



BELMONT  
MILL  
design  
charrette

January 26 & 27, 1996

**PLAN NH**

• The Foundation for Shaping the Built Environment

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## BACKGROUND ON THE CHARRETTE

### The Mill

The Belmont Mill is one of the oldest manufacturing buildings remaining in New Hampshire. It was built in about 1833 as a textile mill for the spinning of cotton and weaving of cotton sheeting in what was then Upper Gilmanton Village. It is a contemporary with both the Belknap Mill in Laconia, and some of the early Amoskeag Mills in Manchester.

The mill building was converted to hosiery knitting in 1865, just prior to the incorporation of the Town of Belmont. By about 1900, the manufacturing complex had grown to include not only the main mill, which had been raised from the original three stories and attic to a full four stories, but also a variety of support structures, including a picker house and finishing room.

The facility was enlarged and modernized several times in this century. In 1992, it was severely damaged by fire, bringing to a close a period of manufacturing activity in Belmont Village that had spanned several generations over a period of 160 years.

### The Charrette

A charrette is simply an intensive design session, normally involving both design professionals and private citizens. It is effectively a graphic version of "brain storming". Participants suggest as many potential design ideas as possible for consideration by the group collected. Ideas are sorted out, and preliminary plans are developed for those which appear to have merit.

The Belmont Mill has generated considerable discussion within the community over the past year. Some feel it is beyond salvation, others are not yet ready to reach that conclusion. The Belmont Charrette investigated both of those ideas.

One design team assumed that the mill was beyond reasonable repair. They based all of their recommendations on the premise that the mill should be taken down, and that all potential re-use activities should focus on the redevelopment of a vacant site.

The second team assumed that the mill could be restored, at a cost, and that all recommendations should bring forth activities that were consistent with the existing structure, and which could support the cost of the rehabilitation.

Both efforts accepted the basic plea from all citizens that the tax resources of Belmont were at their limits, and that the Town should not be looked to to take on a major re-development with local resources.

In the course of two days, numerous re-use activities were suggested by the citizens of Belmont for this site:

Commercial or retail activity	School District Offices
A day care center	A clinic
A senior center	Industrial activity
Town Offices	Expanded library
Senior housing	A museum
Athletic fields	Post Office
Community kitchen	Rentals to small businesses
Kindergarten	Meeting place in P.M. (e.g. Zoning Bd.)

Some questions were raised by the townspeople. What will it all cost? What will be the long-term economic impact on Belmont? Can we afford to retain Belmont's primary historic monument? Will our taxes be raised if we try to revitalize the mill? The following pages outline the design teams' proposals in response to these questions and the suggestions above.

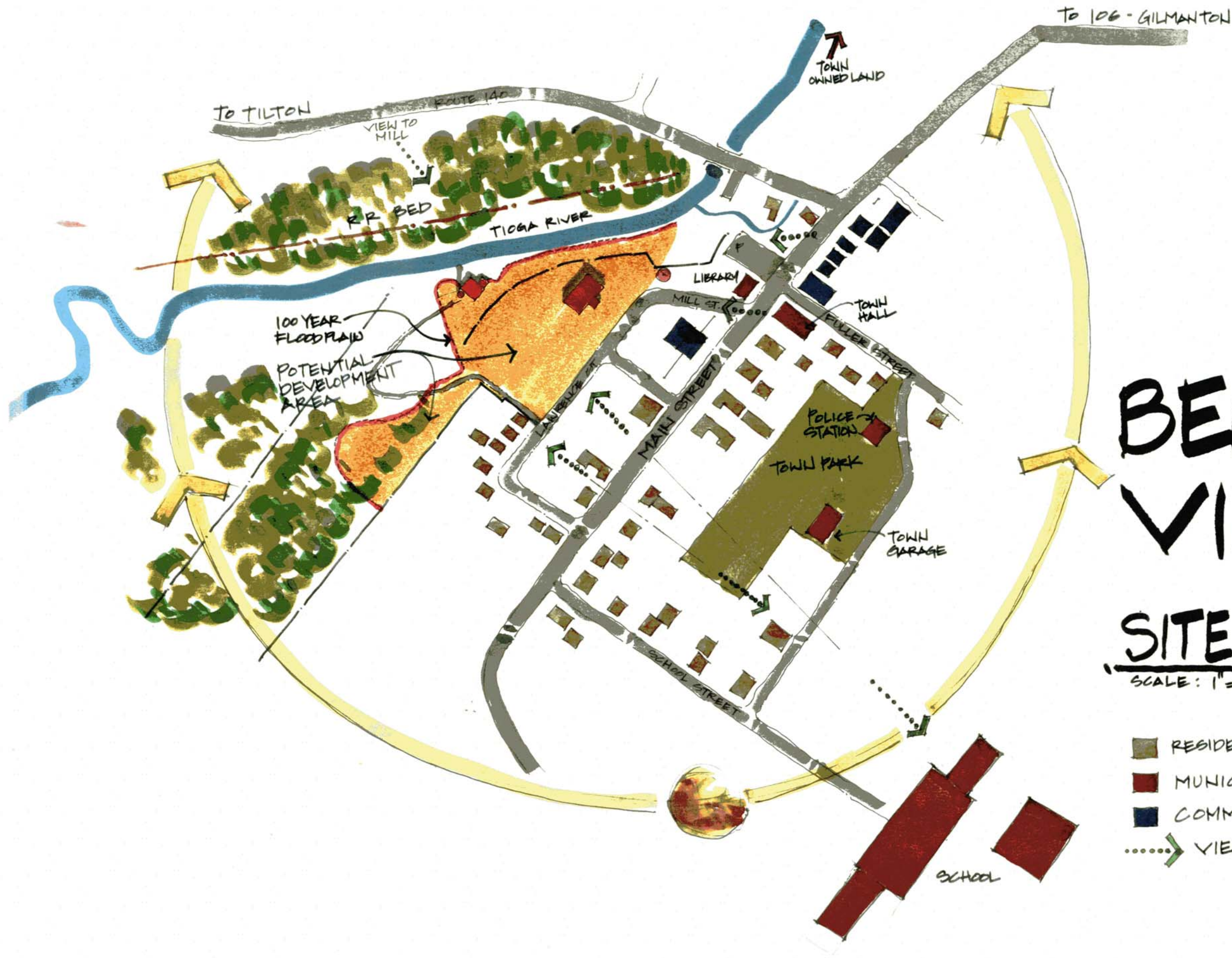
## SITE ANALYSIS

It was generally agreed that the mill site is an integral location for the residents of Belmont. All of the ideas explored reinforce the idea of the site as a village core, whether anchored by an expanded town green, a new senior center, or another use for the building and/or site that takes into account the needs of the townspeople. Although adjacent Route 106 has several businesses that reside in Belmont, the real town center is located in the village, which makes the mill site important.

Physical constraints of the site were addressed during the charrette. The parcel, while totalling 8.2 acres, is an awkward, long, thin shape. It has unusable portions due to this shape, and also to its proximity to the Tioga River, as some of it is in a flood plain slope. While these factors render part of the land unusable, overall it remains a key location in the center of town.

The need to respect the site was also discussed. Whether the mill building is renovated or a new building constructed, retaining the character of the traditional brick structure was considered a significant goal. Replacing the existing building with a pre-engineered industrial structure, for example, would not dovetail with the traditional style exemplified by the library, the bank, and the church. Also, automobile traffic in the village area would be more desirable than commercial trucking. These factors all contribute to the decisions to be on the future of the Belmont Mill.





# BELMONT VILLAGE

## SITE ANALYSIS

SCALE: 1" = 100'-0"

- RESIDENTIAL
- MUNICIPAL/PUBLIC
- COMMERCIAL
- VIEW CORRIDOR



## OPTION B: LEVEL SITE 2

Again, the building is razed and the site is re-developed into a town green motif. The gazebo would be moved as shown on the plan, and a new building would be constructed on the site at a later date. The scheme would be to first demolish the existing building, saving the tower and belfrey, which could be donated or leased to the Belmont Historical Society for a museum.

Then, a town green would be created on approximately two acres of the total parcel. Again, this solution would address the need to lessen the potential liability to the Town and produce a lot that would be viable for future for future development.

### Estimated costs would be:

Demolition	\$40,000
Commercial site preparation	\$15,000
Implement town green per plan	\$160,000
Market one lot	\$2500
TOTAL	\$217,500

Again, the sale of one lot would defray the costs, but the timing would be unknown. The demolition would take place as soon as possible, with the park construction extending over a period of at least two years. Future construction on the site would occur with the sale of the lot, which could take several years.

## OPTION A: LEVEL SITE 1

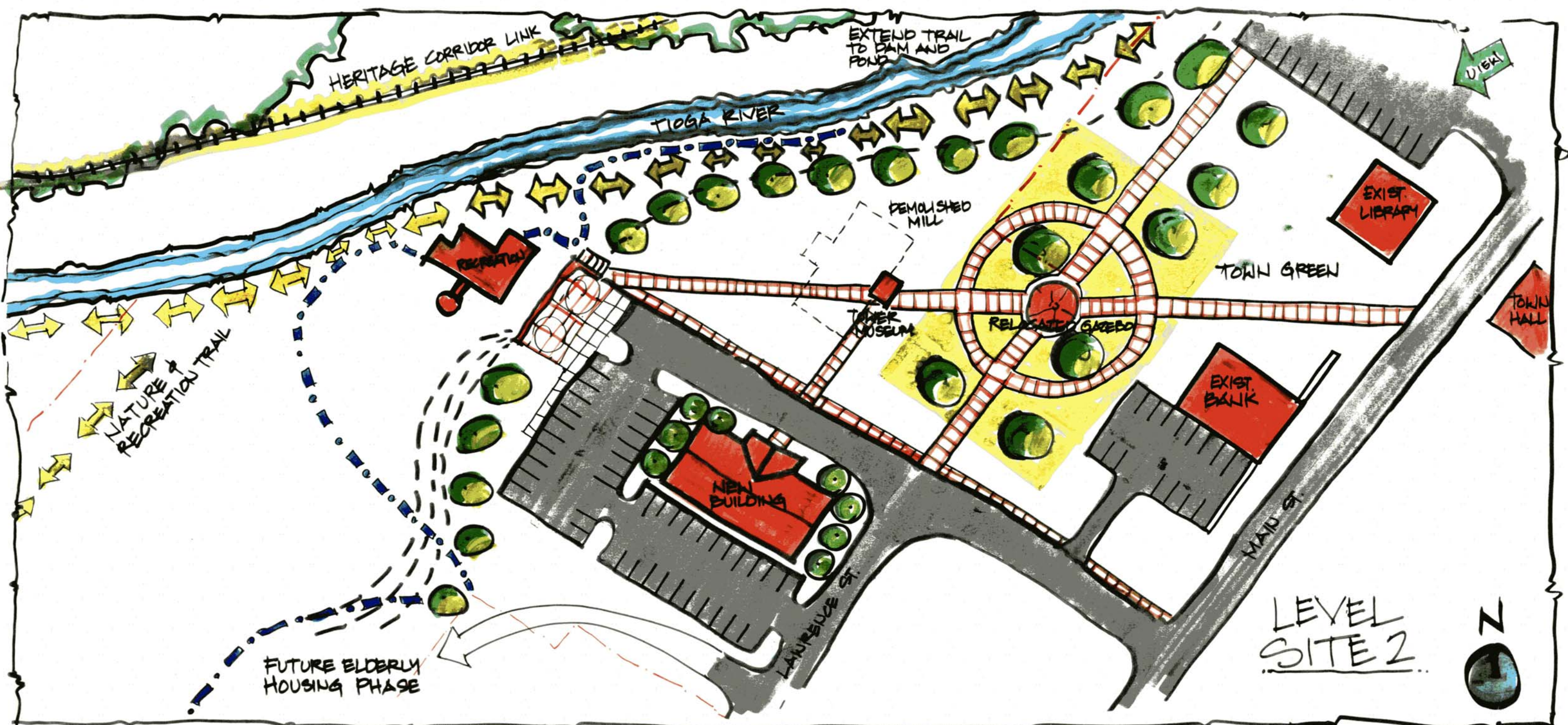
This option would involve leveling the site as proposed previously. The immediate benefit to the town would be the removal of a long standing, controversial problem. By clearing the site, the Town would be ready to accommodate new development. The estimated cost to the taxpayers would be \$75,000. It would be possible to retain some architectural elements of the building to display in an adjacent location. It was suggested that the powerhouse could have a display of artifacts pertaining to the mill with access controlled by the Belmont Historical Society. The bell tower could also be moved to another location.

This solution, while expedient, may not yield the desired results. The funding source for re-development would be unknown, and potentially the site would lie dormant for an unspecified period of time. The impact on the town could be a dead end. There is a limited market for redevelopment right now, as stated by local economic consultants.

### Estimated costs would be:

Demolish remaining building	\$40,000
Grade, loam and seed	\$25,000
Market sites for sale	\$5000
TOTAL	\$70,000

What does this address and /or achieve? It reduces or eliminates potential liability and provides an area for future redevelopment. The sale of 3.2 acres, the most usable area of the 8.2 acre parcel, at \$20,000 to \$40,000 per acre would yield \$65,000 to \$125,000. Timing is unknown on the sale of the lots. Maybe the entire 3.2 acre area would sell in 3-6 years, or it could be sub-divided into three 1.1 acre parcels with the assumption that one is sold every 2 years.



## OPTION C: RE-USE OF THE MILL

The scheme would be to stabilize the building and clean up the site. Let's take up to one year to align tenants and users, while pursuing grants and alternate funding. Then, the mill would be renovated in phases as money becomes available from various sources. New construction would be scheduled as needed.

The re-use of the mill addresses and/or achieves these goals:

- creates a town center.
- maintains the cultural heritage of the community.
- would incur a minimum of cost to the Town, if funded successfully.
- ultimately would create a positive cash flow.
- would address specific community needs.

The costs associated with the re-use of the mill would be considerably more than the other two options discussed here. However, this project would be more likely to attract the interest of funding partners, have greater eligibility for those funds, and would bring more revenue back into the community in the final analysis.

Estimated costs would be:

Stabilize building/Site clean-up	\$25,000
Submit grant applications	\$5000
Renovation costs/Phase 1	\$700,000
Renovation costs/Phase 2	\$120,000
New Construction	Private \$\$
TOTAL	\$950,000

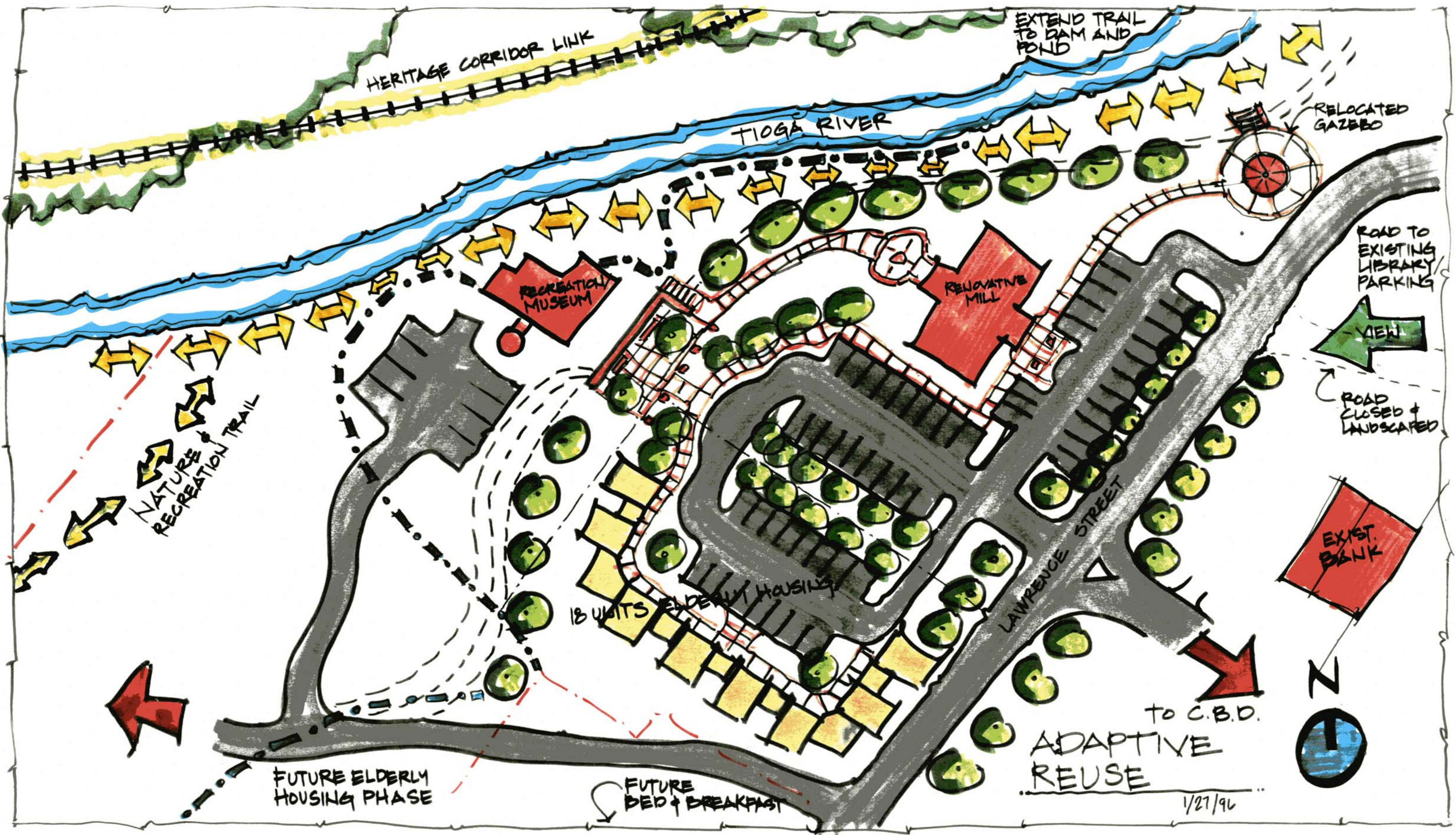
( The sale of a 1.2 acre lot would net \$20,000 to \$40,000 ).

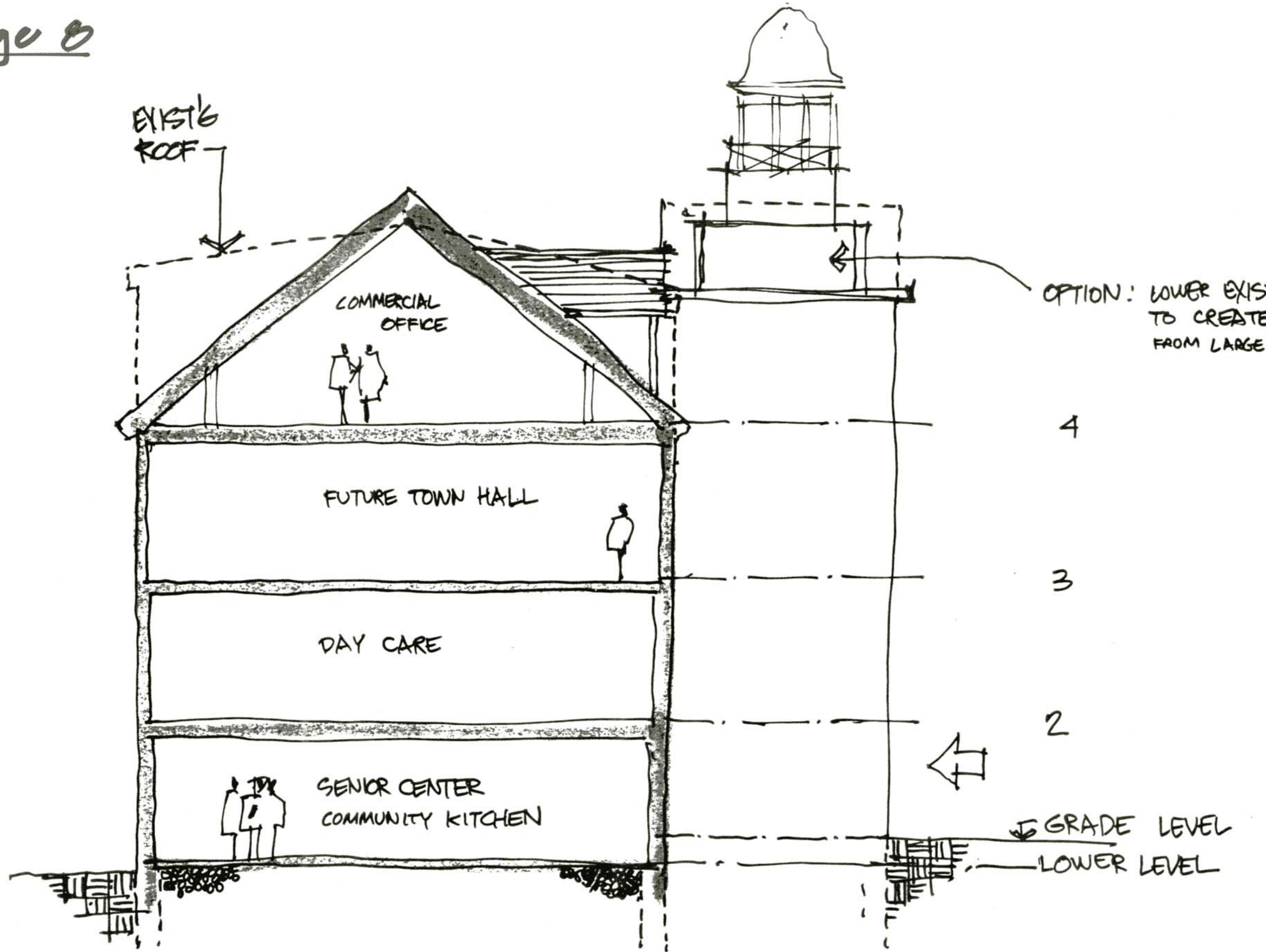
Timing:

Stabilize funding	1st year
Phase 1 Renovation	2nd year
Phase 2 Renovation	By year 2000
New Construction	2nd to 5th year

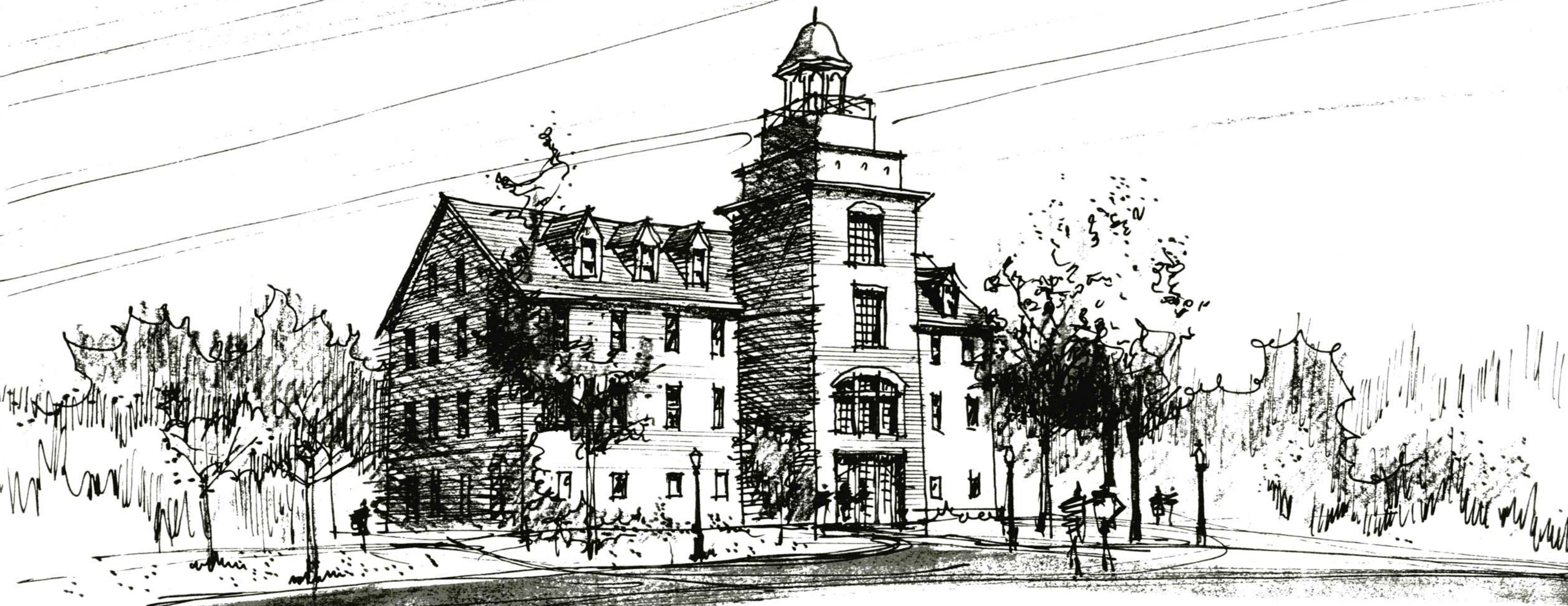








PROPOSED SECTION SHOWING 4 FLOORS ; NEW (OLD) ROOF w/DORMERS



ADAPTIVE REUSE SCHEME

27 JAN 96

## FUNDING FOR THE PROJECT

The following organizations were identified during the charrette as potential funding sources for the mill building rehab or the re-use of the site:

- 1.) Merrimack/Belknap Community Action Program  
-operating expenses for senior center/day care.
- 2.) Belknap County Economic Development Commission  
-funds small shell space for "incubators", which are start-up businesses.
- 3.) Community Development Block Grant
- 4.) Community Development Finance Authority  
-distributes funds from small business taxes.
- 5.) Farmer's Home Administration  
-gives low-interest loans for community facilities.
- 6.) Non-Profit Foundations  
-e.g. The Carnegie Fund sponsors libraries.
- 7.) Private Donors  
-local businesses  
-lending institutions
- 8.) NH D.O.T.
- 9.) ISTEA ( Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act)
- 10.) Railroad Right of Way-- for pedestrian pathway and bicycle path.
- 11.) NH Office of State Planning  
-scenic byway for easement acquisition, signage conservation.
- 12.) NH D.R.E.D.  
-parks and recreation; land and water conservation fund, dam and grist mill site development.
- 13.) HUD  
-finances elderly housing



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the principles that acted as guidelines in making recommendations were as follows:

- Belmont-A Great Place with Great People.
- Don't make irreversible decisions, but don't be afraid to make them.
- Utilize the spirit of volunteerism that made the fire station possible.
- Don't be rosy-be realistic.
- Go fast slowly.
- The tax is at the max.

There is no loss of opportunity investigating re-use because the market for cleared sites is currently so marginal, due to several factors. Much of the retail activity in the Lakes Region is clustered at Exit 20, where the outlet mall was recently built. Commercial real estate rentals in downtown Laconia are not in much demand, so retail rentals in Belmont would follow suit. Much of the industrial activity takes place on Route 106, so there is no immediate market for this usage of the property. The following ideas summarize what charrette participants felt the next steps should be:

- 1.) Prepare both tracks-conduct a feasibility study for the options mentioned previously.
- 2.) Establish a task force of local citizens.
- 3.) Allow one year to investigate costs and viability of options.
- 4.) Cool off and re-group.
- 5.) Get moving, report back and re-evaluate the situation.



