Belmont Mill worth saving, contractor tells selectmen

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BELMONT – After hearing a presentation from a masonry expert who said the historic Belmont Mill is worth saving, selectmen asked their general contractor to prepare an estimate in time for a vote at annual town meeting in March.

Scott Whitaker of Building Envelope Specialists – a subcontractor for Bonnette, Page & Stone – told the board last night that with the exception of the interior portion along the wall that burned in 1992, the masonry is in very good condition.

"At the end of the day, this is a solid building. It is a good candidate for keeping, not demolishing," said Whitaker. "This has a lot of life to it."

Whitaker explained the process he used to evaluate the mortar, telling the board "not all mortar is alike." He said the disolorations in the mortar come from different recipes at different times, but that the brick walls are sound.

He said the south side wall, where he believes the fire either started or burned the hottest, is the only problem area. While the exterior-most wythe — or a continuous vertical section of masonry one unit in thickness — was replaced during the reconstruction 17 years ago, the interior wall portions of that wall needed some work.

He said much of the damage to that section likely came during the fire. He said bricks are used to be hot, but what stresses them is when they are hot and then rapidly chilled — like in a fire fought with water.

He said they should leave the outside wythe alone and evaluate and replace the bricks and mortar as needed up to the original 24 inches of base on the first floor and 16 inches on the second floor. Above, that, he said the brick looks good.

Resident Mark Mooney asked Whitaker if he had actually taken apart any of the sections along the wall that was exposed to the hottest fire.

Whitaker said he had not, but had drilled some test holes and determined that some of the wall is spongy and would need some work.

Selectmen unanimously supported the project, but only if it was a repair that would last a minimum of 30 to 40 years.

Whitaker said that with regular maintenance, he feels the building is solid for at least 75 years.

Whitaker, working with Bonnette Page & Stone, said they would have a dollar amount for the proposed work by Dec. 29 or 30.

Selectmen said the Budget Committee has to have it in the form of a warrant article before Jan. 6.

Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin also asked Whitaker to make a presentation to the Selectmen, the same or similar to the one he made to selectmen. Selectmen also said they would like to host a separate question-and-answer session for the two people in addition to the Budget Committee presentation and public hearing.

Selectman Jon Pike said he would like to see the session taped and put up on the town Website for those who couldn’t attend the question-and-answer session.

Contractors said the final budget estimate would be presented to the Board of Selectmen at 4:30 p.m. on Jan. 29 at the Corner Meeting House.

The date of the question-and-answer session will be set after selectmen get the final estimates.

— it’s imperative that we take every possible action to institute strong and sound policing practices," said Attorney General Eric Holder, referring to the August shooting by a white police officer of an unarmed black 18-year-old in Ferguson, Missouri, and the chokehold death weeks earlier of a man in New York City.