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North Stonington to honor Clarks Falls Schoolhouse ahead of affordable housing conversion

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Melina Khan, Special to The Day

North Stonington — Residents are set to celebrate the conversion of the historical Clarks Falls Schoolhouse into affordable housing after an extensive process to salvage the building.

Keeping North Stonington Affordable Inc. and the North Stonington Historical Society will be hosting a celebration of the acquisition on Saturday at 1 p.m. at the Hewitt Farm Pavilion, with a rain date for Sunday at the North Stonington Senior Center.

“This is a win-win for everybody, and so it just felt like a good time to say, let’s have a party,” said Mary Ann Ricker, KNSA’s President.

The win-win to which Ricker refers is the successful acquisition of the schoolhouse for conversion into affordable housing, which has been a long time in the making.

In November 2018, the Board of Selectmen agreed to sell the property, at 119 Clarks Falls Road, to KNSA after undergoing a request-for-proposals process. The town came in possession of the building earlier that year from the North Stonington Baptist Church, which no longer had use for the property, First Selectman Mike Urgo said.

However, it would take KNSA nearly three more years to officially acquire the property.

Ricker said when it came time to close on the property, the organization learned the original deed from 1849 restricted the property to be used only for educational purposes.

KNSA and the town then pursued action with the Office of the Attorney General to modify the deed’s charitable intent from educational use to affordable housing. The case was settled in New London Superior Court on Aug. 17, with the deed’s restriction officially changed.

According to the agreement with the Attorney General’s Office, the town will receive any proceeds from KNSA’s costs and fees for the property.

The schoolhouse officially was signed over to KNSA on Sept. 17, but Ricker said the rehabilitation process is only just beginning.

The organization’s housing consultant is in the process of looking for grants to fund the project. Ricker said if everything goes smoothly, reconstruction may begin within a year.

Despite the impending restoration, KNSA and the North Stonington Historical Society are eager to celebrate the schoolhouse’s revival.

The school held classes until 1950, when the town’s current school district structure was formed. Saturday’s event will highlight the history of the building, including photos and artifacts from the school’s original days.

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