

Winsted Switches Labor Lawyers; Former Interim Official Hired

By ALISTAIR HIGHER

WINSTED—The Board of Selectmen decided Monday to switch labor attorneys, dismissing Robert M. Bourke and replacing him with former interim town manager Paul S. Vayer.

Mr. Bourke, whose practice is based in Simsbury, has been heavily criticized by some selectmen for his handling of a dispute involving the demotion of a police sergeant, as well as for the contracts he negotiated with the town's employees.

Mr. Vayer, a resident of New Britain, served as the interim town manager after the firing of Wayne C. Doye and prior to the appointment of the current manager, David A. Maynard.

Selectman Brian W. Sullivan was particularly interested in hiring Mr. Vayer. Mr. Sullivan argued that as a former town manager and a lawyer, Mr. Vayer would be best suited to appreciate the town's position in future contract talks.

"It was the consensus of the board to make the switch," said Mayor John F. Gauger later. Mr. Gauger voted against the change. "There were pros and cons to both sides, obviously."

The board voted 4 to 2, with Republican Selectman John R. Forrest abstaining, to retain Mr. Vayer, who will charge \$85 an hour for his services. Mr. Bourke had charged \$110 an hour.

In other business Monday, selectmen ordered town clerk William Riiska to certify all petitions presented to his office without first seeking a legal opinion.

The issue arose from a lawsuit filed by Community Lawyer Charlene LaVoie over a petition that had not been certified by the clerk. The lawsuit was dismissed in October.

In 1991, about 360 residents signed the petition seeking a town meeting on a retirement payment given to former police captain and then Selectman Francis J. O'Neill. Mr. Riiska, consulting with then town attorney Stephen Allaire, decided that the petition was not valid and did not certify it.

Town Attorney Kevin Neilligan advised Mr. Riiska and the board that all petitions should be certified by the clerk and passed on to selectmen, who will consider the question of validity.