Mayor still likes job

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board, Miller said he often sided with McCabe. But Miller said he noticed that McCabe had changed after he was elected mayor. In fact, Miller was concerned enough to write a letter to McCabe's wife, Jane, citing his concern over the mayor's behavior.

Miller credited the explosive debate over the firing of former town manager Wayne W. Dove as placing pressure on McCabe. The firing prompted an outpouring of support for Dove from residents. Dove was dismissed by a 4-3 vote, with selectmen Gauger, Miller, and Brian W. Sullivan voting to keep Dove.

"(McCabe) made a mistake (in firing Dove) and he knows it and he's not making any friends," Miller said. "The pressure's too much . . . he just went against the grain and it put a lot of heat on him."

Miller, who frequently called for the resignation of former mayor Petrit last year, was not ready to ask McCabe to step down.

At Tuesday's meeting, which was called solely to set a budget for the town manager search committee, Gauger, Miller, McCabe and Sullivan all engaged in a shouting match, while the other three selectmen sat by. At issue was a bill from the former town attorney. The bulk of the bill, more than $7,000, was spent defending the town against a lawsuit filed by residents Audrey Kelsey and Ruth Wheeler over the firing of Dove. McCabe accused the three selectmen of being responsible for the bill because, he charged, they were behind the lawsuit.

"Bill thinks he won in court, . . . and he might have won in court and that's his perception, but he's lost the town," Gauger said.

McCabe took office under strained circumstances. Two selectmen, Miller and Sullivan, stormed out of the meeting to elect McCabe in protest because Gauger was not present.

"In my opinion (McCabe) has lost a great deal of credibility with townspeople and elected officials," Sullivan said. "It's got to be very difficult to perform his job as mayor without being biased."

Sullivan also was irked when McCabe announced that he would draft the board's agenda. In the past, selectmen could place topics on the agenda. Eventually, the decision was reversed. Sullivan called that a token gesture.

Running a meeting with three strongly opinionated selectmen — Gauger, Miller, and Sullivan — is difficult, McCabe said.

"It is difficult at times if people speak out of turn and attempt to take the floor when someone is speaking," McCabe said. "Also there are a couple of people in the public that also feel free to interrupt the meeting to express their point of view. Maybe I need to be more swift in making sure only the person who is recognized speaks." McCabe said he will accept suggestions about controlling speakers at the meetings.

"I think that Bill had aspirations of being a mayor who could lead a board in a very positive direction and it very quickly went down the tubes after the Nov. 18 meeting (to fire Dove)," Nancy P. Habbal said. "I think there are a lot of players in this whole thing, and I think maybe Bill is reacting to a lot of people who agitate." Habbal said that LaVoie may be behind some of the friction at the meetings.



WILLIAM H. McCABE

LaVoie is not shy about voicing her opinions at meetings. McCabe described LaVoie as the "eighth selectman."

Although reluctant to comment extensively about McCabe, LaVoie said, "I think his contempt for both the citizens in this town and of the process of open government was obvious, and has been in his actions since he became mayor."

Despite the criticism, McCabe has no intentions of backing down.

"If they're waiting for me to cave into unruly behavior they're going to wait a long time," McCabe said.

Selectman Francis J. O'Neill could not be reached for comment.