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## Question aplenty regarding Belmont Mill reconstruction costs

Jan 19, 2015

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To the Belmont town fathers, the Budget Committee and the taxpayers of Belmont:

We attended the Budget Committee Hearing on Jan. 13 and learned that the proposed cost to Belmont taxpayers to reconstruct the Belmont Mill and refurbish it for use as the Town Hall will be \$3.4 million. Several people attending the meeting asked a number of questions, some of which were not answered, or answered vaguely.

Regarding questions asked about the previous reconstruction in 1998, we were told that a number of studies have been done but not compiled. Apparently the town has several boxes which we were invited to come and rifle through in the hopes of finding the answers to our questions.

Shouldn't it be the job of the selectmen to make a consolidated report available to the public of how the One Million Dollar Grant and the \$215,000 taxpayer dollars were spent in 1998?

Some of the contractors who worked on the mill are still around today. One thing we were told at the meeting of Jan. 13 was that the contracted work was not properly supervised by a party looking out for the interests of the town and there was no qualified professional in charge of the construction.

The town administrator and selectperson in attendance indicated that they had no interest in providing any report to the taxpayers to answer the questions regarding the mill reconstruction of 1998.

Additional questions were asked at the meeting regarding the break down of the \$3.4 million cost into what the cost would be to do the necessary repairs and use it for the same use as now, that is renting it to various groups including the senior center and doctor who currently occupy it and other possible tenants to replace those who have left.

Specific costs need to be provided for repairing the fourth floor, fixing the heating system and repairing the damaged brickwork.

Also no cost was given for the extra work to expand the addition for storage. Shouldn't the taxpayers have the opportunity to decide if it is in our best interest to spend less money and do the repairs?

Questions were also asked regarding seeking out other grant programs and community loan funds. The only answer we were given was that one selectperson believed that the taxpayers should pay for the whole thing because there would be no restrictions on what they could then do with the building.

Doesn't it seem that a \$1 million grant would be worth some restrictions as to the amount of rent we could charge, since we didn't have to pay those capital costs for all those years?

When asked when the rent restrictions for the mill will end, the town administrator said five years; however, at a selectmen's meeting on Jan. 7, 2013, it was noted that it was four to five years. On March 26, 2013, the town administrator said that there could be an update to the rent the town could charge for the remaining years of the grant based on the town's costs.

Further questions were asked regarding why the town needs 17,000 square feet of office and storage space for 11 full-time and five part-time employees (less a small amount allocated to the senior center) when they are using less than 4,000 square feet now. It was noted that the Welfare Department would also move into the new town hall, but that department doesn't seem to be enough to justify such a huge jump in space needs.

Questions were also asked regarding use of the current town hall if they move, and use of the recently purchased bank building. Unofficial answers given were to tear them down. This is also being seriously considered for the historic Gale School.

All of these are legitimate questions that need to be answered in order for us taxpayers to be informed voters when deciding on how best to preserve and utilize the Belmont Mill.

Please attend the following meetings, ask questions and voice your opinion:

1. Tuesday, Jan. 20, 6:30 p.m., bond hearing at Corner Meeting House.
2. Saturday, Jan. 31, town deliberative session.

George and Susan Condodemetraky

Belmont

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Comments (0)

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