

Belmont Selectmen Want Old Mill Razed

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BELMONT -- Selectmen plan to call a special town meeting next month to seek authorization to demolish the 162-year-old mill building that was saved from the wrecking ball last week by an injunction sought by a group of concerned citizens.

But selectmen were unable to convince the town budget committee this week to endorse its plan to demolish the four-story **Belmont** Mill, which was badly damaged in a fire three years ago and acquired by the town through a tax deed earlier this year.

Three other buildings in the **Belmont** Mill complex had already been torn down when a citizens group won a temporary injunction to keep the mill from being demolished.

Selectman Mark Mooney said voters at the special town meeting will be asked to approve spending \$100,000 to raze the mill and clear the site and will also be asked to voice an opinion on relocating a 40-unit, \$2.4 million housing project for the elderly from Shaker Road to the mill site.

Mooney said the Belknap-Merrimack Community Action Program, housing project developer, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which is providing funding for the housing project, would not want to use the **Belmont** Mill site if any buildings are left there.

Selectmen have been trying to convince CAP officials to move the project from the already approved 4.7-acre Shaker Road site to the mill site, which is located just off **Belmont's** Main Street near municipal buildings such as the town hall and library.

Budget committee members said they wanted more information from selectmen about restoration costs for the mill before they would support its demolition. Wallace Rhodes, president of the **Belmont** Historical Society and spokesman for the group of citizens trying to save the mill, said a structural engineer's report should be available in a week or 10 days and that the report is needed in order to determine whether the mill can be saved.

But Mooney says the town doesn't have the money to restore the building and that it is not economically feasible for a private developer to renovate it. The town had sought a \$700,000 Community Development Block Grant for

rehabilitation of the mill, but the funding request was not approved. Selectmen hired Guarino Associates of Gilmanton to tear down the buildings, and work has been under way on the demolition project since early summer.