No referendum on Mr. Dove 12-16-91

OUR TOWNS

Winchester

With the political process in such disarray in Winchester, it's natural for concerned citizens to look for ways to bypass the mess and seize control themselves. But that's not the way government necessarily works.

Many people in Winchester are still understandably furious about the Board of Selectmen's intention to fire Town Manager Wayne W. Dove in November. Few reasons were given. Folks also are upset that the Democrats, to whom they gave a 5-2 majority on the board, are so deeply split by their squabbling that they couldn't decide on one of their own as first selectman. Republican William H. McCabe was chosen.

The protesters, with the help of the town ombudsman, Charlene LaVoie, want to make sure Mr. Dove — whom they regard as competent and not overly political — stays in his post. She is seeking a court injunction to block the board and she has requested a referendum on the fate of Mr. Dove. Ms. LaVoie, an attorney, is mistaken.

The ombudsman post, known as the community lawyer, was endowed by the family of consumer advocate Ralph Nader as a way to help people sort out the intricacies of town government. It was to be nonpartisan.

Ms. LaVoie may be violating the spirit of the office by stepping into the political firestorm that has engulfed Mr. Dove. Even so, her intentions appear honorable — to remove some of the mystery from the board's maneuvering and to have bewildered voters heard.

But the town charter must be upheld. It bans referendums on selectmen's personnel decisions. Despite the questionable handling of Mr. Dove's case, it's the selectmen's job to run the government and they should be allowed to do so. The well-intentioned Ms. LaVoie should back off.