

Trustees nix idea of converting Gale School to library

By GAIL OBER
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

BELMONT — After deliberating in a non-public session held several weeks ago, the Library Trustees voted unanimously against supporting the Save the Gale School Committee's bid to use the old building as a public library.

According to Chair Mary Louise Charnley, the trustees went into a non-public session on October 15 because the topic involved the lease and or purchase of real-estate.

She said that included in the reasons not to support the idea were concerns about heating and supplying electricity to

such a large building should it be moved and used as a library and whether or not locating a public library on school property was a viable idea.

"A public library must be available to everyone in a community," she said, noting that school districts typically need to control access to their campuses.

The Save the Gale School Committee had recommended relocating the historic Gale School from its perch above and behind the Belmont Middle School to a corner lot on Concord Street that currently belongs to the Shaker Regional School District. During a recent
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presentation to the Shaker Regional School Board, members Ken Knowlton and Pret Tuthill had suggested some kind of long-term lease from the school of the corner lot to the library should the committee's recommendation be accepted.

Gale School Committee member Diane Marden said last week she was disappointed with the Belmont Library Trustees decision.

She said "Plan B" is to go to the Belmont Board of Selectmen.

With plans to eventually move town offices into the Belmont Mill, members of Save the Gale School Committee have said that the town may need some space in the future for the senior center, a day care and other non-profit activities and the Gale School could be suitable for some of those needs.

She said committee members are also researching different options and grants for preserving the Gale School but reiterated that she thought its use as a public library would have been a "perfect fit."

The Save the Gale School Committee has also commissioned a report from an

architect who noted that aside from the foundation, the circa 1894 building is in very good condition.

"The wood walls and posts supporting the floor and roof framing are plumb or very near plumb and do not show any visible signs of structural overstress or movement," wrote Alex Azodi of Omega Structural Engineers.

The N.H. Division of Historical Resources weighed in in August of 2013 that the school is architecturally and historically significant.

Discussions surrounding the potential restoration, relocation, and reuse of the school have occurred on and off for at least the past 10 years. The building belongs to the Shaker District but its historical significance is centered around the town of Belmont.

According to previous news reports, the Gale School was used by the school district until the 1970s when it was converted to unheated storage. Depending on who is asked, estimates to demolish the building could run between \$40,000 and \$100,000.

Aside from the August presentation by the Save the Gale School Committee
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tee, the School Board has discussed the school once this year. Although no decisions were made, members encouraged Superintendent Maria Dreyer to explore options and made some suggestions that removing the bell tower and possibly incorporating it some future town project.