Selectmen set date to discuss proposed changes in charter

By JUNE PETERSON
Register Citizen Staff

WINSTED — After a quiet public hearing on the town charter this week, the Board of Selectmen will discuss proposed changes in the document at its June 3 meeting.

Community lawyer Charlene LaVoie suggested that the charter should be changed to allow townspeople and selectmen to share equal legislative powers. Under the existing charter it is difficult for residents to adopt, repeal or amend ordinances on their own.

Residents must pass around petitions and gather signatures to adopt an ordinance, and selectmen call the town meeting, LaVoie said. The whole process should be made simpler, she said.

She also said the town meeting should be part of a separate section in the charter, not listed under the duties of the Board of Selectmen.

Town Clerk William T. Riiska, a member of the charter commission in the late 1950s, said that he regretted not removing the town meeting from the charter. Few people attend town meetings, he said. Selectmen were elected to serve the public, and should speak for them, he said.

"I think this is the last hope the people have, is the town meeting," resident Richard Nalette said.

Resident Ruth Wheeler also said that the charter should mandate that all boards and commissions draft a set of bylaws.

Marie A. Kamens, chairman of the Charter Revision Commission, said that it should be up to the appointing body to provide commissions with guidance.

According to Town Attorney Stephen O. Allaire, the board has 15 days from the close of the public hearing to make recommendations to the Charter Revision Commission.

The board may offer any comments that will tie into the charter, Allaire said.

The commission then has up to 30 days to review selectmen's recommendations. A final report is then submitted to selectmen from the commission, he said. After that, selectmen may reject or approve some or all the proposed changes.

The portion adopted by selectmen then must be published in an area newspaper. However, 10 percent of the voters may petition to have certain parts added. Finally, voters will decide whether they want to adopt the charter on the November ballot.

The commission began to update the charter over a year ago. Some of the major proposed changes include:

- Changing the name of the Board of Selectmen to town council.
- Creation of a separate water board. Currently, the Board of Selectmen sets the water rates; under the proposed changes a town meeting would set the rates.
- Reducing the number of residents needed to call a paper ballot vote at a town meeting.

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