

Special Town and School Meeting

November 3, 2014, 7 pm

Regarding petition of 5% of the voters to vote to adopt Town and School budget articles from the floor instead of by Australian ballot.

Present: Select Board Members: Maria Ammatuna, Ethan Swift, and David Atherton, Town Manager, Robin Bennett, School Board Members: Lisa Kenyon, Erin Gallivan, and Debbie Boyce, Principal Judi Pulsifer, Clerk Susan Gage, Moderator Art Doty and 40 registered voters.

Moderator Art Doty opened the meeting at 7:00 pm and welcomed Brandon Cub Scout Pack 123, Boy Scout Troop 111, and Brownie and Daisy troops 30033 to lead the flag ceremony.

Mr. Doty stated that the two separate warnings, school and town are substantially the same in content. Wayne Rausenberger made a motion that discussions be combined by common consent, seconded by Bernie Carr. Mr. Doty noted that there was no opposition, so a single discussion ensued for both the the Town and School Articles.

Mr. Doty read the School Meeting warning followed by the Town Meeting warning then opened the discussion asking for anyone speaking in favor of the article to open the discussion.

Bernie Carr spoke on both sides of the issue. Stated that the traditional Town Meeting is a dying culture and its loss is being felt throughout the state. Australian Ballot is more inclusive and convenient especially by absentee or early voting. Benefits of traditional Town Meeting is that it helps neighbors understand each other's points. Helps people to become more educated about issues.

Kevin Thornton spoke about the divisiveness in the town and its effects paralyzing town government. Mr. Thornton feels that whether this issue passes tonight, we need to get over this problem. He feels we need more mutual respect and doesn't believe that switching from Australian ballot would exclude people from voting, but would include more because of participation. Mr. Thornton stated that If people really care they find a way to vote and that Australian ballot is not the answer to participation. Democracy requires thought and caring. If there were real issues at stake people would be involved.

Brent Buehler spoke about the Town Meeting and felt the Select Board could not answer questions that were posed. Felt there were no answers available at the Town meeting last year and that would make it impossible to vote in a budget when answers were not readily available.

Mr. Carr stated that it puts an onus on the Select Board to have answers ready and to be better prepared. Mr. Carr also suggested that Town Meeting would not have to happen on a Monday night but could happen on a Sunday afternoon.

Linda Stewart disagreed with the idea of voting from the floor as it would disenfranchise many people who cannot make it to the meeting. She felt there is too much risk of disenfranchisement.

Larry Rogers had a question about the number of registered voters and how we would fit them all in to a meeting space.

Jan Coolidge spoke about the budget meetings last year that were opened to the public. There were eight budget meetings that were poorly attended.

Brent Buehler again spoke about a flyer that was put out by the Select Board that contained errors. He would like to see the Town managed appropriately before any big changes are made in how we vote.

Mr. Carr responded to Ms. Stewart regarding access and disenfranchisement.

Pam Douglass stated that she went to the Vermont Secretary of State website and discovered that voter turnout at traditional Town Meetings are a solid 14%. She also noted that voter participation is still only about 21% with Australian ballot.

Mr. Thornton responded to the objections of people regarding voter participation and disenfranchised voters.

Rep. Steve Carr spoke strongly in favor of traditional Town Meeting. He then spoke about the current divisiveness in town, and the ramification of that for people deciding to move businesses into town.

Dennis Reisenweaver asked how many absentee ballots there were for each vote last year. Clerk Susan Gage did not have those figures available, but stated that generally 7 – 10% of votes are cast by early or absentee ballots.

Pam Douglass stated that SOS website showed 9.3% of voters vote absentee or early.

Motion to adjourn by Bernie Carr and Seconded by Kevin Thornton at 7:39 PM.

Australian Balloting will begin tomorrow, Tuesday, November 4 at 7:00 AM through 7:00 PM.

Maria Ammatuna, Select Board Chair

L. Arthur Doty, Moderator

Lisa Kenyon, Neshobe School Board Chair

Susan Gage, Town Clerk