

Selectmen should inform public

Editor of The Register Citizen:

At a recent Board of Selectmen meeting for the town of Winchester, late into the meeting, after a break, after the press and most of the citizens had left, the last item on the agenda, "New Business," was called. Selectman Walter Miller introduced an item that he wished to address. He changed his course to query why this item had not been placed on the agenda as a separate item when he had requested the mayor to do so the previous week.

A discussion ensued regarding the manner in which items are placed on the agenda. Apparently, topics are often not listed as specific agenda items since they can be raised as "New Business."

There was debate as to whether the mayor had discretionary power to determine the content of the agenda and, thereby, not place topics on it. The charter does not give the mayor this power. Selectman Miller pointed out that the manner in which items were, or were not, selected for placement on the agenda could be used as a political weapon.

It was argued that placing any item

on the agenda, willy-nilly, could lead to abuse and disruption. Selectman McCabe appropriately pointed out that the potential for abuse was outweighed by the public right to know the topics to be discussed by the board: listed agenda items give notice to the public. He recommended that every item presented by a selectman or the town manager should be on the agenda and that the board could deal with frivolous or specious matters.

The town manager aptly intervened and indicated that any item brought to his attention by any selectman would be placed on the agenda.

It is very important that the public know what their elected officials plan to discuss at meetings. Citizens are interested in varied topics, and although I encourage more citizens to attend all meetings (and I know many view the meetings on channel 13), many attend (or tune in) depending on the agenda items scheduled for discussion. This opportunity should not be taken away by a perceived potential for abuse, politically motivated or otherwise.

Charlene LaVole
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