

Belmont Mill's Fate Will Be Decided by Voters

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BELMONT - A special town meeting will be held Nov. 7 to determine the fate of a fire-damaged mill building that dates to the early years of the Industrial Revolution.

Demolition of the **Belmont** Mill, which has a main four-story structure that was built in 1833, was halted last month when a group of residents won an injunction in Belknap County Superior Court.

Voters will be asked to give permission to selectmen to demolish the structure. They will also be asked in a non-binding referendum whether to endorse a proposal by selectmen to use the mill site for a 40-unit housing project being developed by the Belknap-Merrimack County Community Action Program. A third vote would authorize selectmen to transfer ownership of the property to **Belmont** Elderly Housing Inc., a non-profit group.

The town acquired the mill property through a tax deed earlier this year and demolished several fire-damaged buildings before the injunction. Selectmen have been trying to persuade county program officials to relocate the \$2.4 million federally funded housing project from Shaker Road to the mill site, maintaining the Shaker Road site is too small and presents traffic problems.

But those hoping to save the old mill want to use it as part of the housing project or as a community facility.

Wallace Rhodes, president of the **Belmont** Historical Society, said a contractor has estimated it will cost \$900,000 to rehabilitate the facility.

He called that a reasonable figure but said a money source will have to be found.

The town's application for \$700,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds for to restore the entire mill complex was rejected earlier this year by the Office of State Planning.

The \$900,000 repair estimate was developed by Jeffrey Downing of Conneston Construction of Gilford and was received a few days after a structural engineer insisted restoration costs would be prohibitive.

Peter Steffensen of Manchester said extensive fire and water damage suffered

in a fire three years ago, and continued deterioration due to exposure to the elements made the work cost-prohibitive.

But Rhodes said the \$900,000 might be an achievable number if a source of funding can be found.

County program officials have been granted a six-month extension by the Department of Housing and Urban Development on the housing project but say they must break ground by September of next year.

The program wants to be reimbursed by the town for what it estimates are \$100,000 in costs incurred at the Shaker Road site.