

—Slug:.....COMM-0852.opin.letter.a00_duncan
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—For section.....Voices/Letters from readers
—Format.....Opinions - Letters to the Editor - Special
—Dateline.....Brattleboro
—Article Number:.....43061



Notes from editor (not for publication):

Thanks, Tony.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Losing OTM or RTM would be a major loss to
2 Brattleboro

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4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 Representative Town Meeting (RTM) has been an eye-
6 opener for me.

7 When I moved here, I did not think anything about local
8 politics would require much effort to understand. Since I became
9 a member of RTM, I have learned that local governance can be
10 very complicated. People sometimes express positions that reflect

11 valid but conflicting values, and making an informed decision to
12 address the real problems of the town can be hard.

13 Town Meeting has forced me to get rid of simplistic
14 beliefs about fiscal management and how to square them with
15 issues that I consider important: compassion for others, climate
16 change, the needs to fund core town services, and to consider the
17 burden of property taxes on people with limited incomes.

18 My experiences in RTM have changed my views on
19 issues on a number of occasions — sometimes enough to change
20 my vote.

21 Many knowledgeable people present information and
22 perspectives at RTM, including some whom I disagree with or
23 have little in common with politically. But I know them to be
24 honest, and I consider their opinions with respect.

25 The meeting has remained vigorously devoid of
26 reference to political parties. The discussion is encouraged to be
27 fact-based with a rational analysis. Opposing views and relevant
28 facts are presented, and nonconstructive behaviors such as
29 grandstanding about political positions is strongly discouraged.

30 If RTM and open Town Meeting (OTM) are defeated,
31 losing the independent town committees, including the RTM
32 Finance Committee, would be a major loss for the town. That
33 committee spends hundreds of hours preparing an independent
34 assessment of the town's finances that the public needs in order
35 to assess the budget. Losing an independent finance committee
36 would reduce financial scrutiny and consolidate more power in
37 the hands of the Selectboard.

38 Australian ballot voting has the advantage of allowing
39 every registered voter to vote. There are informational meetings
40 that the public is welcome to attend, every year, but very few do.
41 I think it is unlikely that changing to a ballot system would bring
42 a large increase in public attendance or civic involvement.

43 Such voting does not allow for any amendments to the
44 budget or issues. Ballot voting allows only an up or down vote

45 and does not allow for any changes or compromises in the
46 proposed articles.

47 Australian ballot would also immediately lead to a
48 marketing arms race for political agendas. Whoever has the
49 largest, best, slickest campaign would have a significant edge in
50 any vote. Social media would likely devolve into emotional
51 rhetoric designed to polarize.

52 Finally, Australian ballot voting is already an option in
53 the charter. If 50 RTM members or 5% of residents oppose a
54 budget vote, it will automatically be brought to a full vote. There
55 is no need to remove Town Meeting and make Australian ballot
56 voting mandatory for the budget.

57 No system is perfect, and each has strengths and flaws.

58 I, in my capacity as a left-handed juggler, will be voting
59 no on Article 2 on rescinding RTM, no on Article 3 on
60 implementing the Australian ballot, and yes on Article 4 to have
61 open Town Meeting if voters approve the question to eliminate
62 Representative Town Meeting. (OTM would retain most of the key
63 aspects already in RTM.)

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

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LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

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LINKS:

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

###BEGIN LOGLINE###

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###END LOGLINE###