

Winsted's Brand of Politics Puts Town Managers in the Hot Seat

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Town 'Hot Seat'

WINSTED—Town Manager David Maynard describes staying out of political trouble in this notoriously partisan town as a sort of intricate game of "side-stepping" the holes people are trying to push him into.

"I have to draw a strict line between administering the town and politics," Mr. Maynard says. "That's what a professional town manager does. The problem here was that there was a period of time when there were nonprofessional managers, and the town carries a lot of baggage from that era."

Baggage or not, being Town Manager in Winsted has evolved into pure political pinball, where the paid administrators often spend more time tiptoeing around the ever-present tension between Republicans and Democrats than they do overseeing municipal affairs.

How long Mr. Maynard will be able to side-step the political morass remains to be seen, but he has the sympathy of former town managers Wayne C. Dove, David E. Battistoni and Paul S. Vayer, all of whom describe the job as a "hot seat" in a town that has gone through three managers in as many years.

Now, with Winsted poised to vote on \$19 million in capital improvement projects put forward by Mr. Maynard, the credibility of the current Town Manager is being dragged into the political arena a little more than six months after he took the job.

The problem, according to Mr. Maynard's predecessors and Charlene Lavoie, an attorney who acts as an advocate for residents, is the "petty politics" on the Board of Selectmen, which has used the Town Manager as a "ping-pong ball," batted back and forth between factions.

It seems that in Winsted, political feuding is even more complicated than

usual. The seven-member Board of Selectmen has five Democrats and two Republicans. However, two of those Democrats—Nancy Habbal and James Pettit, who was an unaffiliated candidate in the last election—broke ranks in 1991 and joined Republican Selectman Frances J. O'Neill to help appoint Republican member William McCabe as Mayor.

To make matters worse, the former town managers claim these officials have a significant misunderstanding of the town charter, which calls specifically for the "insulation" of the manager's position from the political wrangling. While Mr. Maynard is confident that a professional attitude will keep him above the fray, his predecessors and some selectmen argue that the town-manager form of government eventually just will not work.

"I left on my own," says Mr. Battistoni, the Town Manager between 1987 and 1990. "However, I will say now for

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