Winsted selectmen to fight injunction

By WILL TACY 12/7/91
Register Citizen Staff

WINSTED — The board of selectmen waded one step deeper into their bitter, divisive fight over the planned firing of suspended Town Manager Wayne W. Dove at a special meeting last night.

The meeting, requested by selectmen Walter D. Miller and Brian W. Sullivan, was called to address both the board's intent to fire Dove and recent litigation arising from that action.

A Litchfield Superior Court judge Wednesday issued a temporary injunction barring the board from taking any action to formally remove Dove until the resolution of a suit prepared by community lawyer Charlene LaVoie requesting a binding public referendum on the board's intent to fire Dove.

A hearing on that temporary injunction is scheduled for Monday at Litchfield Superior Court.

In a series of increasingly angry votes last night, selectmen first approved addressing the litigation in executive session, directed Town Attorney Mark Svonkin to prepare a defense in the suit and tabled a motion to rescind the board's plans to fire Dove.

And, as has become common, the votes were preceded by drawn-out melees of heated, pointed debate.

After a 40-minute executive session, voted against by both Miller and Sullivan, Mayor William H. McCabe suggested the board consider asking Svonkin to prepare to argue the case at a scheduled hearing Monday morning. McCabe's suggestion was backed, in familiar fashion, by selectmen Nancy P. Habbal, James T. Pettit and Francis J. O'Neill. Miller, Sullivan and Selectman John J. Gauger Jr. voted against the motion.

The same majority also shot down an amendment offered by Miller that would cap town expenditures arising from the litigation at $3,000.

Then, the four-vote bloc of McCabe, O'Neill, Habbal and Pettit voted to table Sullivan's motion to rescind the board's intent to fire Dove.

Sullivan argued the board could with one easy vote settle the entire divisive matter and avoid any potential legal costs, while attacking critics of Dove who he said have circulated "malicious rumors" about Dove's credentials or past.

"It's old-time politics and we don't heed it," he said. The ongoing fight is simply tearing the town and the board apart, he claimed.

But Pettit and the three other selectmen backing the motion to table the request argued the board should not take any action with a lawsuit hanging over its head.