Public gets few insights into new school plan

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WINSTED — People who attended the Board of Education meeting last night left none the wiser on the key issue in the debate regarding the restructuring of The Gilbert School.

The lawyer for the school board, Thomas Sullivan, was unable to answer the question of whether the proposed restructuring plan could be altered to create a public majority on the new board rather than a private majority.

"The statute's ambiguous on that," he said. "That's going to be an issue I'm going to have to pursue with the Gilbert attorney."

The lawyer for The Gilbert School who drafted the plan, Carole Briggs, was on vacation and Sullivan said he had been unable to discuss the school board's concerns about the plan before she left.

Opponents object to the proposed plan to reorganize the governing body of the high school on the grounds that it does not give equal representation to the public. A majority of the seats on the new governing board would be made up of members appointed by the school's private board of trustees.

Though The Gilbert School operates as Winsted's and Hartland's public high school and is funded almost entirely by tax dollars, it was created through a private endowment and is run by a private board of trustees.

Of nine seats on the new board, five would be appointed by trustees and four by the Winsted and Hartland boards of education.

The other area of concern involved the lease that the school board would have to sign with The Gilbert School for this restructuring to take effect. Again, Sullivan said he would have to consult with the person who drafted the documents for the restructuring.

The school board decided to postpone further discussion until Briggs returned and was able to speak with Sullivan and with the school board.

About 20 people attended last night's meeting, which was originally intended as an executive session. Through the intervention of community lawyer Charlene LaVoie, the meeting was opened to the public, though they were not invited to speak.

Ruth Wheeler, one of the opponents of the plan, presented a petition with more than 400 signatures to the school board opposing the proposed restructuring.

The school board also voted to schedule a public hearing on the matter once some of the board's initial questions are answered.

A meeting between Gilbert trustees, school board members and their respective attorneys scheduled for next Thursday was cancelled because of Briggs' absence.