

—Slug:.....COMM-0860.bratt.OTM_advance
—Contributor..... Virginia Ray
—Contributor email.....ginnypray@gmail.com
—For section..... News
—Format..... News - byline and dateline
—Dateline..... Brattleboro
—Article Number:..... 43449



Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 For Brattleboro, the first open Town Meeting since 1960

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Selectboard wipes human services funding from its
3 recommended budget; new committees will replace former RTM
4 groups

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 Voters will convene in the first Open Town Meeting since
7 1960 on Saturday, April 11, starting at 8:30 a.m. in the
8 gymnasium at Brattleboro Union High School, 131 Fairground
9 Rd., to consider a \$27 million FY27 budget.

10 The open Town Meeting format means that every
11 registered voter who attends has a vote. That's different from

12 Representative Town Meeting (RTM), where about 140 elected
13 representatives voted on behalf of their district's constituents.

14 The change came after voters on March 3 discontinued
15 RTM.

16 An informational session for the public will be held
17 Wednesday, April 8, starting at 7 p.m. in Brattleboro Area Middle
18 School's multipurpose room.

19 **Human services town funding** 20 **still a question**

21 Voters will see a proposed allocation of \$1 in Article 8,
22 regarding supporting social service programs and facilities in
23 town.

24 A divisive change from the past, this article can also be
25 amended on town meeting floor. The board will appoint a
26 Human Services Committee to allocate whatever sum voters
27 agree upon at the meeting.

28 Discussion of the warning at the Selectboard's March 10
29 meeting had a somewhat wobbly start because a new proposal
30 for the warning was distributed shortly before the meeting,
31 causing confusion and discomfort among board members who
32 had prepared using the original document. But the discussion
33 went on.

34 On the warning, voters will see language updated to
35 reflect that the Human Services Committee, previously an RTM
36 committee, no longer exists. The new language proposes a
37 Human Services Committee, appointed by the Selectboard, to
38 allocate money.

39 At a Feb. 25 meeting, members of the former Human
40 Services Committee spoke in defense of human services funding,
41 after the Selectboard voted to eliminate such spending from the
42 recommended FY27 budget.

43 Members detailed their exhaustive vetting process of
44 applicants, involving the review of nearly 1,500 pages of

45 documentation to recommend over \$480,000 in support for 36
46 local organizations.

47 Representatives from various nonprofits, including
48 Interaction, Groundworks, and the Women’s Freedom Center,
49 testified that the town money is essential to maintain operational
50 infrastructure and leverage state and federal grants.

51 They argued that early intervention and preventative care
52 for issues such as food insecurity, homelessness, and addiction
53 are far more cost-effective for taxpayers than is long-term fallout
54 of unmet needs.

55 Community members and committee members
56 emphasized the services represent a vital social safety net rather
57 than optional charities.

58 That discussion concluded with a call to restore funding
59 at the upcoming meeting, framing the investment as fundamental
60 to the town’s economic and social stability.

61 **Finance Committee to morph**

62 The RTM Finance Committee has also ceased to exist.
63 State statute allows establishing a five-member Advisory Budget
64 Committee to be voted on at the Town Meeting.

65 Pending passage of relevant articles, the board will
66 appoint a five-member Advisory Budget Committee at its Tuesday,
67 April 21 meeting.

68 If voters approve an advisory budget committee to be
69 appointed by the Selectboard, they will also vote on whether
70 those members will be elected in future.

71 In discussion, board members proposed a second article:
72 to have the Selectboard appoint the committee for the first year
73 — until Town Meeting Day 2027 — with members elected by
74 Australian ballot thereafter, avoiding a costly and complex special
75 election in August.

76 During discussion it was also noted that the Finance
77 Committee historically preferred election by Australian ballot
78 rather than appointment by the board.

79 While public comment suggested making Selectboard
80 appointment of the budget committee permanent, the board
81 preferred the current amendment to honor the committee’s long-
82 term desire for elected status.

83 **Setting the date**

84 Also to be voted is whether to hold future annual Town
85 Meetings on the Sunday preceding the first Tuesday in March.

86 The rationale for proposing such a change is that
87 Saturday and the Monday preceding the first Tuesday in March —
88 the state’s Town Meeting Day — are difficult, due to venue
89 availability and staff workload for elections.

90 Thus, Sunday was proposed as a viable, though more
91 costly, alternative.

92 **Library trustees**

93 Voters will nominate from the floor three Brooks
94 Memorial Library trustees to serve three years and one to fill a
95 one-year unexpired term. They will also be asked to ratify a
96 temporary appointment to fulfill the remainder of an unexpired
97 term.

98 The names for consideration for the three-year terms of
99 2026-2029 are Margaret Atkinson, Jennifer Rowe, and Stephenie
100 Swindle.

101 The name for the 1-year term of 2026-2027 is Felicity
102 Ratté.

103 The name for ratification to complete an unexpired term
104 ending in 2028 is Robert Ferrante.

105 **Other business**

106 Other articles to be voted upon include:

- 107 • Spending \$131,698.86 through special assessments on
108 property within the Mountain Home Park Special Benefit
109 Assessment Tax District to pay debt service on capital

110 improvements to water and sewer lines serving the Mountain
111 Home and Deepwood Mobile Home Parks.
112 • Spending \$80,000 through special assessments on
113 properties within the Downtown Improvement District for capital
114 and operating costs of projects of the town's designated
115 downtown organization.
116 • Exempting the municipal tax portion of real estate
117 taxes for Brattleboro American Legion Post 5's Little League field
118 on South Main Street for five years.
119 • Exempting the municipal tax portion of real estate
120 taxes for The Family Garden Inc. for five years.
121 • Exempting the municipal tax portion of real estate
122 taxes for New England Center for Circus Arts (NECCA) for five
123 years.
124 • Electing two representatives to the Capital Grant
125 Review Board for one year.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

126

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

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

127

0

####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

128

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

####BEGIN VIDEO####

129

####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

130

####END LOGLINE####