

Court order blocks selectmen's vote

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By RAY ROUTHIER
Court Staff Writer

WINSTED — Two town residents and a community lawyer got a court order Wednesday to prevent selectmen from voting on the dismissal of Town Manager Wayne Dove.

The selectmen were scheduled to vote Wednesday night on whether to finalize Dove's dismissal and possibly lay to rest a controversy that has drawn protests, petitions and personal attacks on selectmen from hundreds of residents.

The court order delayed Dove's firing until at least Monday, when a hearing is scheduled. The hearing will focus on how Dove's fate should be decided — by the selectmen alone or by a townwide referendum.

Charlene LaVoie, a lawyer hired

to be an advocate for residents by the Shateek Nader Trust, said she sought the temporary restraining order because she believes the charter allows townspeople the right to vote on the selectmen's decision to oust Dove.

"We want this to go to a referendum," LaVoie said.

The order was granted by Judge Anne C. Dranginis in Litchfield Superior Court after LaVoie filed a petition in town hall with 330 signatures requesting a referendum.

Mayor William H. McCabe said Wednesday that the legal challenge could have a drastic effect on how the town is run, if the judge decides that residents share the power to hire and fire town employees.

"This goes right to the heart of governance," McCabe said. "We felt we were doing what we were sup-

posed to under the charter. What the judge will be doing is interpreting our charter."

McCabe said the selectmen will abide by the court order and wait for the hearing Monday before meeting or taking any action.

"If there are any clarifications to be made on the selectmen's responsibilities, I think we need to hear them before doing anything more," McCabe said.

Selectmen voted 4-3 on Nov. 18 to fire Dove, despite the pleas of 140 angry residents asking for the reasons for the action. Under the town charter, the selectmen must hold a hearing on the dismissal, if requested, and then vote a second time.

On Tuesday, about 250 people attended a public hearing on the proposed firing, most of whom supported Dove, and the final vote on his fate