

Town Charter – Issues

Adoption of Annual Budget & Budget Related Articles

3(a) “Articles not approved at the floor meeting at the annual meeting shall be considered defeated” – This is a draft edit, I’m not sure what that means -is this being considered by the legislature or not?

The whole purpose was to vote money related items by Australian ballot, so it doesn’t seem as though you could remove an article before it even got onto the ballot.

The entire process seems cumbersome. At Town Meeting we will be voting by Australian Ballot for Town & School officers, local and union school district budgets. We will be “discussing” the town budget & budget related articles and then asking people to come back again, at some undetermined date to vote on those items. An “undetermined date” is a little difficult for all the people who travel at that time of year. “Budget-related articles” seems vague and up for interpretation by the Selectboard of the moment. In the Charter it says that budget-related article does not mean articles that seek approval to incur indebtedness to fund public improvements and acquisition of capital assets....So, what does that mean exactly? Does it mean we would **not** vote by Australian ballot to construct \$500,000 worth of sidewalks in the village? What exactly does “indebtedness to fund public improvements” mean? I don’t think that is clear for the Selectboard or the general public.

It seems like a lot of voting to take place in March & April. The volume of people choosing to vote by absentee ballot is increasing every year. You need a certain amount of time to create the ballot, print the ballot and get those ballots out to all of the absentee voters. Often, people who have requested ballots for the March election, are travelling home sometime in the month of April and it’s not possible to get that absentee ballot to them and back again. We have that problem all the time when we have to re-vote a school budget that was rejected in March and is up for a re-vote in April. We could be having a town budget vote in April and re-voting a school budget in April and those two elections wouldn’t necessarily be happening on the same day. We will basically be preparing for a vote, printing and mailing ballots, setting up for an election from February through April and maybe beyond.

A simple vote by Australian Ballot for the town budget can be accomplished without a charter and it should happen on Town Meeting Day along with all of the other budgets, articles and officer voting. A single election day to vote on everything by Australian Ballot increases your voter participation, simple. This Charter does not accomplish that.

I don’t think the way this Charter describes the adoption of the Town budget and budget-related articles is clear and I don’t think it is the way to increase voter participation. It’s messy and cumbersome and it will be difficult, from an election official standpoint to generate, account for, send out and receive absentee ballots that is fair and inclusive to the entire town population.

Mary A Mead

Charlotte Clerk/Treasurer