

Board and church members discuss fate of steeple

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POWNAI — The town Select Board met with representatives of the Pownal Community Church Thursday to discuss the church's steeple and the legal issues that surround it.

The steeple was taken down in September 2006 because of safety concerns. It has remained on the ground, in front of an access road that connects Route 7 to Center Street, since that time.

Town resident Raymond Shields has asked the town to remove the steeple so that he may access a part of his property. Shields has said that he hired an attorney to ensure that this will be done. Both the board and the church representatives indicated a desire for better communication.

"We need to have more communication between the church and the town," said board member Stephen Kauppi. "We need to know how you're moving along, and what kind of time window for the repair we can anticipate." Pastor Lise Boulerice expressed concern that the church had not been informed earlier about the potential for legal action. Board chairman

Select Board Chairman Nelson Brownell agreed that this was a problem. "Communication is a problem in this town. We have parties in town that are involved in the same projects, but

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are not talking to each other — they go away with different perceptions," Brownell said. "We're trying to get on the positive track of solving this." Kauppi said it was important that the town know where the project was going.

"Are you saving it? Are you scrapping it?" Kauppi said. "I'm not a fan of spending money to move it without solving the problem."

Kim Gile, of the church, said that a three-phase restoration project was moving forward.

"At this point, we don't have enough (money) to complete it, but we have enough to start phase one, which is supporting the roof," Gile said. "We feel pretty confident that phase one will start by the fall."

Gile said, though the progress may appear slow, the church is pleased with the steps taken so far. "This really is a restoration project, and it can be easier to build new than restore sometimes," Gile said. "We feel it's moving very well."

Gile said, in regard to the steeple itself, the church was exploring its options. "We're going to have a steeple specialist come in to take a look and see what is salvageable before we have to deconstruct it," Gile said. "We're not just going to be cutting it up into pieces. We're going to be taking it apart and salvaging the beams we want to use."

Boulerice said she expected the specialist would be coming down over the summer, but she did not have a specific day for his visit. From there, Boulerice said, work could probably begin to take apart the steeple.

"Bottom line: If you decided the steeple will not be used, you could start work to take it apart immediately," Kauppi said. "Then, the situation would be resolved." Board members expressed a desire to deal with the legal matters as quickly as possible.

"What I don't want to see is spending more money on the legal matter than it would cost to get it moved," said member Donald Prouty.

Gile praised the work that had been done to raise money for the project.

"I can't tell you how blessed we've been when it comes to fundraising," Gile said. "We're very committed to this restoration project."

Board members then went into executive session to discuss the legal details with the church representatives.