Plans to restore historic church moving along

- By Keith Whitcomb Jr. Staff Writer Oct 9, 2018

CLARENDON — Efforts to restore the North Clarendon Chapel are focused around raising both funds and community interest, one of the project's leaders told the Select Board on Monday.

Nicolette Asselin, who's been heading up the recent fundraising efforts, said during the summer there's been a number of fundraising events, grant applications and community input on what to do with the historic church.

Asselin said in an interview Tuesday that the Friends of the North Clarendon Chapel donated the church to the Corpwell Foundation about two weeks ago. Corpwell is a nonprofit, so now the project is eligible for various grants, Asselin said. Her role is that of a grant researcher.

"Some wanted music, others wanted food and clothing distribution," she said of the feedback the group has received. "Maybe what we need is a multi-purpose room, something that could be used for many things."

It could also be used as an annex to the nearby Bailey Memorial Library, Asselin said.

The church is in need of some exterior work, she said. "The inside is still in good shape, actually, not too bad."

The Preservation Trust of Vermont awarded the Corpwell Foundation an assessment grant in summer that paid for an architect to look over the property and determine what work needs to be done.

Asselin said the trust has been an excellent resource in general.

She said all told the restoration will be in the $40,000 range. The big repairs needed are to the steeple and roof, but the siding needs work as well. Asselin said she was surprised by the cost estimate, thinking it would be much higher.

"It's not falling apart, the tin ceiling needs to be brushed up, the stained-glass windows, some of them are good, some of them are broken," she said, adding there are no issues with the foundation.

She said about $5,000 has been raised through donations and the townwide yard sale.

"We were surprised how interested people were — they really wanted to do something with the building," she said.

Corporate sponsors have also stepped up, she said.

According to clarendonheritage.org, Lavalley Building Supplies has pledged building materials at a reduced rate, Spencer Engineering has offered to do some survey work, and master gardener, Brian Billing has offered some landscaping design ideas. Home Depot and Vermont Country Store are also listed as offering to match funds, but those are listed as "pending."

Clarendon Heritage is a website maintained by Corpwell, Asselin said.

She said she was able to get the building on the National Registry of Historic Places and has applied for a $20,000 matching grant to the state. She said she hopes to hear word of that grant by December.

The grant would be from the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, she said. It's a 50/50 match, so Corpwell would have to raise $20,000 to secure it.

The work on the church is divided into phases, she said.

"The first thing we are going to do is fix all the woodwork we can possibly save … all the edges will need to be redone to make sure it doesn't get any worse, all the windows that are broken," she said.

Fundraising efforts will continue to secure the $20,000 grant, she said. She's also going to research more grant options. Phase II will be to work on the interior.

Select Board Chairman Michael Klopchin had a number of questions, including whether the state requiring the chapel to have running water and bathrooms.

Asselin said at this point it's not, but if bathrooms were needed a temporary one could be installed until grant funding for one could be secured. She said there's also a nearby building where the owner might be willing to let the facilities there be used.

Klopchin suggested the town website be used to spread word about the project. There was some discussion about how to go about this, as the project isn't receiving local taxpayer funding and the board didn't wish to give its full blessing to any one project.

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