Judge's order halts board's Dove vote

By JEDD GOULD 12/5/91
Register Citizen Staff

WINSTED — Just hours before selectmen were scheduled to vote to fire Town Manager Wayne W. Dove, a Litchfield Superior Court judge yesterday afternoon issued a restraining order preventing the action.

Judge Anne C. Dranginis handed down the injunction, potentially setting the stage for a townwide referendum on the employment of Dove and a revision of the traditional powers held by the Board of Selectmen.

Community lawyer Charlene LaVoie, who filed the complaint on behalf of residents Audrey Kelsey and Ruth Wheeler, has asked the judge to uphold a petition signed by 330 residents requesting that a referendum be held on the board's motion to fire Dove.

The decision by Dranginis to halt the board's action until the legitimacy of the petition's request could be determined was "an extremely significant, rare move," LaVoie said.

The judge realized "there were significant issues in how to interpret this charter to include the town meeting as half of the legislative authority of the town," LaVoie said.

According to the town charter, the Board of Selectmen must vote twice to fire a town manager.

First they must cast a vote stating an intention to terminate employment. And on Nov. 18, the Board of Selectmen did that, voting 4-3 to fire Dove by the end of the year.

But the charter makes clear that the board must then cast a second vote to take action on its intention and officially end employment. The board was ready to take that action last night.

However, supporters of Dove were uncertain whether the overwhelming testimony of 300 residents in favor of Dove at a public hearing Tuesday night had changed the minds of the four selectmen who want to replace him.

When the four selectmen "did not respond" to a petition signed by 1,600 citizens requesting the reinstatement of Dove, LaVoie said "a court action had to be resorted to."

The petition filed yesterday requests that the board's vote stating an "intention" to fire Dove be brought to referendum.

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