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Mill building's future uncertain

BELMONT — Though the town has been contacted by the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places asking if it wants to list the Belmont Mill building in the organization's registry, listing the building would not solve its problems, town officials say.

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The town had been eyeing the historic mill building as a new home for the town offices, but voters killed that idea at Town Meeting in March. The building's future has been uncertain, and Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin said Wednesday that listing the building in the registry will not do much to alter that uncertainty.

"If the selectmen do decide to list it, we still don't know what will be done with the building," Beaudin said.

Town historians have been working to preserve the 1833 former hosiery plant building that was the "economic heart of Belmont village," according to the town's heritage commission, until it closed in 1970. The mill was saved in the 1990s with the help of a government grant, which expires in four years.

A \$3.3 million warrant article to renovate the mill building for use as town offices was defeated at Town Meeting, with just 164 votes in favor, 467 against.

The mill, which is currently occupied by businesses, has structural and interior problems, particularly on its fourth floor, officials said. The high cost of repair is due in great part to the building's age.

The future of the mill has been up in the air since then, though historian groups have been trying to raise money to save the structure.

The Belmont Heritage Commission has been trying to get the building listed in the registry for some time. Last week, the town received a letter saying that the registry of historic places had reviewed the building and its attributes and found it worthy of listing, Beaudin said. The selectmen must now decide whether to list it; there was some support for listing it among

selectmen at this week's board meeting.

Elizabeth Muzzey, director of the Division of Historical Resources and the state's historic preservation officer, said listing the building could benefit its future. The registry, started in 2001, has hundreds of historic places listed.

"From an advocacy point of view, having state recognition that this is an important place shows that it is important to a lot of people," Muzzey said. Also, being listed could help preservationists acquire additional grants for the building, and may help in several other ways, she said.

Wallace Rhodes, president of the Belmont Heritage Commission, said listing the building would help other town causes as well.

"Listing of the mill and other town-wide properties on the (state register) supports the 2002 community Master Plan, state barn preservation and the Community Revitalization Tax Credit programs," he said.

The Province Road Meeting House, owned by the heritage commission, is already listed in the registry, said commission member Linda Frawley.

dseufert@newstote.com