

Group fighting state mandates

By JENNIFER REID

Register Citizen Staff

NORFOLK — The members of the citizens advocacy group Focus are planning to band together with other such groups, public officials and concerned Northwood Corner residents to question the constitutionality of unfunded state mandates.

"It's a crime the state forces these mandates on us and then won't pay for them," said Focus member Lindsay deManhey during the group's meeting Thursday night. "When towns get wind (that) these laws can be defeated, (the state) better watch out."

Focus secretary John McGinnis said yesterday that he is trying to organize a meeting of concerned

citizens in April. He said he will contact first selectmen of the towns and taxpayers groups, including Charlene LaVoie of the Community Lawyers office in Winsted. The group hopes to take the issue to the state legislature.

For example, McGinnis cited the state-mandated handicapped elevator to be installed at Hotelle Elementary School. The elevator is estimated to cost between \$80,000 and \$100,000.

The group also talked about fighting the binding arbitration law, in which a panel of three judges award a last best offer in a contract dispute after mediation has failed.

The group spent most of its meeting talking with two mem-

bers of the Board of Finance, Lawrence Liefert and Matthew Riiska, who were invited to speak about their duties on the board.

Riiska explained that the board's primary function is setting the town budget every year. The board reviews budgets from the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Education, and 25 town departments. While the board can question and change line items in the selectmen's and departmental budgets, it cannot touch line items in the education budget, Riiska said.

Town residents can review the budget in a public hearing, and later vote to approve or reject it at a town meeting, he said.