodian of the building and has allowed the outside of it to become "shabby and unattractive."

He said that it would make great SAU offices, and since the school is pressed for space with the addition of full-day kindergarten, the old Memorial School, which is now used for offices, could be reverted to classroom space.

Both claimed the School Board members didn't try to come up with viable solutions when they participated in the meetings.

Canterbury School Board representative Bob Reed served on the committee and said as a member he did try and was at the meeting. He said the school is a "very emotional thing," but that the space was too expensive to repurpose and the district is obligated to use what money they have to keep the building they are using in good condition.

The three warrant articles will be voted on at the March 4 Shaker School District Meeting at the Belmont High School. Polls open at 11 a.m. and the business portion of the meeting begins at 7 p.m. when polls close.

See more photos of the building at <http://belmontnh.homestead.com/GaleAug06Photo.html>
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