

—Slug:.....COMM-0852.opin.letter.a00_davis
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—For section.....Voices/Letters from readers
—Format.....Opinions - Letters to the Editor - Special
—Dateline.....Brattleboro
—Article Number:.....43054



Notes from editor (not for publication):

What a beautifully argued letter, Andy. Please note editorial change around line 22 — I got a little confused and think it might be clearer. Please push back if I misunderstood. —All the best, Jeff



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Representative Town Meeting has served us well

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2

####END SUBHED####

3 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

4 Representative Town Meeting (RTM) has served our town
5 well for over 60 years. RTM members serve the town and provide
6 oversight with consistency, civility, and commitment.

7 I will be voting to retain RTM because it is by far the
8 largest gathering we have to regularly discuss our shared interests
9 and decisions. RTM is a cross-section of our community by age,
10 class, and outlook.

11 Democracy is not purely a math problem; democracy is
12 a story of engagement and participation in our community life.

13 Why in this world of diminishing civility and
14 hyperpartisanship would we discontinue a forum that involves
15 face-to-face discussion and debate that is respectful and
16 informed?

17 The ability to consider articles put forward by the
18 Selectboard — and to amend them — is essential. It will not
19 happen in a purely ballot form of self-government. RTM has been
20 a forum for nearly every challenge we have faced in Brattleboro.
21 Decisions and priorities have been weighed and acted upon.

22 Brattleboro has a hybrid form of government. We already
23 use townwide Australian ballot for to choose our elected officials
24 and decide other questions as determined by our town charter.

25 The Selectboard serves as our primary legislature, by
26 state law. The Selectboard discussions, debates, and votes are
27 recorded and broadcast for all to see. Representative Town
28 Meeting is a deliberative body, a check on the Selectboard, and
29 — to quote the town charter — “a guiding body for the town and
30 a source of ideas, proposals and comments, elected by district, as
31 defined by the board of civil authority. It exercises exclusively all
32 powers vested in the voters of the Town.”

33 We all hear the call that taxes are too high in our town.
34 Representative Town Meeting rejected last year’s budget because
35 it called for a 12% increase.

36 RTM is not the reason we have high taxes. RTM is the
37 reason we are equipped to have real conversations as we likely
38 face even deeper budget cuts in the future. RTM has a history of
39 both checking expenditures and supporting targeted increases.

40 Our tax woes are the result of many factors in our town,
41 our state, and our nation: health care costs, social needs,
42 housing, the cost of providing municipal services. Competing
43 needs require conversation, deliberation, and prioritization.

44 RTM tackles the choices that town finances are forcing
45 upon us. Our taxes are borne largely by small business,

46 residential homeowners, and — through the cost of housing —
47 renters. None of these financial pressures were created by RTM.
48 Ending RTM will not change these factors. It will only diminish
49 our ability to civilly and democratically respond to these
50 challenges.

51 It is time to move forward with Representative Town
52 Meeting and to work with the Brattleboro’s Charter Review
53 Commission to make some needed improvements to town
54 government.

55 The basic structure of RTM is sound. We are “the One
56 and Only Brattleboro,” and we can handle being the one
57 example of Representative Town meeting in Vermont. The RTM
58 has served us consistently through times of controversy and non-
59 controversy for over 60 years.

60 A no vote on Article 2 on Tuesday, March 3 will be a vote
61 in favor of civil democracy as we work together to solve the
62 challenges before us.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

63 The writer serves Brattleboro’s District 9 as a
64 Representative Town Meeting member.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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