

Belmont asks public's help: Keep the Belmont Mill or flatten it?

By GAIL OBER, LACONIA DAILY SUN

BELMONT — It's coming down to saving the Belmont Mill building or tearing it down.



Selectmen grappled again Monday night with how to determine what the community wants to do with the building, so they are asking people who are interested in the building's future to join them on Dec. 5 at their regularly scheduled meeting.

Selectmen learned Monday night that it will cost about \$500,000 to do the brick work and seal the exterior, fix the wall where a fire burned the building in 1992, and basically seal the building to prevent further degrading caused by elements and underuse.

Selectman Ron Cormier said the primary piece of information that the selectmen need to know is if the general population wants to save the mill, which will require them spending money on the building.

"Either we bring in a wrecking ball or we spend some money," Cormier said.

They also asked members of the Heritage Committee, who were there Monday for another reason, for their opinion.

Linda Frawley said the commission sent a memorandum that recommends multiple funding sources for saving and rehabbing the mill. She also said Monday she doesn't support saving an old building just to save it, but that the use is equally important.

She said she didn't support the \$3 million bond proposal in 2015 because there was some additional storage space added to the back of the building and that it was going to be turned into town offices for 22 employees.

Board members explained that it was additional space around the elevator shaft on the river side of the mill that could be used for additional storage and that the senior center would still be there.

As to funding sources, selectmen are shying away from them because they tie the hands of the town for a number of years and carry use restrictions.

Right now, for example, LRGH leases space for a doctors' office on the third floor and their contract runs through 2019, which is when the town is free and clear of the use restrictions from the Community Development Block Grant that enabled them to renovate the building some 15 years ago. Had the bond for converting the building into town offices passed in 2015, the town could have been required to pay back a small portion of the grant because not all town operations fall under the the grant's use restrictions.

Resident Kevin Sturgeon noted that there are two buildings in the center of town that merit discussion, with the former TD Bank building being the other one. He said that, in his opinion, voters really need to hear a plan for both of them so they can decide what to do with or spend on either.

Cormier told Sturgeon that if the town gets approval to gradually turn the mill into town offices, which would still include the senior center, then the bank building could be turned into a community center.

Should there not be the will to save the mill, he said it is likely that some of the town offices would have to relocate to the bank building but noted that the building not large enough as it stands right now to hold all of the town hall offices and services.

He said the town has a \$300,000 estimate to rehab the bank building, which includes adding on a pitched roof and getting rid of the glass wall so that it will fit in with the building theme of the rest of the village.

The selectmen invite people to attend their Dec. 5 meeting that starts at 5 p.m. at the Corner Meeting House to tell the board what they would like to do. Comments can also be emails to www.townadministrator@belmonthnh.org (<mailto:www.townadministrator@belmonthnh.org>). or snail mailed to the Town Administrator at Belmont Town Offices, 143 Main St., Belmont, NH 03220.

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