

## **Belmont Mill Repair Costs 'Prohibitive'**

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**BELMONT** - A structural engineer says the cost of restoring the fire-damaged **Belmont** Mill would be prohibitive, increasing the likelihood that the 162-year-old structure will be demolished.

Selectmen were stopped from tearing down the mill last month when a group of residents hoping to preserve the mill won a court order temporarily halting the demolition.

But a report by Peter Steffensen of Manchester, a structural engineer recommended by the state's Division of Historical Resources, indicated that renovation costs "would be prohibitive," due to extensive fire and water damage suffered in a five-alarm fire three years ago. Steffensen's report cited continuing deterioration of the structure due to exposure to the elements and the amount of masonry work which would be required.

The report says the mill floors are not even and the existing frame would need to be reinforced.

Wallace Rhodes, president of the **Belmont** Historical Society and a spokesman for the group trying to save the mill, conceded that the report puts the future of the mill in doubt.

He said a general contractor visited the mill and is preparing cost estimates which should determine what direction the attempt to save the mill will take. Selectman Mark Mooney said he was not surprised at the structural engineer's findings. He had said earlier that it would be too expensive to save the mill. Selectmen have been trying to persuade the Belknap-Merrimack County Community Action Program to use the mill site for a \$2.4 million housing project.

Action program officials say they have already put \$100,000 into a site on Shaker Road.