

Effort to save historic Gale School gains ground

■ Agreement:

The president of the group seeking to preserve the building said she's received a draft P& S

agreement.

By JOHN KOZIOL

Union Leader Correspondent

BELMONT — As the clock ticks down to either demolition or relocation, a group working to save the historic Gale School is now reviewing a purchase-and-sales agreement under which the Shaker Regional School District would sell the structure for \$1 and also provide money to move it.

Located directly behind the Belmont Middle School and a literal stone's throw from the Shaker Regional offices on School Street, the Gale School — which was built in 1894 and last used as a school in 1985 — has been the subject of numerous preservation efforts.

But those efforts are seemingly coming to an end, with the school district saying it wants the Gale School gone by the start of the 2018-19 school year.

On Wednesday, Diane Marden, president of the nonprofit group Save Our Gale School, said she had just received a draft P& S agreement whose main points were the \$1 price tag and the promise that the \$71,000 that had previously been allocated for tearing down the school would be used to move it to a new lot.

The lot would have to be acquired and voters would have to ratify the property transfer at the 2018 School District Meeting.

Marden said the school district has apparently changed its mind on a \$5,000 deposit, making it refundable should SOGS complete its acquisition

of the Gale School.

During an interview last week, Marden said SOGS hopes to raise a yet-to-be determined amount to move the school, adding that it may seek an injunction to prevent its destruction.

Several contractors have already offered their services to help move the Gale School, but Marden hopes more will come forward, especially those who can help pour a concrete-foundation at the new site.

Marden attended the Gale School as did many members of her family and said the school has a special place in her heart.

That sentiment is shared by others, including those at the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance which earlier this month named the Gale School to its "Seven to Save" list.

The Gale School should be saved, said the Alliance, because it is running out of time, while Marden added that "It's solid and it hasn't been altered over the years. It's an icon in Belmont."

Apart from the schooldistrict money to move the Gale School, all other funds are being raised through donations, said Marden.

Information about tax deductible donations is available at www.belmontnh.net/GaleSchoolSAVE.html and belmontnh.homestead.com.

Although not a member of SOGS, Woody Fogg, who has worked with Marden and Ken Knowlton for many years on saving the Gale School, said it is possible to move it up and over the existing ballfields at the Belmont Middle School to a new site on Route 106, although SOGS would ideally prefer to move to a lot that is closer.

A retired professional civil engineer, Fogg said not only can the school be physically moved, but that once it is moved the Laconia Area Community Land Trust is interested in putting it back into use.

"There are still a lot of moving pieces," said Fogg, but the good news is that some of them are falling into place.

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The historic Gale School in Belmont is running out of time. The Shaker Regional School District wants it gone by the start of the 201819 school year and the group Save Our Gale School hopes to move it to a new location. JOHN KOZIOL/UNION LEADER CORRESPONDENT

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