

**Belmont Town Hall Study Committee Report**  
**Submitted to the Board of Selectmen - June 14, 2004**

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( Includes Vollmer Associates Town Hall roof evaluation, cost opinion )

The Town Hall Study Committee acknowledges, with appreciation, information from the NH Division of Historical Resources on funding and code compliance.

Committee files, research and notes will be deposited in the Belmont Library for public availability and as historical resource information.

## **Town Hall Study Committee Background & Introduction**

Selectmen named a newly comprised “Town Hall Study Committee” (THSC) on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2003. Committee members were all residents, and actively involved in local efforts including Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Zoning Board of Adjustment, Cemetery, Library, Recreation, Budget, Historical Society and 2001-2 Master Plan committees – among others.

The working volunteer group pledged to explore alternatives for town office/municipal needs, and identify innovative, other than local tax funding sources.

Research and fact-finding were the emphasis for the first six months. Committee efforts began with gathering Belmont population facts and information, including pertinent studies and earlier research. Although no built out analysis or cost of community services studies are available, or in progress, best accepted demographic source projections indicate the nearly 7000 population reported in the 2000 US Census – could reach 9400 - by the year 2025. \*

Other tasks completed in 2003 were a walk-through of current Town Hall offices, unused second floor – and consultation with PlanNH leadership.\*\* The Town Hall Study Committee was also consulted regarding support for purchasing adjacent 147 Main Street property for parking and possible municipal office use. No recommendation was made.

Options were extensively discussed during meetings, informal reviews, interviews and research through early spring 2004. Several updates to Belmont Selectmen, Town staff and the community were provided at BOS meetings, individually, on request and through the [Belmont Better Times](#).

Appointed committee members included:

**Ken Ellis, Linda Frawley, Board of Selectmen representative Chairman Doralyn Harper, Ken Knowlton, Jeffrey Marden, David Morse, and Norma Patten. Ron Mitchell and Nikki Wheeler** joined the group after formation, Ken Ellis did not participate, and Ken Knowlton served as chairman.

\*Projections are based on the Census and updated by Regional Planning Commissions and New Hampshire statewide planning officials. For details online, see the State Data Center at [www.state.nh.us/osp/sdc/sdc.html](http://www.state.nh.us/osp/sdc/sdc.html)

\*\*PlanNH is the New Hampshire professional team of architects, designers, engineers and planners guiding 1995-1996 Belmont Mill design and preservation feasibility discussions, following Belmont Civic Profile determination of community priorities, needs and direction. See [www.plannh.nh.gov](http://www.plannh.nh.gov) and [www.ceinfo.unh.edu/CommDev/CommProf.htm](http://www.ceinfo.unh.edu/CommDev/CommProf.htm) A 2000 Belmont Community Profile was promoted and later urged before and during the recent Master Plan, for updating, as recommended by UNH and other civic engagement professionals.

## Viewpoints

Opinions were plentiful, including:

- Belmont citizens were generally not well-informed about any major community facilities needs, town or school, concerned about fiscal impacts and the 2003 proposal was a surprise
- New construction was more desirable than annexes, relocation or separating town staff (including adapting usage of lower floor Corner Meeting House.)
- Project funds, other than local taxes, were and are available from government, private foundation and other sources
- Over recent years significant taxpayer dollars\* have been recommended for current town office repair and renovation, including a projected \$75,000. in 2003.
- Town Hall and the Village are – and will be - affected by Route 140 eventuality and Route 106 proximity.
- Operations, moving/transitional/relocation costs seem nebulous and building/energy efficiencies and alternatives appeared unexplored.
- No formal Space Facilities Needs Committee or Building Committee has existed in recent years. Many 2002-3 Budget Committee could not recall 2001-6 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) adoption or use.
- Belmont 2001-6 CIP recommended specific town office and community center building projects – including second floor Town Hall renovations and the relocation and recycling/reuse of Gale School\*\* as a village community center, among other possible uses (1999 documented moving cost to Belmont Mill adjacency was approximately \$150,000. including assessment the building was “sound and very movable.”) Updated feasibility\*\*\* suggests utilization of some 8600 square feet for support and program space, before maximizing and/or annexing features.

\*Town Annual Reports show \$38,917. spent in 1997 Town Hall renovations, \$32,000. voted via warrant article for “Town Hall improvements including the replacement of the roof,” 1992 Master Plan recommendation IV.25 in the 2001-2006 supported CIP committee endorsement of \$115,000 to renovate the second floor for office, storage (files) and meeting use including installation of handicapped access. Despite prioritization, budget and community support, several repair/renovation/reuse recommendations have missed implementation, to date.

In 2003 a full Town Hall structural assessment proposed by Town Administrator McLelland was rejected by BOS (RFQ, RFP, specifics unknown) and a 2004 roof evaluation report (RFP, specifics unknown) was commissioned to Vollmer Associates.

\*\* Gale School Committee information and interview by Ken Knowlton, Helen & Brad Corriveau July 24, 2003

\*\*\* Christopher P. Williams, Architects, Feasibility Study for the Shaker Regional School District, serving the Communities of Belmont & Canterbury, February 1, 2003

- The Belmont Mill, earlier proposed for town offices, offers space options as leases expire and community needs change, without compromising the Community Development Block Grant intent – including space “swaps” with current Town Hall.
- Continuity concerns with reports being “shelved” or forgotten: from PlanNH to 92 Master Plan and 2001-2006 CIP
- A 2002 Master Plan update listed no major community facilities with critical, immediate needs
- Misinformation regarding Americans for Disability Action (ADA) and code requirements in renovating historic structures, and media reports quoting the 2002 Master Plan as source that the current Town Hall “had outlived its usefulness” (Laconia Citizen June 26, 2002) or terming “unsafe”. (Concord Monitor – December 19, 2002)
- Architectural historians have identified eligibility for National Historic Register status of the Belmont “Factory Village District”. (Key inventory documents were shared at a summer 2003 THSC meeting, following Section 106 required historic/archaeological assessment\*, paid for by the Department of Transportation, that replaced and reversed an earlier, pre-Belmont Mill renovation study.)
- Some 40 New Hampshire town halls/offices have undergone successful renovation in last 10 years\*\*
- New construction site impacts to Village located eligible and listed National Historic Register sites (Gale School and Library) and the award-winning Belmont Mill adaptive reuse project appear omitted.

To summarize, the need for a new Town Hall had not been “unquestionably” established in some committee and community member minds.

Questions, in fact, consumed a great deal of time, in THSC efforts to identify and quantify need, costs and funding opportunities – while identifying alternatives – all without budgeted resources or staff time.

Chief concerns were:

1. Need
2. Cost(s)
3. Funding

\*Author, consultant and architectural historian was Elizabeth Hengen; archaeological section remains in progress by Victoria Bunker. The study was presented at a 2003 Route 140 Advisory Task Force Committee, Kim Koulet of the Lakes Region Planning Commission is chairman)

\*\* According to the N.H. Division of Historical Resources 2002: Acworth, Amherst, Andover, Antrim, Boscawen, Campton, Canterbury, Claremont, Concord, Danbury, Deerfield, Franklin, Gilsum, Goffstown, Greenfield, Hancock, Hinsdale, Holderness, Lancaster, Langdon, Lempster, Littleton, Manchester, Milford, New London, Penacook, Peterborough, Pittsfield, Plymouth, Rindge, Rochester, Rollinsford, Sanbornton, South Hampton, Stratham, Sutton, Walpole, Washington, Webster, Wilmot, Wilton. At least three of these (Peterborough, Plymouth and Rindge) were compared to Belmont for “government services” and other factors used for 2003 salary increase study.

## Need, Cost(s) & Funding

Space requirements changed significantly, since a May 2002 ad hoc committee\*\* chose an architect and design scheme through a \$9000. Selectmen authorization. Town staff was quoted in the Citizen as possibly proposing a “7000 – 8000 square foot building.” Three months later the structure grew to “8500 – 10,000 square feet.” Published materials reported town needs would be handled both for “the next 15 – 20 years” and “30 to 50 years” in Town staff written information for January 22, 2003 public hearing.

December 2002 program space needs were presented as 15,230 square feet with “development cost opinion” of \$2,295,712 - further detailed as project cost per square foot of \$151. with basement and \$225. without basement. Among assumptions was the site next to the Belmont Mill (town purchased land from PSNH several years ago and demolished an ancillary building once proposed for recreation and/or museum use) and \$32,000. for appliances, fixtures and furniture.

### U.S. national average, preliminary cost estimate\*\* town halls of 15,230 square feet

Total project cost	low	median	high
	\$1,312,000.	\$1,654,000	\$2,210,000

### Concord, NH area, preliminary cost estimate for low rise offices 15,230 square feet

Total project cost	low	median	high
	\$1,048,000.	\$1,356,000.	\$1,750,000.

Unit cost estimating, typically used for fiscal projections (including tax rate impact and CIP) is not a guaranteed maximum price. Additionally, construction estimates are “pro forma”. True cost and impact occurs at project acceptance, with change orders. From cost of living, inflation, unknowns, the \$2.3M proposal of 2002 is very likely understated, according to several area contractors, architects and engineers committee members interviewed.

Among questions of space requirements and proposed design were:

- operating costs
- energy efficiencies
- aesthetic displacement of the Belmont Mill, our Village cornerstone
- loss of village green (advanced in Plan NH charrette, 1998 Town Report and the 2002 Master Plan)
- lack of built out analysis and other growth/demographic forecasting
- some 2136 square feet of public and private conference rooms
- predominance of private/walled offices for a public building
- The Belmont Mill, earlier proposed for town offices, offered space options as leases expire, without compromising the Community Development Block Grant intent – including space “swaps” with current Town Hall.

\*Ad hoc committee members were Town Administrator Don McLelland, Town Planner Candace Daigle, Land Use Technician Rick Ball and Budget Committee Chairman Ron Mitchell.

\*\* Source: RSMMeans/First Source Reed Construction Data June 2004

- Continuity concerns with reports being “shelved” or forgotten: from Plan NH to 92 Master Plan and 2001 CIP
- A 2002 Master Plan update listed no major community facilities with critical, immediate needs
- no independent space analysis or apparent standardization
- concerns to Belmont Mill future usage, annex opportunities, due to parking and light loss (38 Town Hall 47 Mill projected by SHG)
- smart growth/sustainability issues (pedestrian & trail friendly walkways vs. more asphalt, limited integration of today’s multi-building, campus municipal complex)
- no renovation/reuse plan for current Town Hall established
- missing correlation to “footprint” of Town Shed, or other capital needs (Fire and Police) approved in 2001-6 CIP and 2003 contracted update
- site and design assumptions lacking Library impact (both as Town’s only National Historic Register listed building, with hopes and capital reserves accumulating for renovations and possible addition.)
- funding sources relied 100% on local taxpayer (in a bedroom community with 79% of population family households or seniors) in a challenged property tax climate
- no consideration of project delivery alternatives, as in Design/Build

According to an expert, engineer and manager provided by the NH Municipal Association to aid members, building programs have identifiable phases:  
vision, programming, design, redesign, construction, punch list

Top three costs of municipal projects in ranked order are:

1. Operations
2. Interest
3. Construction

The Belmont building process has been shortchanged without a Town Facilities Space Needs Study, Feasibility study (including existing conditions, operating & maintenance costs, structural screening) and a Building Committee – likely since the late 90s. Those steps – and the resulting “branding” of expanded town offices as a government, rather than citizen, grassroots or community-driven request -- regardless of whether new or renovated construction – is unfortunate.

For any Town Hall, other buildings to move forward, key assumptions need to be in place, before design/architect selection, including and not limited to:

1. Agreement of needs being met
2. \$ Sources (cash reserves, private donations, CDBG/other grant, bond revenue)
3. Uses (shared, flexible, including Town/School)
4. Written statement of purpose (low operational dollars, high performance building, multi-year phased project)
5. Community, neighborhood impacts and expectations
6. Open communication with project “owners”

## **Other Communities**

Belmont is special, unique and our town.

Planning, without reinventing the wheel and through other examples, can be helpful in a project of this magnitude and importance.

Some highlights of THSC research:

**Boscawen** - \$1.6M project renovated and expanded town offices with annex, elevator, adapted space including police department and future growth capacity (upper floors) now utilized as rental/revenue. A Selectman wrote a successful \$350,000 LCHIP grant.

**Canterbury** – tying together three existing buildings (previously Police, Fire departments and Town Highway garages) into one cohesive, accessible 7000 square foot library and meeting hall and a new 20,000 square foot municipal safety complex, employing energy efficient “insulating concrete forms” is also in progress

**Deering** – adding a small attachment to historic Town Hall, elevator, revamping entranceway, accessible bathroom facilities and renovating “unheated, inaccessible and structurally unsound second floor” (\$550,000.)

**Derry** – converted its “poor condition” Town Hall to an arts center, including A/C using basement heat exchanger, adding a sprinkler system, full window replacement for a total \$1.5M renovation cost

**Hill** – swapped town offices for “smart school” elementary addition

**Loudon** – Building Committee re-engaged, reviewing modified plan built in Moultonboro and energy efficiencies of Canterbury municipal projects

**Madison** – offered voters choice, after key assumptions, costs/use established of new or renovated Town Hall as warrant article. Overwhelming choice was renovation, and the building was moved to a hillside location for energy, operating efficiency.

**Meredith** – determined recently several public facilities may be at/above respective capacities, advised at Town Meeting, appointing a Space Needs Committee for comprehensive 2004 evaluation, anticipates findings may impact CIP goals and building priorities Established a “municipal building expendable trust fund” eight years ago, currently totals \$450,000+

**Moultonboro** – completed a new municipal safety complex last year, following new town office, both developed as modified Design/Build projects

**New Hampton** – recent reroofing Town House estimates range \$8,250. to \$19,250. and replacing, restoring windows, all repairs estimated as \$30,000. to \$41,000.

**Rollinsford** – revamped, renovated and added elevator to revitalize Town Hall (Harvey Construction, builders)

**Sanbornton** – established \$25,000 trust fund for Town Hall renovations

(Chairman's note: Certainly there are many examples. These are the projects brought to my attention from committee member research and advisories. This summary is compiled from newsclips, other public domain information.)

## Recommendations

Any major community project for our town or school deserves careful planning, affordability, a long-term economic basis incorporating Village center commercial, minimum impact potential, citizen consensus and a process that creates and constructs appropriate Belmont civic architecture.

The design cart may be ahead of the collective community and taxpayer horse. Regretfully, some have characterized this specific THSC as a group choosing new construction over renovation/adaptive reuse. We know everyone wishes it were that well defined, or as easy a choice.

Our report asks many questions raised by other residents, and suggests a communications need as well as significantly different ideas for the Belmont future. Town population has not only grown in recent years, but also changed. The most recent census reports that more than 62% of residents lived in a different county, state or house in 1995.

Specifically, a majority of this committee urges Selectmen to:

1. "Go fast slowly ... the tax is at the max."\*
2. Meet jointly with THSC and consultant, RightRoad founder David Provan (NHMA provides two hours consultation for member communities) by July 30, 2004, schedules permitting
3. Sponsor a Community Profile event by October 3, 2004\*\*
4. Continue to discuss and plan CIP with Shaker School District and Canterbury, including jointly recycling/reusing the Gale School "among the most architecturally distinguished schools in the state."
5. Ask Town management to investigate, develop and report on funding alternatives by year-end, including impact fees
6. Prepare interim plans through 2006 including Belmont Mill (partial) usage where Day Care now located, staff relocation to lower level Corner Meeting House and other creative space sharing and swaps.
7. Budget 2005 current Town Hall roof replacement, following RFQ and RFP, considering Mires/Vollmer Associates, other findings\*\*\*

\* Quote from the PlanNH Charrette, Belmont citizen regarding Belmont Mill reuse possibilities or demolition decision (January 1996)

\*\* Volunteers from this THSC and Master Plan steering committee, are among residents already committed to staffing a 2004 Community Profile

\*\*\* 1988 Dennis Mires, AIA assessment reported current Town Hall "can handle approximately 50 psf/live load/code for office use" – and assembly, for use by more than 50 people would need reinforcement for 100 psf/live load "as proposed. Some THSC members urged adding a fire suppression (sprinkler) system, possibly serving other buildings, based on availability of municipal



water and location of the water storage system. Roof replacement was recommended in April 2004 Vollmer study.

8. Reopen meetings and discussions with NH Department of Transportation on Route 140 design progress, because of any future Village Center building program impact.
9. Plan and act on citizen priorities from Community Profile and alter CIP priorities as appropriate.
10. Re-establish a Building Committee in 2005 including diverse and expert residents, following community wide interest solicitation.

Three key parts of the Master Plan vision, adopted by the Planning Board two years ago, further support these recommendations:

“ ...The Town recognizes its potential for growth and is committed to the protection of its unique natural resources, history and recreational opportunities ... Preserve and protect the rural quality of life including natural, agricultural and historic features ... Develop the Village Area into a unique and attractive combination of residential, commercial, historical and recreational uses to serve as a focal point for the town...”

Belmont clearly values its heritage – as evidenced by the approval at March 13, 2004 Town Meeting – establishing a five member Belmont Heritage Commission, now included as one of at least 35 statewide.

Our future is equally valued, and we formally thank Belmont Selectmen for the opportunity to serve as your appointees.

Committee files, research and notes will be gathered over the next several weeks and filed in the Belmont Library for public information and access, including Saturdays.

## **Funding Sources Summary**

Opportunities are wide-ranging and include government, foundation, individual and tax incentive programs. Each category features various types of grants, from competitive to non-competitive and especially in the case of federal support, demonstration or pilot projects.

Belmont has not aggressively sought other than taxpayer funds, since the financial packaging of the Belmont Mill in the mid 1990s through multiple forms of support and particularly a Community Development Block Grant authorized through Belknap County and its Economic Development Council. CDBG monies still exist.

Tax credit public/private programs through via Community Development Finance Authority projects were outlined to THSC, and listed in the 202 Master Plan. Further and innovative options, related to economic development incentives remain available through programs including Main Street and the new Downtown Initiative, in partnership with NH Housing Finance Authority, NH Office of Energy and State Planning and NH Department of Resources and Economic Development.

USDA – Rural Development Administration Community Facilities grants are a traditional and key source for building projects, either through direct, partial grant or low interest, guaranteed loans. Several local and area residents are USDA staff professionals.

New Hampshire's major community foundation, the NH Charitable Foundation, includes a regional Lakes Region Charitable Foundation with at least four Belmont residents serving leadership roles as trustees and/or incorporators. Regular programs and training sessions are available – as most communities and non-profits do not include grant writers, development or marketing professionals on staff.

Additionally, many regional and national foundations exist including Pardoe, Kresge, Reconnecting America and Save America's Treasures (SAT) – with project, capital grant, preservation purposes. Both Canterbury and Laconia communities are significant recipients of SAT funds, administered through the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Technical assistance and building conservation resources include the Preservation Institute in Vermont, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, NH Division of Historical Resources, among others.

The NH Conservation License Plate Program (“Moose Plate”) supplements existing state conservation and preservation programs with additional funding through voluntary plate purchases.

New Hampshire Land & Community Heritage Program has provided matching grants to public entities and non-profit organizations, to help communities acquire and preserve natural, cultural and historical resources.

Transportation Enhancement Act (TEA) funds for more than 10 years have helped develop “livable communities” , offering 80% support for a wide range of projects from sidewalks and trails, to removal of outdoor advertising, scenic beautification and historic cycle is 2005. Of note, design and engineering services can be applied for within the grant request, also on an 80:20 matched basis.

Impact fees for capital projects are utilized by many New Hampshire communities in growth situations and concerned about costs of community services. The Belmont Planning Board, through member Jeffrey Marden, provided a presentation from Bruce Mayberry, recognized regional expert in impact fee methodology during 2003.

### **Historic Buildings and Code Compliance**

Courtesy of New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources

<http://www.state.nh.us/nhdr>

[http://historicprop.com/oldhome\\_codecomp.html](http://historicprop.com/oldhome_codecomp.html)

### **References and Research**

Key town reports reviewed included:

Belmont Master Plan(s) -- through November 2002 adopted version

Capital Improvement Plan(s) --- various through 2001-2006

Town Reports --- 1998 and other years

Board of Selectmen and Planning Board minutes: 2001-2003

Strategic plan commission 2001 to SEA Consultants

Town Hall Study Committee(s) 2002 and 2003

Impact fees 2003

Getting to Smart Growth: 100 Policies for Implementation, published by the Smart Growth Network, International City/County Management Association, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and others 2002

Belmont Historical Society records and members

Belmont Civic Profile report

Gale School Committee files – courtesy of Helen & Brad Corriveau

PlanNH Charrette 1996

Gale School Feasibility Study, Christopher P. Williams Architects

NH Municipal Association 2004 workshop “Managing Municipal Building Projects: Budgets, Contracts and a Successful Project Team”

NH Preservation Alliance 2004 conference “Saving Community Landmarks and Landscapes”

Interviews, Selectmen and/or staff: Communities of Antrim, Boscawen, Franklin,  
Loudon, Madison, Meredith, Moultonboro, Wakefield – 2002-4  
Meeting with Jeffrey S. Taylor Associates, Mr. Taylor – June 2003

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Further information page detailing “Historic Buildings and Code Compliance” is  
furnished from the NH Division of Historical Resources.

Final attachments include Vollmer Associates April 2004 “Town Hall Roof  
Evaluation” and a June 3, 2004 conceptual cost estimate.