

## Selectmen receive first cost estimate on Belmont Mill move

By TIM CAMERATO | Aug 08, 2014

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TIM CAMERATO/CITIZEN

THE BELMONT BOARD of Selectmen plan on moving town offices from Town Hall, left, into the Belmont Mill, right.

**BELMONT** — The Board of Selectmen is planning how to best sell voters on moving town offices into the Belmont Mill, after a meeting with architects and construction managers earlier this week.

In December 2013, the town accepted bids from Bonnet Page & Stone Corp. of Laconia and PortOne Architects of Portsmouth to design and renovate the Belmont Mill for use as town offices.

BPS Vice President Keith McBey, on Wednesday, presented the board with the firm's initial cost estimate of \$2,755,256.56 to renovate the mill for town offices. He said they were hoping to have a discussion about the scope and direction of where the project should go.

BPS' cost study assumes construction will take place within a nine month timeframe. Upgrades to the mill building will include new plumbing and mechanical systems (\$574,595), electrical work (\$352,965), and repointing the existing brick veneer (\$306,048).

"I don't know where you guys want to end up on numbers," McBey said.

McBey said the estimate is for building costs, not legal expenses, furnishings, permit applications, etc.

"Those costs usually run in the 15-20 percent range of construction costs," McBey said.

He said adding 20 percent to the \$2.7 million would be a "conservative" estimate of what moving into the mill could cost.

Selectman Ronald Cormier said the price is more than he was expecting. When asked what Cormier sees as a marketable number, he replied he doesn't have one in his head.

“We can sit here and go through number line by line and say 'We can trim this and we can trim that,'” Cormier said. “We're a political body and I know where this is going to come down to because I've gone through these things for years.”

Cormier said the town would need to bond the reconstruction, meaning a warrant article would need a 2/3 vote on Town Meeting Day.

“The last time that happened was probably 1992 for the high school,” Cormier said. “Those types of things don't happen here very often.”

Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin said the board could look at putting money aside in the years leading up to construction, then bond the rest of the costs. She said the town has passed previous bond issues.

“The only way to get this, in my opinion, is to phase it,” Cormier said. “You do the work you can do, you move in with the money that we have and the money that we can scrounge for repairs that we know need to be done so that the building is at least sound.”

Cormier said its too easy for people to ask why the town isn't just constructing a new building.

McBey said the town could pick up dollars by adjusting rooms, but the offices won't have the flow they were hoping for. He said the mill is a historic building and he believes PortOne principal Kelly Davis designed it so that the town offices could be there for a long time.

Mooney said the town's going to have to sell the plan to residents. If construction is phased and only one floor is finished at a time, people will have to use two different buildings to do business with the town.

Selectmen Jon Pike said they've committed to saving the mill and he wants to see the same masonry and contractors do the work so that everything is done right and matches. He said voters might approve the move with the right salesmanship, but probably not for the 2015 Town Meeting Day.

“We would present a plan and take a six month program to present this plan, and have a have several meetings on it, and show them,” Pike said. “I think it swings.”

Mooney said the town has outgrown Town Hall and it needs to be rehabbed.

“It's important that we're going to be able to say to the voters that, by redoing this, we're going to be able to stay in this building for as long as we live probably,” Mooney said.

Mooney said the building has to be a part of a larger plan that explains what will happen to the town's other buildings.

The selectmen asked McBey to breakdown costs into categories of necessary renovations to the mill and turning the mill into a town hall. The selectmen would also like to compare that with the amount of money coming in from the current tenants of the mill.

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Comments (0)

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