Editorials

Fire inspections 3/25/92

Time for common sense in Winsted

Winsted Selectmen are putting themselves — and the town in an untenable position on the issue of fire inspections. Happily, there is a way out — if they'll take it.

State law requires that the town fire marshal inspect structures for fire safety violations within a set time frame. For several years now, Winsted has not met the state requirements. It doesn't tax the mind to recognize the implications for residents' personal safety, for property, or for the town's legal liability.

Selectman Walter Miller asked his colleagues to direct Fire Marshal William Eichner to comply with the state regulations by completing all mandated inspections by June 30. But the motion failed on a 3 to 3 vote. The reasoning of those who blocked passage: not that the inspections weren't important to public safety, but that Mr. Eichner won't have time to do the job single-handed and that the town budget carries no funds for added help.

Failure to appropriate adequate funds (Mr. Miller was among those who voted for the inadequate budget last year,) surely doesn't let the town off the hook in the eyes of the law. Perhaps more crucially, it won't let either the town or selectmen off the hook in the sad but far from unthinkable event of a deadly or costly fire in an uninspected building. Other communities — New Britain is just one — have recently experienced such disasters.

No money budgeted for more inspection manpower? Selectmen don't have to be trapped by that, if they really want a way out of their morally and politically untenable position. In cases where public safety is at stake, the town charter has provisions for emergency appropriations and transfers of funds.

Right now the whole situation has nasty political overtones. A common sense approach by a Board of Selectmen united on the basis of public safety would serve the interests of those who elected them.