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Notes from editor (not for publication):

I fortified your first point at line 79. Is this what you were getting at? I don't think we should imply that the representative seats aren't elected.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Town Meeting is great! Why would we give this up?

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Brattleboro's Representative Town Meeting is an
3 incredibly vital and expressive use of our democracy and an
4 ongoing lesson in civics

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 WHEN I MOVED to Brattleboro in 2018, I had only ever
7 known ballot voting. In most places that I lived, I did not know
8 the name of my mayor. My impression is that most people in
9 those communities were uninvolved in their local governance
10 and elections.

11 The first time I attended and watched Representative
12 Town Meeting (RTM) voting here, I was inspired and incredibly
13 impressed — to see a variety of people, debating, challenging,
14 presenting evidence for their views, being respectful, and voting
15 together on their future for the next year.

16 Then I became an RTM representative, which was quite
17 easy, and I gradually learned more about the town and the
18 people. Now I think... Town Meeting is terrific! Why would we
19 give this up?

20 * * *

21 BRATTLEBORO'S Representative Town Meeting is an
22 incredibly vital and expressive use of our democracy and an
23 ongoing lesson in civics, way beyond anything I ever learned in
24 school. In my view, a full day dedicated to listening, debating,
25 and voting on the budget and other important issues is necessary
26 and worthwhile

27 Voting by Australian ballot is already an option in the
28 charter. If 50 RTM members or 5% of residents petition to oppose
29 a budget vote, it will be brought to a full town vote. There is no
30 need to remove Town Meeting and make Australian Ballot voting
31 mandatory for the budget.

32 True, Australian ballot voting will allow more people to
33 cast a vote, though not nearly as many will actually do so, as the
34 One Person One Vote Brattleboro group's slogan suggests.
35 Between 2014 and 2025, an average of 22% of Brattleboro voters
36 placed a vote in national elections (11% for midterms and 36%
37 for presidential elections).

38 An Australian ballot vote about our complicated \$27
39 million budget will be a vote that is not informed by the type of
40 debate and probing and tough questions that come out of Town
41 Meeting. And it will only be a yes/no vote, without the ability to
42 amend the question or to make new compromises.

43 Brattleboro switching to Australian ballot voting will
44 consolidate power with the Selectboard, whose decisions will get
45 less scrutiny because the most significant means for open debate

46 will be gone. Comments at Selectboard meetings are limited to 2
47 minutes. Attendance at pre-Town Meeting informational sessions
48 is consistently weak.

49 I'm on the finance committee, whose role is to provide
50 an independent analysis of the budget that is proposed by the
51 Selectboard each year, and to help make it understandable for
52 others. It's a complicated set of documents and proposals that
53 takes us several months of weekly meetings and side work to
54 understand it well.

55 The Australian ballot movement has no proposal for how
56 an independent finance committee will function, or even
57 whether it will exist at all. One fan of the Australian ballot
58 proposal has publicly proposed a future where the Finance
59 Committee members will instead be appointed by ... the
60 Selectboard!

61 If that were to happen, it would mean another of the
62 checks and balances to Selectboard power going away.

63 * * *

64 EVERYONE IS affected right now, many quite deeply, by the
65 attacks on our constitutional rights, by the dismissal of civil
66 service structures that are stable and necessary, and by the
67 disturbing way that different groups of people have been pitted
68 against other groups of people, by our current presidential
69 administration.

70 Brattleboro's strong participatory democracy has been,
71 for me, a kind of solace against these threats.

72 This is not the time to attempt to replace our current
73 governance system with an entirely different ballot system that
74 removes our community-based deliberating and voting.

75 This is the time, instead, to keep finding more ways to
76 talk and work together, not to separate further from each other by
77 voting from the comfort of our kitchens.

78 * * *

79 IF PEOPLE WANT to see changes in the outcome of
80 Representative Town Meeting, or in the way it works, there are
81 good options for making changes:

82 • *Participate in RTM.* Look to become a representative.
83 Step up and be willing to be appointed to fill vacant seats. Invite
84 your friends and neighbors to participate so we can add new
85 voices to the mix.

86 • *Call your reps and tell them how you want them to*
87 *represent you and then ask them how they did and will do so.* In
88 five years of being a rep, only one constituent has ever asked me
89 to represent them on something, which I then did in a public
90 meeting.

91 • *Attend Charter Commission meetings and*
92 *communicate with commission members about what you want*
93 *to see happen.* Every 15 years, a commission looks at the town
94 charter and makes recommendations for revisions. Those
95 meetings have been poorly attended.

96 This is regrettable, because the outcome of their
97 decisions for updating governance rules is quite consequential for
98 the town. I would like to see Charter changes that help RTM to
99 become more responsive to the public.

100 * * *

101 I WILL BE HAPPY with either RTM or with open Town
102 Meeting.

103 RTM is full of people who are valuable contributors
104 because they are consistent and dedicated, and they work for the
105 interests of the broader community beyond their own social
106 group. I also like the fact that an open Town Meeting welcomes
107 everyone, and no representation is needed.

108 I think Australian Ballot voting is the worst system for
109 voting on the budget, especially when that option is already
110 available when needed, in any given year.

111 I plan to vote no to rescinding RTM (as the question is
112 worded — this means keeping RTM), no to the Australian ballot
113 question, and yes to the open Town Meeting question.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

114 **MILLICENT COOLEY** represents District 9 as a member
115 of Brattleboro's Representative Town Meeting, where she also
116 chairs the body's Finance Committee. She is author of the petition
117 to place open Town Meeting as a voting option on the March 3
118 election ballot.

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

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

119 0

####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

120

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

####BEGIN VIDEO####

121

####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

122

####END LOGLINE####