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—Dateline.....Brattleboro  
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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Real friends and real democracy

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2

####END SUBHED####

3 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

4 Real friends are not those who populate the lists of your  
5 various social media accounts.

6 They are the ones who are there for you when things  
7 unexpectedly get difficult for you.

8 This sort of friendship doesn't result from some  
9 acquaintance noticing that you posted something clever. It is  
10 cultivated, sometimes naturally over decades of living in the same  
11 community or starting from a shared interest that brings people

12 together. Sometimes it happens more intentionally, such as when  
13 someone goes and welcomes a new arrival to the neighborhood.

14         The former might give you a thumbs up, if you're lucky.  
15 The latter might offer to help you with something before you got  
16 up the nerve to ask.

17         The process of building a healthy and vibrant society is  
18 similar.

19         There's the minimal democratic engagement involved  
20 skimming the local news and voting. Then there's the more  
21 intimate involvement of volunteering for a board or committee.  
22 Or even sticking your neck out to run for public office.

23         In most towns around the country the leap from just  
24 being a voter to greater involvement is a big step that takes a lot  
25 of effort and money.

26         Here in Brattleboro, we have a remarkably accessible  
27 political process. Representative Town Meeting is the most  
28 accessible deliberative decision-making body I have seen  
29 anywhere in the world. It is at the same time one of best  
30 community building exercises, as it brings a broad cross section  
31 of the community together to discuss issues that affect the whole  
32 town.

33         It also serves as a training ground for future Selectboard  
34 members.

35         The chance for this large a portion of a town's residents  
36 to get this familiar with the issues and budget of their town is  
37 exceedingly rare. It results in Selectboard candidates who are far  
38 better prepared to take on the job, along with being a good check  
39 on their excesses.

40         Though we don't always have competitive races, and I  
41 don't always like the choices that our Selectboard members  
42 make, they tend to be well-qualified to serve.

43         With RTM there to check their work and referenda as a  
44 further check, we have a remarkably robust system of governance  
45 in Brattleboro.

46 Let's preserve the keystone that is RTM, the piece at the  
47 center that keeps the arch of our democratic process stable.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

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

*LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:*

49 ####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

0

####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

50 ####BEGIN LINKS####

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

51 ####BEGIN VIDEO####

####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

52 ####BEGIN LOGLINE####

####END LOGLINE####