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—For section.....Voices/Letters from readers  
—Format.....Opinions - Letters to the Editor - Special  
—Dateline.....Brattleboro  
—Article Number:.....43175



**Notes from editor (not for publication):**



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Australian ballot: a better way forward for Brattleboro's  
2 democracy

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 As Brattleboro voters consider the future of our town  
6 governance, I support moving away from Representative Town  
7 Meeting (RTM) — not toward open Town Meeting, but instead  
8 toward conducting town business by Australian ballot, paired  
9 with strong public discussion and information sessions in  
10 advance of each vote.

11 Much of the support for RTM rests on two commonly  
12 cited strengths: the ability to amend articles on the floor and the  
13 opportunity for debate and discussion.

14 In theory, both are valuable. In practice, however, they  
15 occur far less often than many assume.

16 Over the past decade, RTM has almost always voted  
17 articles up or down as warned. When concerns arise, the  
18 outcome is typically rejection rather than thoughtful amendment.

19 It is also said that when RTM votes something down,  
20 representatives can give direction to the Selectboard about how  
21 they want it changed. But that kind of feedback does not require  
22 RTM. Residents already provide guidance through public  
23 comment at Selectboard meetings, public hearings, and written  
24 input — processes that would continue under Australian ballot  
25 voting.

26 Debate and discussion are essential, but they do not  
27 need to be tied to a single meeting where representatives are  
28 expected to listen, deliberate, and vote immediately. Holding  
29 discussions in advance of Australian ballot votes gives people  
30 time to reflect, review materials, and talk with neighbors before  
31 casting a ballot. That is a feature, not a flaw.

32 Another concern is that Australian ballot consolidates  
33 power in the Selectboard. But the Selectboard already controls  
34 the Town Meeting warning, and citizen petition articles exist  
35 under both systems.

36 Finally, RTM participation is difficult for many residents  
37 — those who travel for work, who work weekends, who provide  
38 care, or who face accessibility barriers. Australian ballot voting  
39 makes participation easier and more inclusive.

40 No matter where you stand, please vote now at the Town  
41 Clerk's Office, on Tuesday, March 3 at the American Legion, or  
42 call the Town Clerk 802-251-8157 to get an absentee ballot. Our  
43 democracy is strongest when more voices are heard.

44 If this vision of local democracy appeals to you — a  
45 vision that preserves discussion, expands participation, and gives

46 every voter an equal voice — I encourage you to vote yes to  
47 discontinue Representative Town Meeting, yes to conducting  
48 town business by Australian ballot, and no to open Town  
49 Meeting, which limits direct voting to those able to attend lengthy  
50 in-person meetings.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

51 The writer represents District 7 as a member of  
52 Brattleboro's Representative Town Meeting.

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

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

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LINKS:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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