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# Tempers flare over Belmont Mill

By TIM CAMERATO | Dec 30, 2014

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**BELMONT** — A new \$3.6 million price tag to renovate the Belmont Mill into town offices made some residents very unhappy on Monday night.

Over the past year, the Board of Selectmen has worked with architects and construction managers to prepare the mill building for a renovation into a Town Hall, and a warrant article to bond the project is expected to come before the Budget Committee on Jan 6.

Keith McBey, vice president of Bonnette, Page & Stone, said the new project cost of \$3,657,578 was designed using “target bidding,” or asking for prices from trusted contractors.

“We were able to pick up over \$100,000 on mechanical and plumbing. On electrical, we were able to hold firm,” McBey said.

In August, BPS and Port One Architects presented the board with a \$2,775,256.56 price tag, in an initial cost study. Those costs didn’t account for “soft costs” or added masonry work.

McBey said soft costs include things like builder’s risk insurance, architectural designs, fire alarms, cable wiring and custodial equipment. In the new budget for the mill, all of those would come to \$680,170.

As a result of further inspection into the mill’s masonry, expert Scott Whitaker, of Building Envelope Specialists, Inc., recommended a repair budget of at least \$752,152 to a segment of brick. The initial cost study only provided \$354,802.55 for masonry work.

“What we’re talking about here is a guaranteed maximum price. It does not represent a competitive bid effort,” McBey said.

He added that all savings picked up during construction would go back to the town.

Selectman Ron Cormier asked McBey the cost to fix the mill without moving in town offices. Cormier presumed the price to be around \$2 million. McBey and Cormier agreed that, without masonry, costs would run around \$1.6 million.

“If it’s worth investing two and a half to repair what’s broken, it’s probably worth investing three and a half to make it what we want it to be,” Cormier said. “To me, it comes down to either we repair it, and do it properly, and renovate it so that it’s useful for uses that this town needs, or you turn it into a pile of rubble.”

Later in the meeting, former selectman Donna Cilley asked how that number was arrived at, since the building is currently functioning. Cormier replied he originally asked BPS what the cost to simply repair the building would be, and he was given

an estimate of about \$1.6 million. With the added masonry costs, that number went up.

Cormier said he is concerned about the budget, and the board has talked about putting together extra reserve funds towards the project. Another goal would be to find other costs to offset the tax burden of a bond.

“We don’t want this to make the budget go up,” Cormier said.

He said an example \$150,000 payment could be made up for in other areas of the budget.

Cilley asked if and how the board could have \$1 million already ready to go into the project.

Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin said there’s \$511,000 in the Capital Reserve Fund. Cormier added they requested \$600,000 “that was previously asked for in other areas, and have moved it for this one-year period” in the upcoming budget.

“We previously used to ask for \$800,000 in highway, now we’re only asking for \$300,000, and we’ve moved the half a million into the building,” Cormier said.

Cormier said they’ve discussed the move with department heads and made sure no projects would be affected.

Cilley said a road study performed in Belmont about 12 years ago said the town should be spending about \$1 million per year on roads. Now, she said about \$700,000 to \$800,000 is slated for road improvements.

“If we need \$600,000 to \$800,000 of road money a year to keep our road improvement plans in place, then that’s what we need to fund. Now, if we don’t need to fund those, we shouldn’t be funding them, not to take those monies and put them somewhere else” Cilley said.

“Separate issues here – they’re separate issues,” Cilley said.

“They are separate issues but, I understand we didn’t need to fund them...” Cormier said before Cilley attempted to cut in.

“Let me finish my g--d--- statement, please!” Cormier shouted.

“Excuse me. I’m not done,” replied Cilley.

She said each department head funds their department based on the community’s needs, and that what she hopes continues to happen.

“To slice and dice so that you can take monies and apply it to something else is a discredit to what we would hope we move forward on,” Cilley said.

Cormier said the insinuation that the board is moving money is wrong.

“The board has not moved money. We have requested different dollar values in the upcoming budget cycle that the Budget Committee has to vet, that the voters have to vet,” Cormier said. “We have not moved any money as a Board of Selectmen.”

Cilley said her statement was that the board seemed willing to put aside road improvements to pass the building renovation.

“It’s got nothing to do with whether or not it’s being passed, it’s got to do with trying to reduce the bond number,” Cormier said.

“We’ll that’s exactly what it is, Ron. It’s passing,” Cilley said.

Beaudin said there’s about \$140,000 to \$150,000 left over from prior year’s programs. \$167,000 is still on the way through highway block grants, and \$150,000 will still be placed in capital reserve. She added that road programs will continue.

The board agreed to go forward with their presentation to the Budget Committee, but look for ways to reduce the cost of masonry rehabilitation. They also agreed reinstate the money from highways and bond the majority of the project.

A final cost to be brought before the committee will be voted on by the selectmen on Jan. 5.

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