Belmont — Selectmen will host a facilitated meeting so residents can participate in determining future of the historic Belmont Mill on Monday, May 4 in the cafeteria of the High School at 7 p.m.

Selectmen, when discussing the mill in a meeting after voters overwhelmingly rejected a plan to restore it and convert it to town offices, said they wanted the voters to tell them what they should do next and how they propose to pay for it.

In preparation for the meeting, Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin reached out personally to all of the stakeholders that she and the selectmen could identify.

The list includes the members of the Heritage Committee, the Historical Society, the people who came to one of two public hearings to voice an opinion about what should happen, the attendees of the annual Town Meeting SB-2 session and anyone who wrote a letter or letters to the editor of the local newspapers.

The circa 1833 mill was restored in the 1990s after being partially destroyed by a fire. During the blaze the roof was destroyed and for three years the insides were exposed to elements.

The town secured a federal grant that allowed the town to rebuild it provided it was used for low- to moderate-income purposes for 25 years.
Three years ago, the town learned there was a soft spot in the flooring on the fourth floor and further examination showed that some of the restoration work that has been contracted during the 1990s renovation was not done as it should have been. Unfortunately for the town, the companies responsible for the questionable work had long since gone out of business and compensation was not possible.

Because of the structural defects on the fourth floor, the Lakes Region Community College relocated its culinary arts program to Canterbury Shaker Village.

The third floor is occupied by Belknap Family Health Center while the bottom floor is home to the Lakes Region Child Care Center that is relocating to larger accommodations over the summer. A portion of the mill is being used by the Belmont Recreation Department.

With the departure of nearly half of the tenants, the town solicited an engineering estimate to renovate the mill and relocate the town offices into it. Budgeted at $3.4 million, the voters rejected the proposal.

The purpose of Monday’s meeting at the High School is for the town residents to evaluate the possibilities of what the mill can be — up to and including the same proposal or complete demolition.

By facilitating the meeting with an independent person — Michael Castagna of Castagna Consulting — selectmen are hoping for some future thoughts to come from the town’s people that aren’t necessarily influenced by the will of the selectmen or the Budget Committee.

What do you think?

Do you think eating what you want in moderation is the best diet?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

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