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Winsted petition battle has begun

By JUNE PETERSON
Register Citizen Staff

WINSTED — The battle of the petitions is on.

Two groups, seeking two different results, have started petition drives to bring the proposed budget for fiscal 1992-93 to referendum.

A group of residents who want to defeat the proposed budget because education expenditures are too low will circulate a petition calling for a referendum. The Winchester Taxpayers' Association, who endorse the $19,774,264 budget, will also petition for referendum.

"It's a responsible, reasonable budget," Selectman Walter D. Miller, president of the association, said. He added that residents should vote to adopt the budget, which would not raise the tax rate.

"We are looking to oppose the budget as it is at the moment," Susan I. Lange, one of the residents spearheading the budget opposition, said yesterday.

Those opposing the budget are angry that the Board of Selectmen cut about $296,314 from the school budget, even though the budget was defeated at the May 4 annual budget meeting primarily because residents wanted additional funds placed in the school budget. And at a meeting May 11, selectmen failed to add further funds to the school budget. It then adopted the town budget, and set the town meeting date for May 26.

The group, with the help of Community Lawyer Charlene LaVoie, has drafted a petition that asks for three questions to be placed on the ballot: whether or not to accept the budget, reject it because it is too high, or reject it because it is too low.

The rejection questions are binding only if more votes are cast for rejection than acceptance, LaVoie said.

The questions should give selectmen directive, Lange said, "It is getting the voice out there and letting them know how we feel," Lange, the parent of two children who attend local schools, said.

The taxpayers group simply wants a simple yes or no question on the ballot, Miller said.

Mayor William H. McCabe said yesterday that he does not favor a referendum, and will not propose that selectmen bring the budget to referendum.

"The budget process specifically calls for a town meeting so people can be heard and do things at the town meeting that they can't do at the referendum," McCabe said, such as debate the budget, or delete items. "If we have to adjourn to referendum it won't be voted until June . . . When we delay the budget, decisions having to do with roads and other public works projects get postponed."

At least 288 signatures must be presented for a referendum.