

Welcome to that uniquely New England form of local self-government, the town meeting! As the meeting's presiding officer, I would like to offer my perspective on town meeting, tell you how you can participate, and urge you to do so.

We don't debate national trends or grand issues. We do tackle a wide range of local government decisions. We deal with such matters as your children's schools, the condition of your drinking water and the upkeep of your roads. What we do affects your fire, police and ambulance protection, and the town's character as it develops. Our main revenue source is the property tax levy, so the choices made at town meeting directly affect your pocketbook.

Where did this idea of town meeting government come from? When the English came to this area to settle in the 17th and 18th centuries, they brought with them some firmly fixed notions about self-government by local meetings. The core ideas were that any member of the meeting could speak, and when all had been heard, they voted. Each member present got one vote, and once the vote was taken, all were bound by the will of the majority.

The rest of the country has followed the model established by the framers of the United States Constitution, who displayed a clear preference for representative democracy over popular voting. Over 250 Massachusetts towns, however, cling with determination to the pure democracy handed down to us from preceding generations. We place our trust in the collective wisdom of the voters willing to turn out for posted meetings to do the town's business. It takes work, to make it work. But for nearly three centuries we have made it work.

The sole requirement for participation in the meeting is that you be a registered voter in the Town of Westborough. If you are not a registered voter, this matter can easily be taken care of at the office of Town Clerk Nancy Yendriga during business hours. (Call 508-366-3020 to confirm the exact office hours.) Annual and special town meetings are posted at Town Hall; local cable TV carries announcements as well. There you can also find notices of meetings and hearings held by the Town's many elected and appointed volunteer boards. The daily and weekly newspapers that serve the area do a good job of covering these matters as well.

Want to learn more? Try the 30- minute video "Town Meeting 101" prepared for newcomers, if you fit that description, or if you want to get at a more compact summary of the key rules and practices, consult the "Frequently Asked Questions" document here on the Web site, or run through the three short videos that cover the key points in about 10 minutes.

I look forward to seeing you at town meeting!

Joe Harrington, Moderator