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Decision on Dove expected tonight

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WINSTED — The Board of Selectmen will meet tonight in what promises to be the concluding chapter in the hard-fought battle over suspended Town Manager Wayne W. Dove's job.

Selectmen are scheduled to vote on whether to reinstate Dove as town manager or to fire him tonight at 8:30 at a special meeting at town hall.

The board voted, 4-3, on Nov. 18 that they intended to fire Dove by the end of the year.

But before they could convert that vote of intention to a vote to fire, community lawyer Charles LaVoie challenged the board's decision by filing a complaint in Winfield Superior Court.

His complaint asked the court to uphold a petition that sought a referendum on the selectmen's vote of intention to fire Dove. On

Monday, Dec. 23, Judge Anna C. Drongitis ruled that the town charter did not allow for a referendum vote on the issue.

The judge's ruling cleared the way for tonight's vote.

But before selectmen vote, the Ethics Commission will meet at 7 p.m. in town hall to hear a complaint against Francis J. O'Neill Jr. that was filed by fellow Selectman Brian W. Sullivan.

If the complaint is upheld, Dove seems certain to get his job back.

The complaint charges O'Neill with a conflict of interest in voting on the firing of Dove because O'Neill is the subject of litigation concerning a \$10,000 retirement package he received from the police department.

Because Dove will be a key witness in the case, a vote to fire would discredit the town manager and make it easier for O'Neill to retain his money, Sullivan argues.

But Francis J. MacGregor, chairman of the Ethics Commission, said his group has up to 30 days to make a decision after hearing a complaint.

With the scheduling of the selectmen's meeting to follow the Ethics Commission's hearing, several selectmen Tuesday questioned what would happen if an O'Neill vote to fire was then ruled to be in conflict of interest.

"Before he votes I want to know whether the Ethics Commission is going to be able to force selectmen to vote again," Sullivan said.

On Tuesday, MacGregor was uncertain if the Ethics Commission could go that far.

"We would have to check it," he said. "Our authority seems broad but I don't know if it's broad enough to reverse a vote of the Board of Selectmen."

Besides a vote on removal of the town manager, today's se-

lectmen's agenda also includes appointing an attorney for pending litigation against the board and the appointment of the board as a search committee for the acting town manager's position.

The lack of a public forum section in the agenda outraged two selectmen on Tuesday, Sullivan and Walter D. Miller, each requested citizens be given an opportunity to speak at the beginning of the meeting, but their request was rejected by Mayor William H. McCabe.

McCabe said yesterday the public hearing and last three selectmen's meetings have given the public ample opportunity to speak on the issue of Dove's firing and that special selectmen's meetings never include an opportunity for public input.

McCabe and Pettit have said their votes are firmly against Dove.