

Selectmen not sure what to do about petition for tax rate cap

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WINSTED — The Board of Selectmen will ask Town Attorney Stephen O. Allaire to take a second look at a petition calling for a four-percent limit on annual tax rate increases.

Selectmen last night reviewed a written opinion from Allaire about the petition, submitted by Selectman Walter Miller.

In a letter dated Sept. 29, Allaire wrote that the charter bars such an ordinance under Sect. 306. The charter states that residents can propose ordinances to the Board of Selectmen with certain exceptions. One of those includes "fixing the tax rate."

Allaire said last week that the charter clearly does not allow such a petition. "The theory may be you shouldn't be able to take away from the voters the right to set what they want for their budget."

In his letter Allaire wrote, "Since the Charter clearly forbids such an ordinance, no further actions should be taken."

But Miller disagreed.

He said the petition is not actually setting the tax rate but is only proposing a four-percent cap on the annual increase in the mill rate.

Miller argued that Sect. 306 of the charter also states that a proposed ordinance should be

either adopted by selectmen or brought before a town meeting.

"Do you want to follow the charter or don't you?" Miller asked. "It's either that or we go to court; what do you want to do?"

Community attorney Charlene LaVoe also stated that the proposal should be brought before the town meeting or adopted by selectmen. She said the charter does not provide "room to reject" a proposed ordinance.

Mayor James A. Pettit said Allaire will be asked to attend the next meeting to further interpret the charter and find out whether the petition should at least go to a town meeting.

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