Winsted

Meeting canceled on severance pay

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WINSTED — A special selectmen's meeting to dicuss the controversy over a police captain's severance pay was canceled for lack of a quorum Thursday night when only three of the seven board members showed up.

The meeting had been requested by Democratic selectmen Walter D. Miller and John F. Gauger, Jr. and was called by Democratic Mayor James A. Pettit to discuss retirement severance pay for Police Capt. Francis J. O'Neill.

Miller, Gauger and Republican Selectman David A. Cappabianca waited 45 minutes with 16 spectators for other selectmen to arrive, and then left town hall.

But Miller and Gauger said they and other residents had gathered at least 300 signatures on petitions Thursday, enough to force a town meeting and referendum on providing severance pay for O'Neill. He is scheduled to retire today after 20 years as a Winsted police officer.

Gauger said he wanted the meeting Thursday night to inform other selectmen that the petitions will be filed today in the town clerk's office.

He said if Town Manager Wayne W. Dove decides to pay O'Neill severance, an injunction will be sought today in Superior Court in Litchfield to halt the payment.

Besides Pettit, selectmen who did not attend the special Thursday night meeting were Democrats Brian W. Sullivan and Nancy P. Habbal and Republican William R. McCabe. Miller said Sullivan was out of town.

O'Neill and his wife, Bobbie, were among the 16 spectators. Bobbie O'Neill and Debby Rosati, wife of Police Officer David Rosati, had picketed Thursday in front of the post office on Main Street, carrying signs urging residents not to sign the town meeting petitions.

Miller and others gathered signatures in front of the post office and other areas of town.

Richard R. Lavieri, O'Neill's lawyer, said Thursday night, "I don't think the petition is appropriate under the town charter."

Asked what he will do if there is an attempt to get an injunction today to stop O'Neill from getting his severance pay, Lavieri said, "We will fight it, sure."

Selectmen had voted 4-3 Monday night to transfer funds to pay O'Neill severance, including $10,000 and $4,430 in medical benefits for a year. In addition, he would receive $5,000 from next year's town budget to be made up by the police union in concessions.

Charlene LaVoie, the town's community lawyer, was also at town hall Thursday night and said she had drawn up the petition calling for a town meeting and referendum.

"They needed help and came to me," LaVoie said of the petition circulators. "I pointed out the right section of the town charter."