



City of Barre, Vermont

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City Manager
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January 21, 2025

Dear Members of the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs,

I am writing to express the City of Barre's request for the legislature to ratify the charter change to permanently move our Town Meeting Day to the second Tuesday in May. This charter change was approved by the voters at the May 2024 annual meeting. The proposal was placed on the ballot at the request of City staff with the primary goal of improving our budgeting process.

In 2024, at the recommendation of City staff, the City Council moved the annual meeting to the second Tuesday in May so that we had additional time to advocate for funding from the state to address the financial impacts of the July 2023 flood. This was a wise decision by the City Council, as the legislature secured \$1 million for Barre. With this funding, we restored devastating service cuts, accounted for the loss of grand list value, and presented a budget to voters with a reasonable projected tax rate increase. When we first began budget deliberations, City staff estimated that a budget without legislative assistance would have resulted in an approximately 20 percent budget increase. The approved budget resulted in a 0.2 percent increase.

The primary budgetary benefit of shifting Town Meeting Day permanently to May is time and data. Normally, City staff would begin working on the following year's budget in September, about two months into the current fiscal year. In 2024, since the budget did not have to be warned until April, we had over half a year's worth of actual financial data to prepare the spending plan. This resulted in a better budget that recognized over \$245,000 in savings. As a result of the voters' approval of this charter change, the City Council again changed our 2025 Town Meeting Day to May, so we will again prepare a responsible budget with more and better data.

A budget is a community's most important document – it sets priorities and allocates resources for the services residents have come to appreciate and value. Every rational organization – public or private – would opt to make its most critical decisions with more data. In our view, the Barre City budget should not be any different, and we are pleased that the voters agreed.

There is also local synergy in a May Town Meeting Day. Our neighboring municipality, Barre Town, also holds elections on the second Tuesday in May. Our communities share many important ties – including employers/employees, family members, and news media. Holding our local elections on the same day will result in greater awareness and engagement ahead of the annual meeting. Barre Town also serves as an example that May annual elections have worked well for decades.

We are also encouraged that the May 2024 election increased voter turnout in Barre, with over 1,565 votes cast. Since 2011, the only times there was greater turnout was during presidential primary election years in 2020 and 2016.

If this charter change is ratified, some members of the Committee have asked how the City would manage if future charter changes could not be acted on by the legislature until the subsequent years. Charter changes tend to be structural and meaningful in nature – not operational. Our charter has served us well, and we do not anticipate any such changes that we could not continue to abide by for an additional year, if needed.

On behalf of the City Council and the residents of Barre, I extend my gratitude to the Committee for its review and ratification of all our charter changes. If I may be of any assistance or if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nicolas Storellicastro', with a stylized, looping flourish at the end.

Nicolas Storellicastro
City Manager

CC Barre City Legislative Delegation
Barre City Council