

# Belmont facility committee to hold open house for 12 town buildings

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Written by Tom Caldwell

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By THOMAS P. CALDWELL, LACONIA DAILY SUN

BELMONT — A citizens' group that last June received the selectmen's blessing to look into the creation of a facilities plan for 12 public buildings is ready to hold an open house.

Organizer Donna Hepp said the Belmont Facility Strategy Committee has been going through previous studies of the various buildings, as well as looking at the town's space needs, and will present what it has learned to those attending the open house, scheduled for Wednesday, Oct. 11, at Belmont High School. Voters rejected a proposal for a new town hall in 2003 and turned down an article seeking to convert the Belmont Mill to a town hall in 2015. At this year's Town Meeting, voters said the mill should be used for town offices or community services and, if not, should be sold.

Noting that there was no funding with the article, Hepp approached the Belmont Board of Selectmen about forming a committee that would bring together people with backgrounds in engineering, design, office planning, real estate, and economic development to assess the town's public buildings and come up with options for their future use.

She said the police station and Town Hall have limited office space, while the library has limited shelf space and accessibility challenges. Another need they identified is indoor space for youth and community recreation.

"There are opportunities for better use of existing buildings, as well as options for leasing or sale of buildings," Hepp said.

The open house will run from 4 to 7:30 p.m., with a committee presentation and question-and-answer period at 6 p.m. There also will be a comment sheet for people to fill out to guide the committee as it proceeds with its work.

A timeline included with Hepp's original proposal calls for the committee to create a draft facility strategy for the selectmen to review in November or December, refining the proposal for a Town Meeting vote, having a facility open house in February or March, and, based on the results of Town Meeting, to identify the next steps for facility planning in April.

The goal is to answer the question, "What is the best way to house our town services, staff, and community programs in the future, and what will it cost?"

Members of the Belmont Facility Strategy Committee are Tom Garfield, Donna Hepp, Carmen Lorenz and Pret Tuthill. The committee's next meeting is Tuesday, Oct. 3, at 6 p.m., on the first floor of the Corner Meeting House.