Belmont Mill eligible for State Register of Historic Places

By TIM CAMERATO | Jul 08, 2015

THE BELMONT MILL could soon join the Province Road Meeting House on the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places.

BELMONT — In addition to the Province Road Meeting House, Belmont could soon see another of its historic landmarks added to the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places.

Members of the Board of Selectmen were informed on Monday night that the Heritage Commission recently applied to have the mill building placed on state list.

Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin told the board she received a letter that day from the state Division of Historical Resources advising her of the information submitted on behalf of the mill and informing that the mill is eligible for the register.

“They would like the town, the Board of Selectmen, to either agree to list the property on the register or not list the property,” Beaudin said.

“Did you do that?” Chairman Ruth Mooney asked fellow Selectman Ron Cormier. He replied that he didn’t apply and only learned of the Heritage Commission’s intent to do so last week.
The Belmont Mill stands on the banks of the Tioga River in Belmont Village. It was built in 1833 and originally housed a spinning and weaving business before switching to hosiery production in 1865. Business was closed in 1970 and rented out to others until a 1992 four-alarm fire tore through the building.

In 1995, a plan to demolish the building was blocked. Led by historian Wallace Rhodes, a coalition then worked to achieve funding and restore the building.

Since its rededication in August 1998, the building hasn’t been without controversy and a combination of tenants leaving and maintenance issues led the town to propose a $3.4 million project to turn it into a town hall. That idea was struck down by a Town Meeting vote in March and another plan for the building has yet to present itself.

Linda Frawley, chairman of the Heritage Commission said the 2002 Master Plan was the catalyst to seeking state recognition of the building. During work on the plan, she said a group of people met and came up with a list of 15 to 20 sites that could be eligible.

As work to renovate the village’s Historic Bandstand came to a close in the past few months, she said the commission decided to undertake researching, documenting and beginning to apply for buildings and important places to add to the Register of Historic Places.

Frawley said it made sense to begin with the mill. “Belmont wouldn’t exist if the mills weren’t located here,” she said.

Wallace Rhodes, vice chairman of the Heritage Commission, agreed and said the designation provides recognition that can help provide grant funding in the future.

“I can’t think of any grounds why anyone would oppose it,” Rhodes said.

According to the state Division of Historical Resources, properties can be removed from the register if a change “harms or destroys its significant historic fabric.” Those types of change include moving a building, replacing its historic building materials with “unsympathetic” ones, or the destruction of its historical attributes.

The register doesn’t add and restrictions or requirements on a building though and owners are “free to maintain or dispose of their property as they choose, without oversight or comment from the NHDR.”

During the meeting, Selectman Jon Pike expressed his support for inclusion on the register.

“I think it should be put on this registry because it is a state building, and we are part of the state and it doesn’t harm or hurt to have,” Pike said.

A decision from the selectmen is expected that their next meeting.