

Shaker superintendent wishes Gale School donor had approached board

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By GAIL OBER
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BELMONT – Shaker Regional Superintendent Maria Dreyer says she wishes the Save the Gale School Committee had told the School Board about a possible benefactor before they made their latest plan to save the old school public.

Describing what Ken Knowlton said was a “generous offer” for all the on site work to be done by an anonymous benefactor should a new site be located, Dreyer described it as “lovely,” but said the person should have approached the board.

“The School District owns the building,” she said yesterday. “Wouldn’t the right thing to do would have been to come to the board?”

Dreyer reiterated the most-often-asked questions relating to saving or demolishing the old school: Where’s it going to go, and who’s going to move it?

“Who’s going to abate the asbestos?” she asked.

She said the members of the School Board “do care” about what happens to the Gale School but that their obligation is “to educate our children safely and expeditiously.”

At the request of the School Board, Facilities Manager Doug Ellis has obtained three quotes to demolish the school, but save the bell and the bell tower. On Monday, Ellis said the estimates range between \$42,500 to \$63,630, and all of them include asbestos removal.

He said the board hasn’t reviewed the bids and has not voted on whether to include a warrant article on next year’s town meeting ballot to tear down the school.

Knowlton sent a letter that ran in the Daily Sun yesterday that said an anonymous benefactor has offered to

donate all the site-work when and if another site is found.

When asked, he declined to identify the benefactor, but said he believes the person has the resources to make good on his promise.

He also said the committee was evaluating a different spot for relocation, but declined to say where.

The school was built in 1897 and was used by the school district until the 1980s when it was abandoned. It was named after Napoleon Gale who donated money for schools and the town’s library.

Most recently, the Save Our Gale School Committee suggested that it be moved to Concord Street and used as a town library, but the Library Trustees said no.

The committee also approached the town government to see if it would sponsor an application for a historic preservation grant. However, selectmen said they already had enough building projects on their hands and were not in a position to assume another.

The problem, said Dreyer, is that because of its size, location and condition, the school district can’t use the building. While getting estimates for its demolition, she said the district learned there would be some asbestos abatement needed as well.

She said that while no one would like to see it destroyed, there is no money – in either the school district’s or the town’s budget – to move it to a different location and restore it.

Dreyer also said that before the School Board asked Ellis to get quotes on demolishing it, she and School Board member Donna Cilley – who serves as a liaison to the Save Our Gale School Committee – invited all of the members to a meeting but no

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one came.

Dreyer said that in recent years the most compelling argument the board has heard from the voters is to reduce costs and keep the school budget as lean as possible. She said over the past few budget cycles, Shaker Regional, as well as other school districts in the area, have delayed much-needed infrastructure and building improvements and repairs to keep the tax burden as low as possible.

At Shaker, she said the board believes any available building resources should be spent on improving the school facilities that are in use now.