Belmont Budget Committee chair Ron Mitchell explains Article 3 in this year’s town warrant that will ask voters to approve $2.5 million for repairs and renovations to the historic Belmont Mill building. Looking on are selectmen Ruth Money, Ron Corner and Joe Pike, along with Town Moderator Alice Rich (standing).

Belmont Mill renovations spark debate at deliberative session

BY DONNA HODGES

The town of Belmont held their first deliberative session last Saturday morning when this year’s 27 proposed articles were read by the official town War- rant for public vote in March, but it wasn’t an easy journey for a few of them.

Among the most de- bated of the proposals voters will see on the bal lot was Article 3, asking for the town to approve $3,357,250 for renova tions to the historic Bel- mont Mill building.

Belmont Budget Committee chair Ron Mitchell ad dressed the topic and be- gan by stating, “We felt ultimately failed and the article was placed onto the warrant for vot ers to now decide.”

Mitchell recapped the last renovations on the building after a devastating fire all but destroyed the property in 1822. He said that the major rebuild more than a decade was done by thelowest bidder, a road contractor who had never been taken on a project of that type.

“The town had no $2,957,250 bond and $400,000 from the Municipal Facilities Capital Reserve Fund, it was also discovered that critical engineering review to look at what ails the histor ic building, it was also finally restore the mill re- turned, current occupants, all of it, the town has been kept to a minimum this year, and recently the roof the town offices at the bank building, and with the exception of current market value main ton of the rent al fees currently being charged.

Town Administrat or Joanne Basoul explained that the terms of the grant used to origi- nally restore the mill re- stricts usage and rental fees until 2019 however. Due to the repairs need- ed, current occupants, with the exception of the Senior Center, will also be moving out of the building and she did not anticipate they would want to move back. Mitchell and select- men made the case that the current town hall is also in dire need of re- pairs and felt it unfair to put any more money into an aged building that does not even meet code.

“We could kill two birds with one stone re- store an historic building and get a new town hall,” said Selectman Ron Corner.

In answer to a ques- tion on what would be come of that building if offices are moved to the townhall, Selectman Ruth Money said, “We’d probably tear it down and add parking. We feel we need that added parking. But, we listen. If someone comes up with a better idea, we’re open to it.”

Tina Fleming of the Budget Committee said she had the select- men’s proposal was opposed. “For $5 million, we’ll lose a new town hall and a showcase in the community,” she said. Cormier added that the board has been told for many times to develop a plan for the downtown area. A doctor’s office is interested in possibly moving into the former bank building, and with the town offices at the mill, the recreation de- partment’s needs would be met, there would be more parking and the mill would be saved.

“In the 11 years I’ve been involved, this is the best plan we’ve seen,” he said.

Hepp’s amendment ultimately failed and the article was placed onto the warrant for vot ers to now decide.

Also up for con- sideration will be the $4,057,600 operating budget that is up已是 $500,172 over last year. A contractual three percent raise for town employees is part of that budget but Basoul and Mitchell explained that insurance expenses for the coming year are down 4.6-percent and the new trash collection contract also means savings of $140,000. Af- ter revenues, the town will only need to raise $5,726,900 through users fees or Highway Block Grant funds.

“The cost of running the town has been kept to a minimum this year, and I want to thank ev- eryone for that,” Mitchell said.

Other articles will ask for funds to be placed in a variety of capital reserve accounts that will then be offset through users fees or Highway Block Grant funds.

“We don’t want to be seen,” he said.

It “still has trade in value, though, and they can get a pretty good trade that way,” he said.

Finally, a petitioned article will seek to rescind the present SB2-format for town meeting and revert back to the traditional town meeting where discus- sions and voting on the town warrant are held on the same day.

A public hearing on that topic will be held on Monday, Feb 23, at 5:15 p.m. in the Corner Meeting House.