Nader report gathering dust?

of the report and ultimately overshadowed it, he said.

Looking back at Nader's suggestions, many would require spending some money. Additional advertising of meetings, publishing of pamphlets or other information for the public would all require funding, which selectmen feel the public is unwilling to pay.

Not all individuals familiar with the report are so pessimistic, however. LaVoie followed Ellen K. Thomas in the role of community attorney, a position paid for by the Shafeek Nader Trust, a trust established in the name of Ralph Nader's late brother.

"From what I can see, in my three months, people want and need what a community lawyer can provide," she said.

Everyone from government officials to citizens who have challenged the town seem to agree that LaVoie now plays an important role in providing the kind of legal information it takes to operate effectively either for or against an issue.

"Though they don't want to pay for it, they're quick to say they like having access to what my office provides," LaVoie said.

Another change has been the growth of the public access cable television station, which now broadcasts selectmen's meetings on a regular basis.

Habbal said she is aware that more people are following the meetings through the television, but that hasn't increased the feedback selectmen receive on their decisions. The same people who attended meetings in the past are attending them now, she said.

Selectmen are also announcing vacancies for various boards through the television medium, but have received little response. "No one ever call up and says, 'listen I was watching you guys and I want to help,' " she said.

Some residents are still downright hostile about the report. "I think it was nothing but a political harpoon," former mayor James D. O'Meara said. "He took shots at people who annoyed him, in particular, myself."

As for long-term impact, "People looked at it, read it and two weeks later, threw it in the trash," he said. "I still firmly believe the residents of Winsted know their own business. They don't need Ralph Nader to tell them."

But LaVoie, like Nader, sees a benefit to the study that goes beyond any of the specific suggestions. The fact that residents were asked to fill out questionnaires on their town invited participation.

"The report rallied people, invited people to participate, to say what they thought of their town," LaVoie said. "I think they have a sense of participation in what's going on in Winsted, not only governmentally but in the community, in the town as a whole."

Though Nader himself agrees the budget battles served to sidetrack the suggestions contained in the report, he believes the issues will resurface.

"I think the citizens will pick it up," he said, "they just need to get a little start. It'll have an increasing effect."