

LETTERS

Asking voters to instruct Shaker board to use the Gale School

To The Daily Sun,

This year, there will be three warrant articles on the Shaker Regional School District's ballot concerning the Gale School. One will ask the voters to choose to raise \$71K through taxes, to demolish this historic structure. This will be submitted by the school district.

At last year's district meeting, the Save Our Gale School Committee requested that the school board form a joint study group with us to seek possible alternatives that might satisfy both groups as to the fate of the Gale School. The school district has no interest in saving the building, considers it "in the way" and wants it gone from its current location. Our committee had hoped that it could be moved to a piece of (school) property on Concord Street as it seemed the only logistical choice/location available.

Here is the breakdown of that discussed option:

1. The school district could/would not consider donating this property in order to provide a reasonable location to move the building on to, entirely separate from the Middle School.

2. All other (studied) alternative locations were limited because of the distance to move to, utilities being in the way, and/or nearby land owner's unwillingness to consider this option.

3. If the Gale School was moved to the Concord Street property, the school district would be quite concerned about the length of time it would take to restore it, the possible costs, what the future use of it might be, and that they would still have the Gale School to deal with.

Our difficulties were:

1. We could not determine what use of the building might be agreeable to the school district. (They offered none.)

2. We had already received donations of money, volunteer work, and site prep work necessary, offered by a company free of charge; however we could not seek further donations without more information as to where the building would go or what the money would be specifically used for.

3. The school board representatives on our study committee had no suggestions to make and did not really seem interested/invested in finding a resolution to this long-running problem. Basically, they just watched us struggle, failing to lend us a hand. (However, Superintendent Dreyer did spend considerable time and effort

studying possible alternatives.)

4. Even though a structural study, paid for by the Save Our Gale School Committee funds found the Gale School building "sound," (only the foundation needs to be replaced) the public has been led to believe that the building is unfit for any future use. This simply is not true.

Last year, the Save Our Gale School Committee said that if no alternative was found, we would drop our efforts to preserve the building. We intend to honor that commitment, but have two final options to present to the voters this year:

— Warrant Article #8: To move the Gale School to the property on Concord Street.

— Warrant Article #9: To restore the Gale School at its present location.

(The costs of these two options would be offset by the money that the school board proposes to use to destroy the building.)

We are basically asking the voters to direct the Shaker Regional School District to keep the Gale School for restoration and use it as SAU offices (as we originally proposed.) Once done, the Memorial School could then be reverted back to needed classroom space for the purpose of preschool/kindergarten classes.

We have put the final decision back into the hands of the voters, right where it should be. So, do we demolish a perfectly sound, historically significant building, losing not only an important piece of Belmont's heritage by destroying existing space that will need to be replaced in the near future for preschool/kindergarten? Or do we utilize what we have, taking pride in our educational past and using it for the School District's future?

The choice is yours. We ask that you reject the warrant article to demolish the Gale School and use that money toward moving it or stabilizing it where it stands. Should the voters choose to save the Gale School, our committee will continue to work hard soliciting donations of money, grants, citizen volunteers, construction work and materials. We DO NOT wish to further burden the property taxpayers.

(For more detailed information on the associated costs and pros and cons of these alternatives, please visit www.belmontnh.net.)

Ken Knowlton, Member
Save Our Gale School Committee
Belmont