Winsted Selectmen irresponsible on fire inspections

Recently the Winchester Board of Selectmen failed to pass a motion directing the fire marshal to complete fire inspections, required by state law and the town charter, by the end of the fiscal year.

The state law is very clear that the local fire marshal shall inspect, at least once each year, all buildings and facilities of public service and shall make a monthly report to the town manager.

The Board of Selectmen is the ultimate authority to which the fire marshal is responsible. Despite this responsibility, Selectmen McCabe, Habbal and Sullivan voted against requiring that all the inspections be completed. Their argument is that the fire marshal does not have the resources to do the required inspections.

This is a disingenuous argument and an irresponsible action on the part of the board which ignores the real problem. Records indicate that last year fewer than 20 percent of the inspections were completed. Even accepting the argument that the fire marshal is unable to complete 100 percent of the required inspections due to a lack of resources is one thing, disregard of state law and the charter is another.

Nearly as disturbing as the inadequate fire inspections in town is the board's failure to address this problem in any manner. This inaction essentially gives the fire marshal permission to not comply with the charter and state law and accepts the dismally low number of inspections.

Recent events remind us of the importance of fire inspections: the indictment of the owners of the North Carolina factory in which 25 workers were killed in a fire because they were unable to escape through locked fire exits; and, the lawsuit filed by families of victims killed in a fire in New Britain against the city and the fire marshal for failure to inspect.

Inadequate inspection procedures and failure to inspect cannot be tolerated. Winchester citizens should be appalled by the board inaction on this important public safety issue. Remind your selectmen of their responsibility, call them.

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