

Selectmen question advice on landfill

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WINSTED — At least two selectmen are now questioning information given to them in a closed meeting Monday night that led them to vote to spend money on a special audit of the regional landfill district.

Tom Armstrong, the town's environmental attorney, told selectmen during the session that it isn't clear how officials of Regional Refuse Disposal District No. 1 have accounted for nearly \$140,000 received from the sale of a trucker loader and an off-road dump truck last year.

Armstrong said Wednesday he didn't intend to lead selectmen to believe that the money had been used inappropriately, although the audit would seek to establish how the money was used.

"I don't think anybody is reaching the conclusion that it was inappropriate to use it for operations," Armstrong said, referring to the landfill district's operations budget.

District Administrator Jim Hart said the money wasn't applied to operating expenses, but was deposited in the district's capital reserve fund.

Selectmen Brian Sullivan and Porter C. Griffin III said that Armstrong led them to believe that the money may have been used inappropriately.

"We were told they could not find where that money went," Sullivan said.

Barkhamsted First Selectman Carmella M. Lattizori said she, too, had heard that the money may not have been handled correctly. The landfill district's budget is confusing to read, she said.

Sullivan and Griffin said that since Monday's meeting, they have begun to research the issue and now think that the cash from the sale of the equipment was probably deposited in the district's capital reserve fund, as Hart said it was. Minutes of the district's board of directors and the treasurer's report show that the money was deposited in the fund, Hart said.

If the money was deposited in the capital reserve account, Sullivan and Gauger said they don't think the town should pay for the special audit.

Armstrong disagreed, saying that the audit could study many questions about the district's management and financial practices. One such question is whether the district spends too much money — nearly \$300,000 — on personnel.

Winsted Mayor John F. Gauger Jr. declined comment Wednesday because the question was discussed in a closed meeting.

Several townspeople, including Community Lawyer Charlene LaVoie and the town's two representatives to the landfill district, questioned whether it was legal for selectmen to exclude them from the closed meeting.