

Winsted Political Flap Costs Official His Job

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men meeting.

At one point in the session, in which residents were allowed to comment on Mr. Dove's job performance, the forum was temporarily halted and moved to larger quarters at the nearby Gilbert School because the crowd at town hall was spilling out into the hallways.

Many residents who attended the meeting expressed anger, frustration and disbelief that the board would vote to fire Mr. Dove despite their strong objections. And, others said they would not have voted for certain members of the board had they known a move was in the works to remove Mr. Dove.

After listening to debate from residents and demands that he give an explanation for his position regarding Mr. Dove, Mayor McCabe cited "a lack of confidence in [Mr. Dove's] ability" by a majority of the board. He further noted that he did not believe "effective communications" could be re-established between the town manager and the Board of Selectmen, and further cited Mr. Dove's inability to implement board policies.

"I take responsibility for initiating this issue," explained the Mayor, who insisted that there was "no smoking gun" over any particular town issues that lay at the root of the controversy.

"There is no problem with him...regarding his performance. There is no problem...personally or with any of his working characteristics or other working habits," said Mr. McCabe. "The problem was in his relationship with the majority of the board." The Mayor was jeered when he added, "I also told him there was no reason, nor should he ever feel, he could not hold his head high, because he could."

Winsted's community lawyer, Charlene LaVoie—hired to represent residents by the Shafek Nader Trust—said the board's reasons for firing Mr. Dove were "vague," at best. "What policies have not been implemented by the town manager? Tell us!" she insisted. Ms. LaVoie received

thunderous applause and cheers from the audience when she told selectmen, "The rules are made to serve the people, not to subvert the people's will. The roar of the crowd is trying to give you a message."

After only minutes of discussion among board members, the motion by Mr. McCabe to fire Mr. Dove was seconded by Mr. Pettit and supported by Ms. Hahnel and Mr. O'Neill. Voting against Mr. Dove's removal were Mr. Sullivan, Mr. Miller and Mr. Geiger.

Mr. Dove will continue receiving full pay and full benefits until the end of the year, Mayor McCabe said.

According to Mr. Riiska, the acting town manager, Mr. Dove does not have a formal employment contract with the

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—Charlene LaVoie
Community Lawyer
Winsted

town. However, charter provisions require that he be paid full salary and benefits from the time of his suspension until Dec. 31.

Another point of contention to surface during the meeting was the charge that Mr. O'Neill, a former Winsted police captain who recently retired, would have a conflict of interest if he voted on Mr. Dove's removal. This summer, Mr. O'Neill and Mr. Dove were involved in a bitter dispute over the police official's retirement package, and the issue is now the subject of a court case.

Ms. Eisenlohr received a round of applause when she noted that Mr. O'Neill, who was only weeks ago elected to the board, "has not had an opportunity...to work with Mr. Dove." Since that is the case, she said, "he should not be asked to vote" on the town manager's dismissal.

Selectman Brian Sullivan's motion that Mr. Dove remain on the job through the next round of budget considerations was defeated. Mr. Sullivan had suggested that Mr. Dove's performance could be re-evaluated at that time. "Everything that Wayne's worked for

here can fall apart," warned the Democratic selectman.

"If anybody takes their finger right now off of what we've got going, we're in trouble," resident Hank Ryan told the board. He compared the anticipated firing of Mr. Dove to a "shoot-out...and we're all going to pay for it."

Resident Frank Holt Jr., listing many of Mr. Dove's accomplishments during his term in office, including bridge and highway replacements and repairs and work with the Small Cities Block Grant, said he felt it was "absolutely incredible that anybody would think of terminating" Mr. Dove. "My position is that we should be applauding Mr. Dove," said Mr. Holt.

"I have to wonder if the time of back-room politics has returned to Winsted," stated resident Rose Madeux. Addressing selectmen, she noted that "You are not always going to agree with the town manager, whoever he may be. I voted for most of you sitting on this board...did I make a mistake?" she asked. "If any of you on this board cannot debate an issue" without having it surface on a "personal level," Ms. Madeux added, "then you should resign."

A request from residents that public comments be weighed by selectmen and taken up after thorough consideration was denied by the panel. "I can't believe for an instant that this board is going to consider [terminating Mr. Dove], when they're just now getting public comment on the issue," said Ms. LaVoie. Addressing Mr. McCabe, she charged, "You're making a mockery of open government.... It's an amazing spectacle that's going on tonight."

Mr. Miller called Mayor McCabe's appointment a "cut deal. And the deal was," shouted Mr. Miller, "to blow Wayne Dove out!"

Mr. Geiger said that although he did not vote for Mr. Dove when he was appointed last December, he did "not agree with the people who are trying to remove him." He further noted that the board's action regarding the town manager was going to make it difficult for the town to attract a competent individual as a replacement.

"You're not going to see anybody make this commitment to this town with these people sitting here!" he said.

After the vote on Mr. Dove's termination, residents approached Ms. LaVoie to see what legal recourse could be taken in support of the fired town manager. In addition, resident Alan DiCara said he plans to begin circulating a recall petition aimed at the members of the board responsible for firing Mr. Dove. "You'll be hearing from us," pledged Mr. DiCara as he left Monday's meeting.