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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Brattleboro voters end 65 years of Representative Town
2 Meeting

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3 Voters say RIP to RTM, approving both a move to
4 Australian ballot and open Town Meeting

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

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6 In one of the most highly controversial and anticipated
7 votes in recent town history, voters went to the polls on March 3
8 and chose to discontinue Representational Town Meeting (RTM)
9 after 65 years.

10 Unofficial results, which were announced at about 8:40
11 p.m., showed that the vote to end RTM was close; 1,216 to
12 1,157.

13 The vote to move to Australian ballot was 1,362 to 945,
14 and the vote to move to a traditional Town Meeting, open to all
15 registered voters, was 1,457 to 841.

16 Two citizens' petitions triggered the votes about shifting
17 to Australian ballot or open Town Meeting, while the Selectboard
18 added a third question asking whether to discontinue RTM
19 entirely.

20 The decision represents the first step in a complex
21 process that must ultimately go to the Vermont Legislature. State
22 lawmakers will need to approve a change to the town charter, a
23 process that town officials have said could take several years.

24 Brattleboro was the only town in the state to use
25 Representative Town Meeting.

26 "I would like to thank the voters of Brattleboro for voting
27 to change the governance of our town so that it can support the
28 right of all voters to decide the financial matters before us each
29 year," said Randall "Randy" Blodgett, co-author of one of the
30 petition articles and a losing candidate for a one-year term on the
31 Selectboard this year.

32 "I think that indicates there's a strong preference for more
33 ways to participate for more people, which would be true in both
34 the Australian ballot and open Town Meeting," said Andy Davis,
35 who has spoken in defense of RTM because "I figured RTM
36 deserved someone to be speaking of its strengths."

37 "There was clearly a campaign to end the 60 years we've
38 had Representative Town Meeting," Davis said. "Those of us that
39 have been involved in this publicly, I think we've all agreed we'll
40 make the best of the new system. We'll go to open Town Meeting
41 in April, and then we'll be waiting for the state Legislature to
42 untangle this."

43 Davis is looking forward to "a very interesting Town
44 Meeting this year" — specifically, the turnout.

45 “It’s also interesting that RTM was defeated by only about
46 60 votes,” he said. “The thing the other two options do have is
47 open participation [...].” I think the most interesting thing is what
48 will be the turnout for open town meeting.”

49 **Potential for massive legislative** 50 **gridlock**

51 The first petition asked voters to discontinue RTM and, if
52 that were approved, then to conduct certain town business —
53 electing town officers, approving general fund budget, approving
54 major borrowing, and all “public questions” — by Australian
55 ballot.

56 A second petition requested that, if RTM were
57 discontinued, the town instead conduct its business through open
58 Town Meeting.

59 Now that both measures — using the Australian ballot to
60 vote on just about everything and conducting votes on just about
61 everything at open Town Meeting — have passed, it’s a bit
62 confusing, and passage of both alternatives could cause massive
63 legislative gridlock.

64 Charter Review Commission Chair Kate O’Connor said
65 Tuesday night the group will try to arrive at a compromise that
66 allows both.

67 “Well, RTM is no more, so the town will default to an
68 open Town Meeting and, since the other two articles also passed,
69 we’ll send two diametrically opposite charter amendments to the
70 Legislature,” O’Connor said.

71 She said that when the two petitions started circulating,
72 “the Charter Review Commission said, ‘We’ll wait and see what
73 happens in March’” and craft the charter based on the results of
74 the referendum.

75 “The town voted for both, and we’ll meet in May and try
76 to figure out some kind of compromise system that has Australian

77 ballot and open Town Meeting,” O’Connor added. “If we don’t
78 do it, the Legislature may say, ‘We’ll do it for you.’”

79 “I don’t think anybody in Brattleboro wants Montpelier
80 picking our government,” she said.

81 Moderator David Gartenstein, who has won another
82 term running unopposed, said he is “gratified that voters have
83 endorsed continuation of Town Meeting, and I look forward to
84 continue to support and encourage the deliberative process at
85 open Town Meeting.”

86 “And I thank everybody who made themselves available
87 to run for town office this election,” he added.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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