

# Town of Danville Town Meeting Committee Charter

**ADOPTED on July 20, 2023, by the Selectboard**

## **A. APPLICATION.**

1. This charter sets forth the mission, organization, and rules of procedure for the Town Meeting Committee of the Town of Danville, which is referred to herein as “the body.”
2. The Selectboard may amend or repeal this charter as needed.

## **B. MISSION.**

1. The Town Meeting Committee identifies options for enhancing local participatory democracy in traditional Town Meeting by conducting research, soliciting and considering public input, and making recommendations to the Selectboard and School Board by January 2025.
2. The output of this committee should not be a single course of action, but a set of feasible, acceptable, and suitable options that the Selectboard and School Board can choose from to begin to implement with the 2025 Town Meeting, subject to ultimate approval by the voters of the Town.
3. The committee should make an interim report at the 2024 Town Meeting and preceding information meetings.

## **C. ORGANIZATION.**

1. The body shall be made up of 5 to 9 members appointed by the Selectboard.
2. All members will serve until the body completes its mission, they resign, or the Selectboard votes to remove or replace them.
3. The body shall elect a chair, who will appoint a secretary as needed.
4. The chair of the body shall preside over meetings. The chair shall preserve order in the meeting and shall regulate its proceedings by making determinations about all questions of order or procedure. If the chair is absent, the body shall select a member to act as chair for that meeting.
5. The chair shall appoint a secretary for each meeting. The secretary shall take and maintain meeting minutes in accordance with 1 V.S.A. § 312(b)(1) and shall publish draft and final meeting minutes online at <https://danvillevermont.org> in accordance with 1 V.S.A. § 312(b)(2).
6. Pursuant to their assigned responsibilities, committee members may represent the efforts of the body and make any decisions pursuant to the approval for action made at a duly convened meeting. Such action and scope of approval will be detailed in the minutes of that meeting. In specific, no raising or expenditure of funds and no actions binding the body shall be made prior to presentation, discussion and approval at a duly convened meeting.

## **D. AGENDAS AND MEETING NOTICES.**

1. Each meeting of the body shall have an agenda. Those who wish to be added to the meeting agenda shall contact the chair to request inclusion on the agenda. The chair shall determine the final content of the agenda.
2. This body shall adopt a resolution establishing a time and place for regular meetings. The chair shall ensure that the dates, times, and locations of regular meetings are posted online at <https://danvillevermont.org>. Regular meeting agenda shall be posted online and on bulletin boards at the Town Office, the U.S. Post Office, and Marty’s First Stop at least 48 hours before the meeting.

3. The chair may schedule special meetings as required. At least 24 hours prior to a special meeting, the chair shall give notice to all members of the body, unless previously waived; shall notify any person who has requested to be notified; and shall also give notice of the meeting's time, place, and purpose to the *Caledonian Record*. Special meeting agendas shall be posted online at <https://danvillevermont.org> and on bulletin boards at the Town Office, the U.S. Post Office, and Marty's First Stop at least 24 hours before the meeting.

4. This body shall not hold emergency meetings.

5. All business shall be conducted according to the noticed agenda, except that any addition to, deletion from, or changes in sequence to the noticed agenda must be made as the first act of business at the meeting. No additions to or deletions from the agenda shall be considered once the first act of business at the meeting has commenced. Any other adjustment to the noticed agenda, for example postponing or tabling actions, may be made by majority vote of the body.

#### **E. MEETINGS.**

1. As a committee of the Selectboard, the body is required by law to conduct its meetings in accordance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law, 1 V.S.A. §§ 310-314. Meetings must be open to the public at all times, except as provided in 1 V.S.A. § 313.

2. A majority of half the number of appointed members plus one, rounded down, shall constitute a quorum. If a quorum of the members of the body is not present at a meeting, no official meeting shall take place.

3. Motions made by members of the body do not require a second. The chair of the body may make motions and may vote on all questions before the body. A motion will only pass if it receives the votes of a majority of the total membership of the body.

4. Any member of the body may request a roll call vote. Pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 312(a)(2), when one or more members attend a meeting electronically, a roll call vote is required for votes that are not unanimous.

5. A member of the body may attend a meeting by electronic or other means without being physically present at a designated meeting location, so long as the member identifies him or herself when the meeting is convened, and is able to hear and be heard throughout the meeting. Whenever one or more members attend electronically, voting that is not unanimous must be done by roll call. If a quorum or more of the body attend a meeting without being physically present at a designated meeting location, the agenda for the meeting shall designate at least one physical location where a member of the public can attend and participate in the meeting. At least one member of the body, or at least one staff or designee of the body, shall be physically present at each designated meeting location.

6. Meetings may be recessed to a time and place certain.

#### **F. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.**

1. All meetings of the body are meetings in the public, not of the public. Members of the public shall be afforded reasonable opportunity to express opinions about matters considered by the body, so long as order is maintained according to these rules.

2. Members of the public may make comments during discussion of each agenda item before any action is taken by the body. By majority vote, the body may close public comment on an item.

3. Members of the public must be acknowledged by the chair before speaking.
4. All persons present at a meeting shall observe order and decorum. Neither members of the body nor members of the public shall delay or interrupt the proceedings or the peace of the meeting or interrupt or disturb any member while speaking. Members of the body and members of the public are prohibited from making personal, impertinent, threatening, or profane remarks.
5. Members of the body and members of the public shall obey the orders of the chair or other presiding member. The chair should adhere to the following process to restore order and decorum of a meeting, but may bypass any or all steps when he or she determines in his or her sole discretion that deviation from the process is warranted:
  - a. Call the meeting to order and remind the members of the applicable rules of procedure.
  - b. Declare a recess or table the issue.
  - c. Adjourn the meeting until a time and date certain.



*This version includes notes from the briefings to the Selectboard and School Board in black text boxes like this.*

# Task Analysis Briefing

## Danville Town Meeting Committee (TMC)

All Those in Favor, Frank Bryan and Susan Clark - There are a lot of factors in our world that are pushing us away from each other. Town Meeting builds something Vermont has always had a lot of: social capital.

Identifying options for enhancing local participatory democracy in traditional  
Town Meeting

Presentation as of November 18, 2023



# Purpose and Agenda

## Purpose

This briefing to the Danville Selectboard and School Board:

- **Updates facts and assumptions** about Town Meetings
- **Validates the task** and guidance for the TMC
- **Solicits guidance** from the boards on acceptable options
- **Sets projected schedule** of activities for the TMC

Alison Despathy, 2023 TM: "I think it really is important for all of us to come together, to see each other's faces, to have the conversations, as we try to sort through and solve problems."

## Agenda

- Situation
  - Background
  - Research Notes
  - Towns Across Vermont
  - Election of Officers
  - Recent Voting in Similar Towns/Cities
  - Danville TM History
  - Danville Participation History
  - Changing Town Meeting
- Key Planning Assumptions
- Initially Identified Approaches
- Task Methodology
- Projected Timeline
- Discussion and Guidance



# Situation – Background

Glenn Herrin, 2023 TM: "It's the one day a year that somebody can get up and come, talk to their neighbors and argue with them, respectfully, and hash out their differences and vote on what makes a difference to them and their town."

- Vermont mandates Town Meetings
  - Floor Meetings
  - Australian Ballots
  - Danville charter: "All voting on the Town budget and the highway budget at all annual and special meetings shall be by Australian ballot." [24 App. V.S.A. ch. 114, § 101](#)
  - Danville School District charter: "All voting on the school budget at all annual and special meetings shall be by Australian ballot." [16 App. V.S.A. ch. 131, § 101](#)
- Hard data is unreliable
  - Attendance is generally measured by votes; floor meetings sometimes reflect only 1 vote
  - Reporting to the Secretary of State is inconsistent and contains many errors
  - Floor Meetings have about 8-13% turnout
  - Australian Ballots have about 27% turnout
  - Danville's 2021-2022 turnout (absentee ballot only) peaked at about 40%
- Every town is different
  - Most towns use a combination of Floor Meeting and Australian Ballot (but the mix varies)
  - Some towns seem very happy... and other towns do not



# Situation – Research Notes

- First Town Meeting – Bennington, 1762
- Small towns have better attendance than large towns
- Australian Ballot reduces attendance for floor meetings
- Sociological and political ideologies do not appear to affect attendance or participation
- The size of the hall does not make a difference in attendance or participation
- Diversity is a plus for participation
- Night meetings tend to decrease in attendance over time
- Changing from Tuesday to Saturday does not seem to affect turnout
- Issues are the most important determinant of turnout and the amount of discussion

**Eric Bach, 2023 TM: "...they don't really get to have a voice in how things are done, because they can't get here."**



# Situation – Towns Across Vermont

- Trend towards Australian Ballot
  - In 2013, 45 towns/cities used only AB; in 2023 that number was 64
  - In 2013, 77 towns used floor vote exclusively, in 2023 that number was 69
  - The majority of towns use AB/floor hybrid
- Observations from Town Officials
  - Many towns have *perception* of dwindling attendance and engagement
  - Some towns like methods that other towns hate and vice versa!
  - All towns noted increased voting with mail-in ballots during COVID
  - Most towns prefer a hybrid of Floor Meeting and Australian Ballot
  - Small percentage thought info meetings before balloting is adequate, majority thought those are not well attended and are compromised since there is no chance for change at that point
- 2023 Australian Ballot questions
  - 18 towns voted on moving entirely to Australian Ballot
  - At least 3 voted to eliminate floor meeting
  - Most kept floor meeting, but some shifted to electing officials by Australian Ballot
- All towns are seeking more attendance and access
  - Many town clerks discussed recent trainings regarding solutions for those who are sick, disabled or cannot make town meeting but would like to participate without an Australian Ballot
  - Creative solutions and interpretations/amendments of statute all being considered to create equitable access to Town Meeting

## Engaging issues:

- Mobile towers
- Dollar General
- Wind towers
- Budget increases
- School buildings
- Firearm use ordinances
- ATVs
- Zoning changes
- Bond votes
- Emergency services
- ...





# Situation – Election of Officers

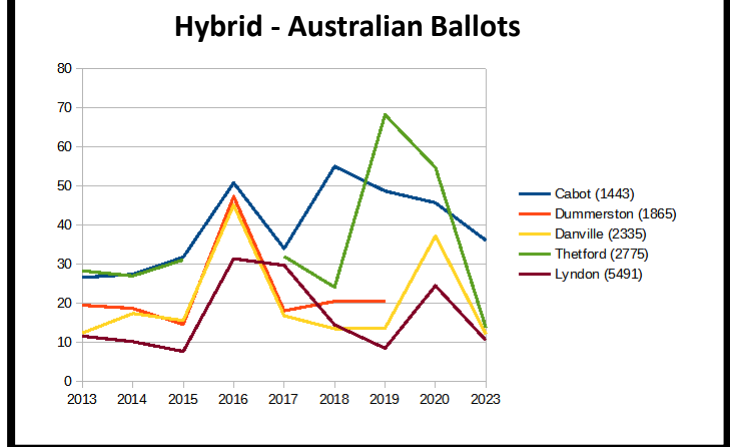
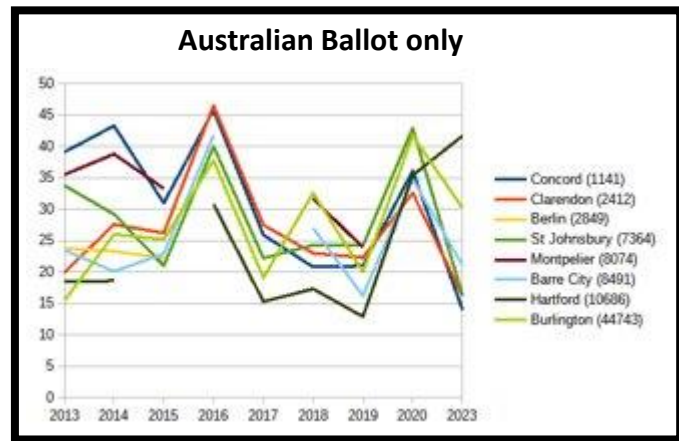
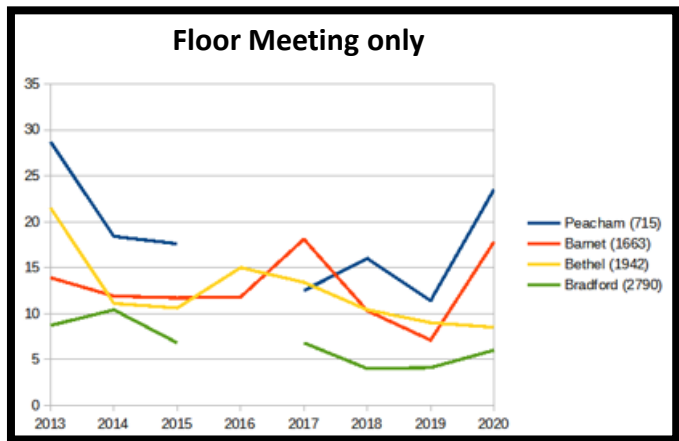
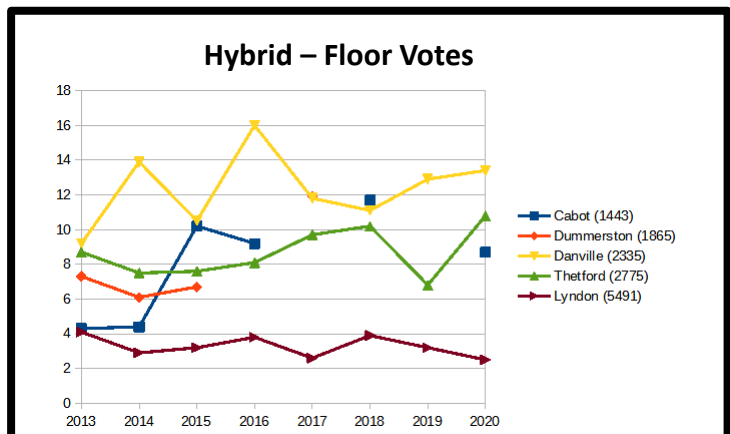
*About 4 towns use Australian Ballot only for budgets, while about 84 use Australian Ballot to elect officers.*

- Elections at Floor Meetings *do* allow introductions
  - [17 V.S.A. § 2640\(c\)\(2\)](#): "... a candidate for local office nominated from the floor at the annual meeting may introduce his or her candidacy to the extent permitted by the voters at the meeting."
- Election by Australian Ballot requires candidate registration
  - People seeking an office must circulate a petition
  - Petition requires either 30 signatures or 5% of the registered voters - whichever is less
  - A short, single page form filled out to town clerk is the only other requirement
- 2023 Town/City Reported Methodology (for town issues, of 235 reporting)
  - 158 use Australian ballot for officers
  - 101 use Australian ballot for public questions
  - 78 use Australian ballot for budgets
  - 74 use Australian ballot for both officers and budgets
  - *School numbers are similar, but merged districts and supervisory unions occlude the data*



# Situation – Recent Voting in Similar Towns/Cities

- Floor Meeting attendance
  - Current average 13% for floor meetings only, 8% for combination
  - Generally smaller towns have better turnouts
- Australian Ballot attracts 2-3 times floor turnout
  - Average ~27%
  - Options vary – all items, budget, officers, appropriations, ...
- Turnout for all voting is clearly most affected by local issues



<https://sos.vermont.gov/elections/election-info-resources/town-meeting-local-elections/>



# Situation – Danville TM History

- First Danville Town Meeting: March 17, 1788
- Early meetings reflect an abundance of officers
  - About 50 appointees; 31 town surveyors and highwaymen
  - Controversial issues were generally about livestock
  - 1813 TM ordinance bans rams from wandering around
- 1840 town population peaks at 2,633
  - Population for last 20 years is around 2,200
  - Average voter checklist in recent years is 1,700
- 2010 petition changes charter to require Australian ballot for budgets
  - November ballot item - 2:1 in favor of Australian Ballots (1,146 total ballots)
  - Since 2011, all budgets have passed as presented (with one school exception)
- 2020 most recent "normal" meeting: 239 at floor meeting, 662 ballots cast
  - 2021-22 no in-person Town Meeting due to COVID restrictions
  - 2023 last-minute change to in-person Town Meeting; item to vote on all public questions and elect officers by Australian ballot



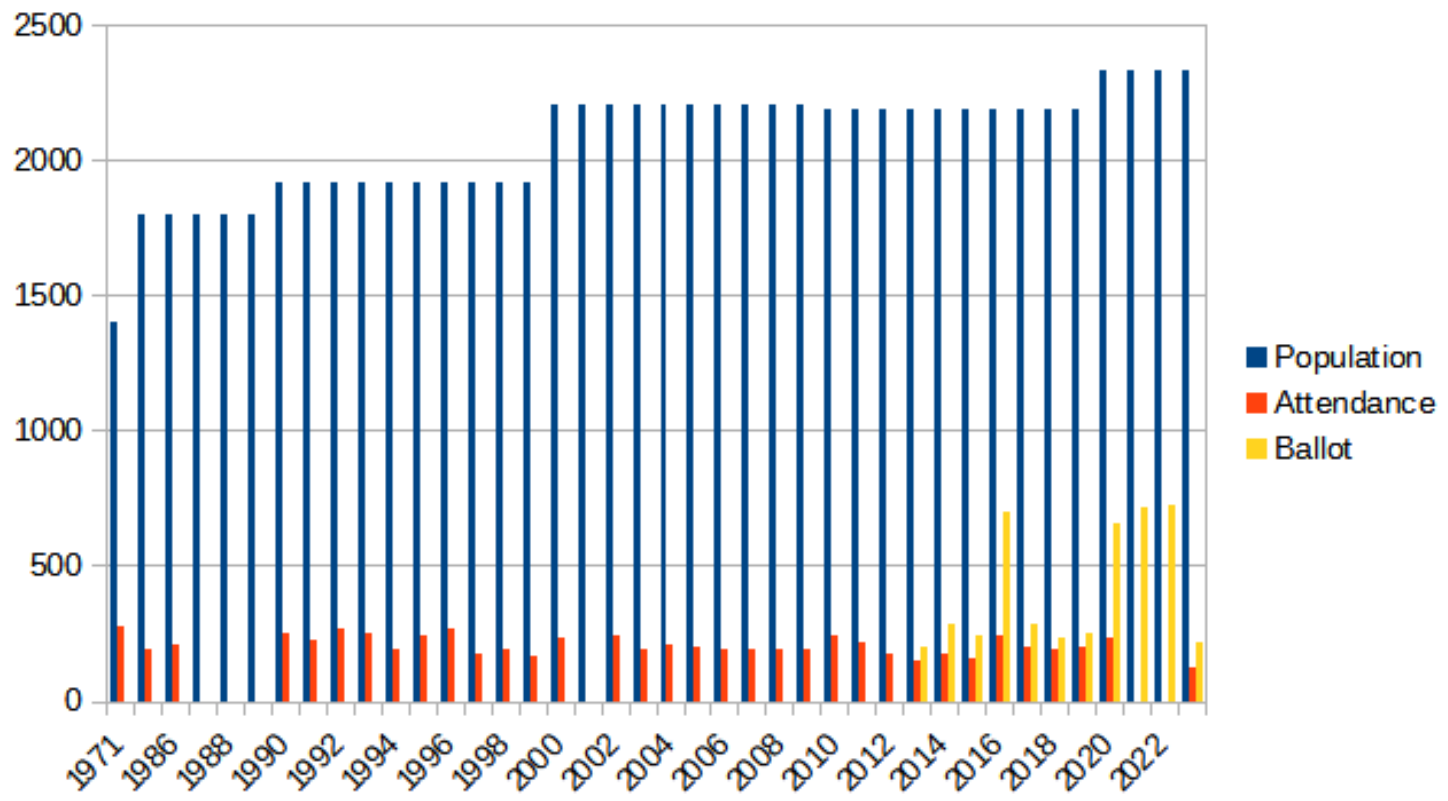
# Situation – Danville Participation History

Recent record high participation in 2016 with questions about ATVs and Article 46 school funding

- Over the past 35-40 years, floor meeting attendance has ranged from 153 to 275 with an average of 209
- Participation seems highly dependent on issues:
  - 2016 ATVs: 250 (+706 ballots)
  - 2015 eliminate auditor: 164
  - 2012 first budget ballot: 176
  - 2005 nothing exciting: 207
  - 1997 appropriations: 178
  - 1996 school budget: 269
  - 1994 insurance: 193
  - 1991 library foundation: 226
  - 1971 kindergarten: 283

- Attendance is NOT really dropping, but...
- Attendance has never been high
- Maximum voter turnout seems to be ~40%

Alison Low, 2023 TM: "[Working families] are the people that we need to hear from the most, and we're not hearing from them now."





# Situation – Changing Town Meeting

- Annual Meetings are required by law - [17 V.S.A. § 2640](#)
  - A meeting of the legal voters of each town shall be held annually on the first Tuesday of March
  - The annual town meeting shall be the annual town school district meeting - [16 V.S.A. § 422](#)
- Allowable Changes
  - ***Charters can override normal Annual Meeting laws; otherwise...***
  - Meeting time and place are set locally
  - Floor meeting may start on any of the three days before the first Tuesday of March (Saturday on)
  - Australian Balloting must be the first Tuesday of March
  - Officers, budgets, and public questions may be elected by Australian Ballot
- Change Process
  - Floor Meeting date shift requires a town vote - [17 V.S.A. § 2640\(b\)](#)
  - Switching to Australian Ballot (for elections, budgets, or public questions) requires a town vote; once adopted, Australian Ballots continue unless discontinued by a town vote - [17 V.S.A. § 2680\(b\)-\(d\)](#)
  - Annual School District meetings can be between February 1 and June 14, with a town vote - [16 V.S.A. § 422](#)
  - Charter changes require a proposal (Selectboard or petition), 2 public hearings, an Australian Ballot vote, and then enactment by the state legislature - [17 V.S.A. § 2645](#)



# Key Planning Assumptions

*Even for Australian Balloting, 40% turnout is for hot-button issues; 25% is more normal.*

- Maximum turnout is about 40% of voters
- Floor meetings serve a public good beyond voting:
  - Participation in TM encourages participation in other town bodies and activities
  - Face to face discussion of issues fosters civility and compromise
- Australian ballots improve turnout for disenfranchised populations (disabled, working, newcomers, ...)
- We can improve floor meeting turnout and participation without changing the basic format
- **It all comes down to striking a balance between enfranchising those who can't attend TMD and giving a meaningful function for the people who do attend**



# Initially Identified Approaches

*The TM Committee expects to make at least 2 format recommendations as well as suggestions for improving participation for ANY format.*

## TM Format

- Floor Meeting Only
- Hybrid
  - AB for budgets (current)
  - AB for elections
  - AB for public questions
- Australian Ballot Only
- ~~Representative Town Meeting~~
- New Hampshire [SB2](#)
  - In-person meeting to set ballot items
  - Voting weeks later

## Participation Boosters

- Encourage Participation
  - Ensure accessibility on par with balloting
  - Offer online attendance
  - Offer daycare
  - Involve young people
  - Advertise services and issues
- Improve Ballot Item Input
  - Host info meeting before TM warning to allow voters to comment on, if not amend, items
- Change Floor Meeting Date/Time
  - Saturday before first Tuesday
  - Saturday evening
  - Sunday or Monday
  - Tuesday evening





# Task Methodology

*Both Selectboard and School board agreed with these general goals and this approach.*

- TMC Goal: identify options for Town Meeting that will...
  - Result in **good decisions** that are understood by and reflect the will of Danville residents
  - Maximize **participation** by people who want to participate
  - Increase **civic engagement** beyond Town Meeting
- TMC Approach:
  - Step 1: Identify **facts and assumptions**
    - Brief and get guidance from Selectboard and School Board
  - Step 2: Research and identify **all potential options**
    - Present to Selectboard, School Board, and 2024 Town Meeting
    - Gather input on implementation and acceptability of options
  - Step 3: Develop and refine plans for **realistic options**
    - Solicit public input and hold public forum(s)
    - Create outlines for options that are feasible, acceptable, and suitable
    - Present recommended options to Selectboard and School Board

**Charter Mission: The Town Meeting Committee identifies options for enhancing local participatory democracy in traditional Town Meeting by conducting research, soliciting and considering public input, and making recommendations to the Selectboard and School Board by January 2025.**





# Projected Timeline

*Both Selectboard and School board agreed with this timeline.*

Step 1

- July – August 2023
  - Selectboard charters Town Meeting Committee (TMC)
  - TMC holds initial organizational meeting
- September - October 2023
  - TMC conducts initial research into background and legal options
- November 2023
  - *TMC briefs Selectboard and School Board on Task Analysis*

Step 2

- December 2023 – February 2023
  - TMC continue research, refines ideas into potential options
  - *TMC briefs Selectboard and School Board on Potential Options*
- March 2024
  - *TMC makes public presentation as part of 2024 Town Meeting (and/or Info Meetings)*

Step 3

- April – May 2024
  - TMC updates options based on board and TM feedback
- June 2024
  - TMC hosts public meeting to discuss updated recommendations
- July – August 2024
  - TMC finalizes recommendations
- September 2024
  - *TMC presents Final Recommendations to Selectboard and School Board*
- October 2024 – December 2025
  - Selectboard and School Board decide on, implement, and warn recommendations
- March 2025
  - *TMC supports 2025 Town Meeting (and/or Info Meetings as needed)*
  - Danville conducts Town Meeting to experiment with / adopt / vote on recommendations



# Discussion and Guidance



All Those in Favor, Frank Bryan and Susan Clark: "...Australian Ballot takes away your right to legislate – to be part of the lawmaking process – and it doesn't even replace it with a deliberative body that represents you. It simply allows you to vote up or vote down, yes or no, on an issue prepared by the selectboard or in many cases by a small group of private citizens with a special interest."

Alison Low, 2023 TM: "[Working families] are the people that we need to hear from the most, and we're not hearing from them now."

Glenn Herrin, 2023 TM: "It's the one day a year that somebody can get up and come, talk to their neighbors and argue with them, respectfully, and hash out their differences and vote on what makes a difference to them and their town."

Real Democracy, Frank Bryan: "Yes – Town Meeting has its flaws, but show me a better system."

Susan Clark: "Australian Ballot voting allows more people to participate but shrinks the legislative vocabulary."

All Those in Favor, Frank Bryan and Susan Clark: "[Debates]... boil down to quantity vs. Quality – more people will participate in a less meaningful way if the Australian Ballot is adopted."

Eric Bach, 2023 TM: "...they don't really get to have a voice in how things are done, because they can't get here."

Town Treasurer: "We had record breaking turnout for voters" [during the pandemic]

Alison Despathy, 2023 TM: "I think it really is important for all of us to come together, to see each other's faces, to have the conversations, as we try to sort through and solve problems."



# Town Meeting '24

## Danville Town Meeting Committee (TMC)

All Those in Favor, Frank Bryan and Susan Clark - There are a lot of factors in our world that are pushing us away from each other. Town Meeting builds something Vermont has always had a lot of: social capital.

Identifying options for enhancing local participatory democracy in traditional  
Town Meeting

Presentation as of March 4, 2024



# Town Meeting Committee

- At the 2023 Town Meeting, there were articles on whether to continue floor meetings or move everything to Australian Ballot (for both Town and School)



- The articles failed, but the discussion raised many good points – pro and con ...so the Selectboard chartered a committee to see if there are better ways
- *The Town Meeting Committee identifies options for enhancing local participatory democracy in traditional Town Meeting by conducting research, soliciting and considering public input, and making recommendations to the Selectboard and School Board by January 2025*

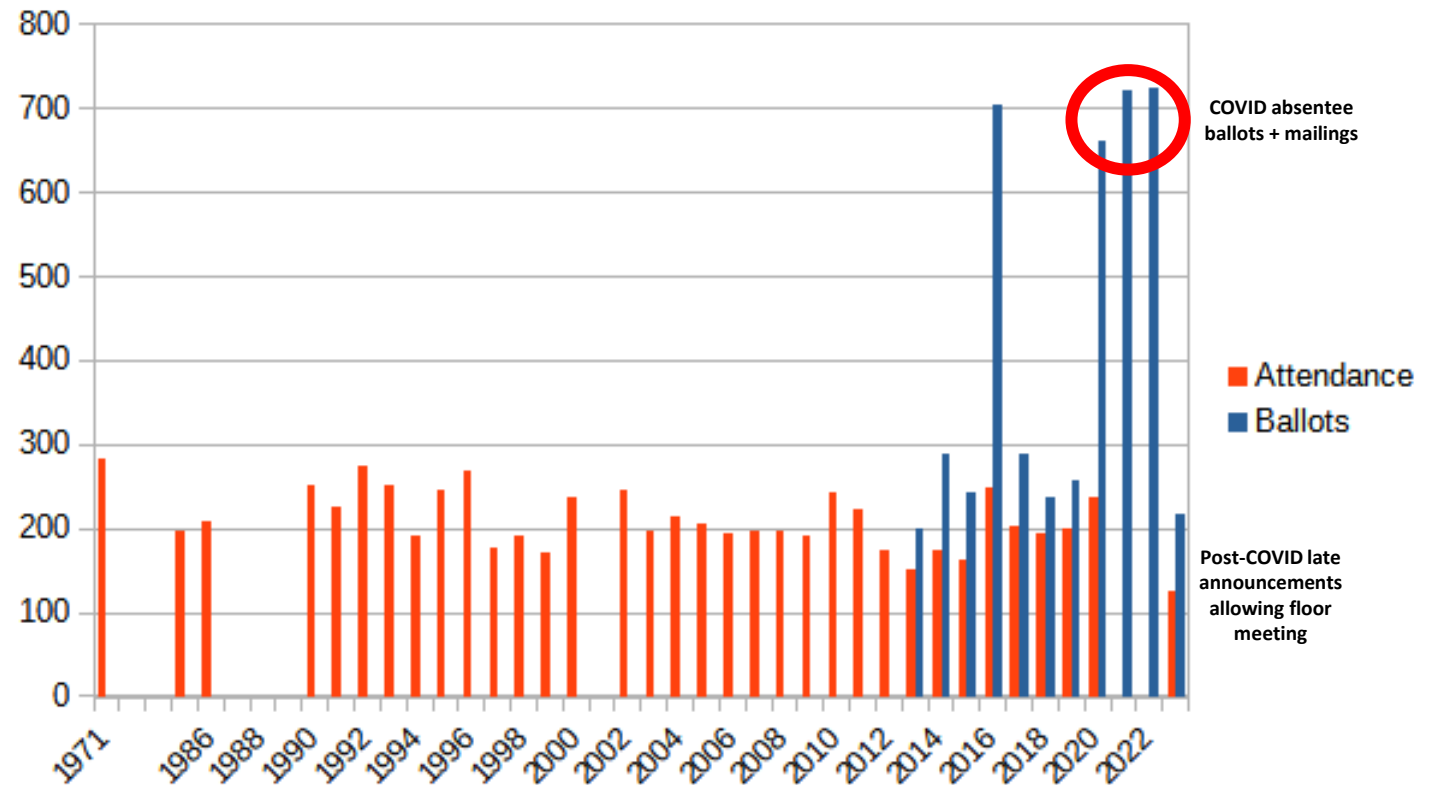


# Danville Town Meeting History

- First Danville Town Meeting: March 17, **1788**
- Early meetings reflect an abundance of officers; controversial issues were generally about livestock and land
- In 1840 town population peaked at 2,633; recently the population hovers around 2,200 with a voter checklist around **1,700**
- A **2010** petition led to charters that **require Australian Ballot for budgets**
  - Charters are for Town and School
  - Same thing could be done with votes, instead
- Over the past 35-40 years...
  - Floor meeting attendance has ranged from 153 to 275 with an average of **209**
  - Ballots (without COVID mailings) average **305**

Attendance is NOT really dropping, but...

- Attendance has never been high
- Maximum voter turnout (for ballots) seems to be ~40%
- Hot issues bring out voters - even without mailing ballots to everyone







# Town Meeting Options

	Floor (Only)	Hybrid A: Elections	Hybrid B: Budgets	Ballot (Only)	New Combination
	TM is conducted entirely by Floor Meeting	TM Elections are by Australian Ballot; remainder is conducted with Floor Meeting	TM Budgets are by Australian Ballot; remainder is conducted with Floor Meeting	TM is conducted entirely by Australian Ballot	TM is in two parts: Floor Meeting a month in advance sets Australian Ballot items
Positives	Allows attendees to legislate any/all TM issues; meeting brings voters together	Allows attendees to legislate (discuss and make changes to) Floor Meeting items; maximizes convenience for voters to say yes or no on specific types of issue; meeting brings voters together		Higher turnout; maximizes convenience for voters to say yes or no to TM issues	Allows attendees to set potential solutions and maximizes convenience for yes/no voting
Negatives	Lower turnout; people who don't attend can't vote Attending meeting takes effort	Prevents voters from legislating Australian Ballot issues (yes-no only) People who don't attend Floor Meeting can't vote on those issues Attending meetings takes effort		Prevents voters from legislating Voters don't need to attend to issues to cast ballots	Unique system will be confusing May not improve participation for meeting or ballot
Officers	Officers elected from floor; only attendees can vote and may or may not know candidates	Officers petition to get on ballot; voters know candidates ahead of time for ballot	Officers elected from floor; only attendees can vote and may or may not know candidates	Officers petition to get on ballot; voters know candidates ahead of time for ballot	Candidates chosen at Floor Meeting; voters know candidates by ballot time
Budgets	Attendees may modify budgets as needed; TM should always result in official budget	Attendees may modify budgets as needed; TM should always result in official budget	Attendees may only change budgets by voting down, requiring future ballot cycle(s)	Attendees may only change budgets by voting down, requiring future ballot cycle(s)	Attendees may modify proposal at Floor Meeting; budgets should usually pass at ballot
Expected participation	Floor Meeting ~14%	Floor Meeting ~12%	Floor Meeting ~12%	Floor (Information) Meeting 0%	Floor Meeting ~14%
	For ALL options (including Floor Meeting only), special / high-interest issues can still go to Australian Ballot with potential for up to ~40% participation				
	Australian Ballot 0%	Australian Ballot ~20%	Australian Ballot ~20%	Australian Ballot ~27%	Australian Ballot ~27%
Change Process	2025: TM vote to repeal charter; Legislature rescinds 2025 or 26: TM vote to discontinue use of ballot for budgets in following year	2025: TM vote to repeal charter; Legislature rescinds (optional) 2025 or 26: TM vote to hold elections by Australian Ballot in following year	No changes required, but... 2025: TM could vote to repeal charter (would continue to vote on budget by Australian Ballot unless/until rescinded)	2025: TM vote to repeal charter; Legislature rescinds (optional) 2025 or 26: TM vote to use Australian Ballot for all measures in following year	2025: TM votes for new charter with Combination TM rules ~2026: Legislature approves changes (after deliberation) ~2027: TM begins new format



# Participation Boosters (for any Town Meeting)

- Public Encouragement
  - Ensure accessibility on par with balloting
  - Offer online attendance
  - Offer daycare
  - Involve young people
  - Advertise services and issues
  - Host welcome / TM orientation
  - Mail ballots to all active registered voters
    - Select or School Board action
    - Expect ballot increase from 27% to 40%
- Improve Ballot Item Input
  - Host info meeting before TM warning to allow voters to comment on, if not amend, items
- Change Floor Meeting Date/Time
  - Saturday before first Tuesday
  - Saturday evening
  - Sunday or Monday
  - Tuesday evening





# Tell us what you think...

- Take the survey!
- Come to the meetings!
- Contact us any way that works for you!

**Town of Danville**  
**2024 Town Meeting After Action Review**  
**May 9, 2024**

This document is an After Action Review (AAR), a record of strengths and areas for improvement, for Danville's Town Meeting (TM) on March 5, 2024, in the gym at the Danville School. Polls were open from 10:00am to 7:00pm, and the floor meeting started around 10:20am and finished around 2:00pm.

Registered Voters: 1,843  
Floor meeting attendance: 306 (16.6%)  
Ballots cast: 503 (27.3%)

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**TM Boosters (i.e. the ad hoc TM Committee)**

Discussion:

- Members of the official TM Committee, charged with looking into how to improve TM participation in general, identified several actions they could do immediately, and formed an informal volunteer ad hoc TM Committee to improve advertising and coordination for the 2024 TM.
- The ad hoc TM Committee further selected one person, Alice Kitchel, to be the "showrunner" as the point of contact for coordination. She used a temporary email address, tmdanville2024@gmail.com. The single point of contact and email worked very well.

Recommendation:

- Continue to appoint a lead coordinator for each year's TM by early January.
- Consider appointing an annual TM committee every year, or a standing TM Committee, charged with advertising and coordinating TM issues.

## Pre-TM Advertising

### Discussion:

- The Town and School District officially warn Town Meeting with public postings of the agendas and sample ballots, meeting notices, and distribution of the Town Report; these are good but there are a lot of pages that tend not to be eye-catching.
- This year volunteers posted and circulated flyers for a TM survey and to advertise TM itself, separate from official notices, as well as posting on social media and Front Porch Forum (FPF). The survey posters and social media and FPF posts seemed to be well-received and generated more interest and attendance. Paper flyers, obscured by the volume of official notices, did not seem effective.
- While not definitively linked, anecdotally the advertising greatly increased interest, and floor meeting attendance was up by well over 100 compared to recent years.

### Recommendations:

- Continue pushing TM participation (voting and floor meeting attendance) with social media and FPF postings in the month before TM, with multiple people doing the posting.
- Only produce paper ads or flyers by exception.
- Consider engaging young people to make ads on newer media forms (e.g. TikTok).
- Consider hosting an informational meeting the Saturday morning before, perhaps with food (e.g. a pancake breakfast).

## Information Tables

### Discussion:

- In addition to official tables set up in the meeting space, many groups often set up tables at the floor meeting entryway to provide information, recruit volunteers, or solicit donations.
- This year the showrunner coordinated requests and planned locations to ensure there would be enough tables and space to circulate and engage with people. For this year there were 15 tables.
- Specifically in 2024: school office area had food items (coffee, baked goods, girl scout cookies) and train station display; entry vestibule had info displays (Conservation commission, Communications Union District, etc.); and gym entry had TM-related tables (TM survey, TM lunch ticket sales).

### Recommendation:

- Continue coordinating table requests and planning layout ahead of time.

## TM Orientation

### Discussion:

- Tom Ziobrowski, former moderator, hosted a TM Orientation beginning at 9:30am in the school library to introduce floor meeting norms and processes to people who are new to Vermont, Danville, or TM in general.

- Volunteers posted announcements for the orientation on social media and Front Porch Forum several times in the two weeks before TM.
- 7 newcomers attended the session and it seemed welcome and very well received.

Recommendation:

- Continue offering an orientation starting 30 minutes before the floor meeting.
- Continue to post lots of signs to direct people from entry to orientation as needed (8-10 from school entry to library).
- Consider whether the orientation should be advertised separate from other TM announcements.

### Babysitting

Discussion:

- Volunteers provided babysitting for small children during the floor meeting in the school library.
- Parents very much appreciated having a safe place for their children while they attended the floor meeting.
- The sitters had fun taking care of 7 young children this year, with no infants.
- While engaged as volunteers, the school paid the sitters \$50 for their services.

Recommendation:

- Continue to offer babysitting, with optimal staffing of 2 middle/high school monitors plus 2-4 elementary/middle school assistants (allows rotation and breaks).

### Audio-Visual Support

Discussion:

- The Danville School set up a projector (big screen behind podium) and microphone system for the gym, which worked well.
- There was one working mic at the front for the public, which worked well but sometimes created short delays as people walked to the mic.
- Some people in the back could not hear people who did not use the mic, even if they spoke loudly.

Recommendation:

- Continue the use of projector to display agenda items, names of candidates, and relevant presentation information for all to see during the meeting.
- Test all mics about 30 minutes before the meeting begins; invariably one will need batteries.
- Consider having 2-3 wireless mics with volunteers passing them to attendees to be able to speak from their seats.

### Midday Meal

Discussion:

- The Pope Library and Knights of Pythias put on a ham lunch for TM attendees, selling tickets as a fundraiser. (The target was 72 tickets to break even.)

- The food arrived a little later than expected, but the Town Moderator kept the meeting agenda on schedule to break when the meal was ready.
- Many people appreciate the meal as a highlight of the day and incentive to attend the floor meeting, though others leave at lunchtime and do not return.

Recommendation:

- Continue to support/offer a midday meal for attendees.

### **Floor Meeting Conduct**

Discussion:

- Doug Lamothe set up the Vermont and American flags, which ideally go behind the podium.
- A student volunteer gave Toby Balivet's TM invocation to begin the meeting; it went very well.
- Traditionally the Town and School have alternated which goes first in the floor meeting. This sometimes means the School Superintendent cannot make it (as he/she has at least two other meetings to attend) and the flow of meetings also varies significantly year-to-year (with very little to discuss during the School portion, with budgets voted by Australian Ballot).
- For 2024 the Town did not warn an "other matters" agenda item, as that is not legally required; the moderator can just allow that at the end of each section. Given the timing of lunch and lack of an agenda item, however, the moderator did not call for Town other matters, and at the end of the School portion residents wanted to address Town, School, and unrelated items.

Recommendation:

- Continue soliciting a student volunteer to give the TM invocation.
- Consider establishing a standard sequence (e.g. Town at 10:00, School at 1:00) to make the schedule more predictable for presenters and attendees.
- Coordinate so School and Town warn "other matters" the same way; ensure both parts of floor meeting allow people to raise other matters.
- Consider recording and/or streaming the floor meeting so that people may watch portions live or later if they could not attend in person.

### **Other Ideas**

Discussion: these are other suggestions for future consideration.

Recommendation:

- Seating assistance: consider having a volunteer available to help people with access needs or service animals find appropriate seating.
- Breakdown: consider formalizing the tasks needed to restore the school after the floor meeting.
- Surveys: if a group is doing an online survey for Town Meeting attendees, use SurveyMonkey (better data aggregation and analytic tools) instead of Google Forms.

**Pictures**

Discussion: No recommendations, these are just pictures from the day!





Town of Danville Town Meeting After Action Review  
May 9, 2024



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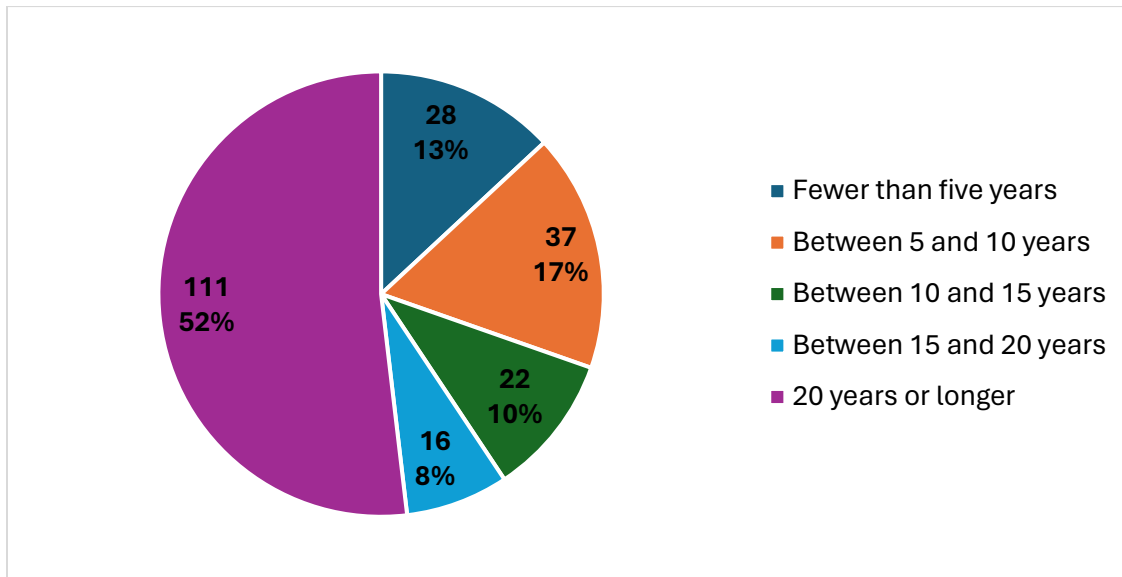
## Town Meeting Day Survey Summary – All Responses

The survey, which went live February 1, 2024, was available online and publicized through Front Porch Forum, the Danville Chamber Facebook page, and posters with a QR code to the survey. Paper copies were available at the Town Hall and the libraries. Prior to Town Meeting Day, only a handful of paper copies were received. Paper copies were available at Town Meeting Day, and 72 handwritten responses were received and tabulated. In total, there were 217 responses, but not every respondent answered every question.

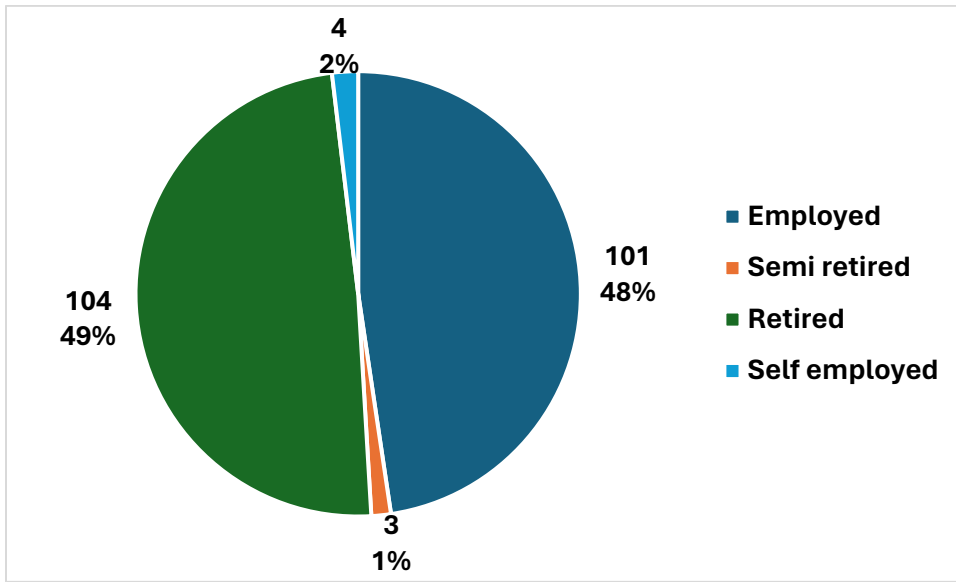
### 1. Are you a registered voter in Danville? (211 responses)

Yes: 209; No: 2

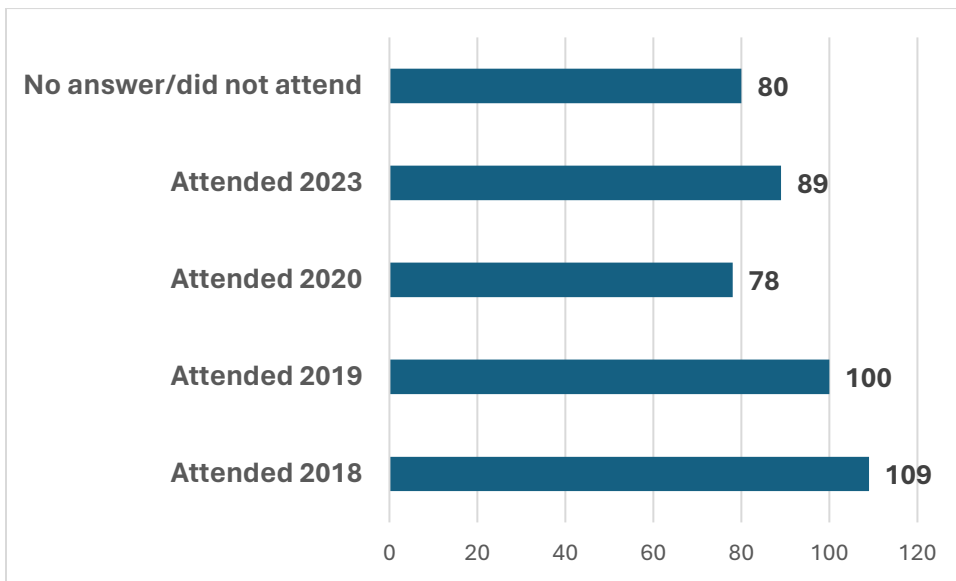
### 2. How long have you been a Danville resident? (214 responses)



### 3. Are you... (212 responses)



### 4. Did you attend Town Meeting Day in Danville in person? (check all that apply)



## 5. Why or why not? (Open-ended)

### Comments from those who attended ALL Town Meetings in person-- 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2023:

1. Tradition of local say in government. 2. Enjoy the social aspects of town meeting.

Always interesting and important to vote.

Attend: Local Democracy is Best

Believe in the importance of taking an active part in local government / decisions

CIVIC DUTY

Civic duty/responsibility

Civic obligation

I believe it is my civic responsibility. How do we have a town and support services, etc without people participating? How do we make sure the town officers are doing right by the town? Residents of the town need to be knowledgeable about how their town .

Community contact/discussion of articles

Community, information, hearing two sides, voting and a little laughter

Community, town legislative body

Curious and to see people

Democratic involvement of all citizens matters

Did not attend the first couple of years due to lack of babysitter

Enjoy the community and the chance to weigh in on the budget. Love Toby as moderator!

For discussions and social aspect

For Public discourse It is important for live debate and Q. & A.

Fun. If you don't vote, you can't complain

I believe in the institution. I think it is vital for town function

I feel it is important to participate, vote and learn about what is happening in Danville

I feel it's one way of being a responsible citizen - to vote, to listen to others' opinions, and to maintain connections within my community.

Years ago (when I was much younger) a 94 year old told me, "if you don't go to Town Meeting you have no right to talk about it afterwards." I've forever been happy she told me that. I enjoy going - in person..

I feel it is important to participate, vote and learn about what is happening in Danville.

To hear the discussions on issues and budgets

To vote (mentioned specifically twice.)

Vote and be informed (mentioned specifically three times)

To understand better what is going on in town, to vote, and to see folks.

To be informed To meet townfolk. Exchange ideas

To try and make a difference in how the town operates and how our tax dollars are spent.

To learn about town affairs.

To know what's happening in my town and keep Vermont tradition

To have a say in town governance, to promote a sense of community, to know my fellow citizens and support my neighbors. If I don't do my part, I have no right to complain about what is or isn't being done.

Provides knowledge about the needs of the people around you.

To elect selectboard.

To be informed and to be involved.

Opportunity to be informed ; I view it as a responsibility of citizenship.

Obligations

I feel that it is important to attend to understand the workings of the town & school district and to voice my opinion by voting.

I like discussing town business with my neighbors. It's the most basic form of democracy.

I like taking an active role in my town's activities.

I love it. It's a cocktail party without booze. Seeing friends and neighbors is priceless. The lunch is great. (later - I'll go no matter what!)

I want to hear any and all explanations before voting - and I don't attend the night meetings either in the Village or in North Danville.

Important to hear details / tradition!

Important to keep involved.

information & to be involved.

Interest in town and school affairs.

It allows people in the village to voice concerns and provides information on the state of the town.

It behooves me to know what's happening in our town and to have input. It also keeps me abreast of what other residents' needs might be. To be of service to the community.

It is a critical part of New England History that is dying around us. I like candidates to positions be able to stand up, answer questions and speak their opinions. I like seeing our elected officials answering questions. I love being able to attend a community event that I have been going to since a teenager.

It is important for everyone to meet and greet and decide things in person and have discussions in person and truly feel that everyone's voice counts and everyone's opinion is valued.

## Comments from those who attended some – but not all – Town Meetings in person from 2018 to 2023:

Civic responsibility

Communicable disease spread.

Get town info.

Had to travel for work during Town Meeting Day for 2019 and 2020.

Had meetings I couldn't miss nor reschedule for work in 2023.

I'm working and can't make it to the meeting.

Scheduling conflicts.

To be better informed before voting.

To participate in town decisions.

To vote for someone. Often we are away since it's school vacation too.

Work obligations make it difficult to attend town meeting.

Meet people, vote.

To vote on town matters.

Typically unable due to work requirements.

Civic responsibility

Community; Hear discussion on issues; Learn more about my town -- information tables

Concerning issues

Good to talk face to face

I did because of my role on BCA. I have to take the day as vacation from work and it is not convenient.

I doubt again - all items passed by 100 people totally unfair!

I generally attend when there is an issue I feel is important to be present and vote on.

I love the engagement of folks & hearing different perspectives.

It's an important civic responsibility and an opportunity to connect with the community.

Love the interaction.

Responsibility to form of govt. Personal interest in topics.

To know what's going on in town.

To see and participate in Town Meeting.

To vote.

Want to be informed about what is happening in the town.

Wanted to see the experience.

Believe in informed deliberation before voting.

Can't get the day off.

Couldn't make it work with my work schedule.

I always did until I went back to work and now don't have enough leave time to attend.

I appreciate the ability to have dialogue regarding our town and the opportunity for voice voting as well as ballot voting in person. I also like seeing people I haven't seen in a while.

When I have not attended, outside of COVID, it's because I do not automatically have the work day off and have forgotten to request a vacation day to do so. I think it should be a state "holiday".

I like the face to face meeting. Tradition!

To be part of the community.

To find out how people feel about issues through discussions voting.

To find out what's going on.

To get the information about the town and school.

Vote for folks deserving of elected posts. Socialize. Be a part of our community.

We usually winter in Arizona but if we are home we attend to support the select board and school board and to listen to opinions of others regarding what's happening in the community.

I like to vote and know what's going on.

Civic duty, and interacting with neighbors and others I rarely see.

I always try to attend and vote during town meeting as an invested citizen. However, it is difficult for my spouse and I to both attend because we have an autistic child that is anxious about going places that also needs around the clock supervision and care. My husband and I try to rotate who goes to which part, but it is a juggle every year.

I like to know what's going on in town. I also like to know where my tax money is going.

It is important to be involved in local affairs but there are sometimes other obligations that conflict with TMD.

It's a unique experience to observe our town's government in action, in person.

Personal connections, listening to other's ideas and responses.

Timing and interest have a lot to do with my attendance. I find that the town report gives enough information to make informed decisions. I often attend for the school part of the meeting.

To keep informed and find them interesting. When I moved to Danville it was the first time I ever attended a town meeting.

To see my neighbors, to heard those running for positions state their cases.

Vote, see everyone, belong.

It's an opportunity for the collective community voice to be heard.

Kids, other stuff going on, sometimes tried to go at least for key votes but my timing was off.

To learn more about the issues facing the town and cast my vote.

I want to participate, I want to have a say and i want to know what others are thinking and doing.

To be a part of my local community, see people I like, hear differing opinions, have the world I want.

Good government matters and we should all support it.



I believe it is important for the community to meet at least once a year to politely discuss town politics and vote for new Selectboard and School Board members.

I consider it a civic responsibility to be informed voters.

To hear conversations about what we are voting on.

Want to be informed and enjoy seeing neighbors.

"I can't remember, but if I'm in town, I always come." Originally from NY State, I had no experience with direct democracy before moving to VT. In fact, the very concept seemed extinct, and being committed to the experiment of self-governance, how can I not participate? Plus, being a quiet, socially introverted individual with no children in the school district, this is an attractive opportunity to gather w/ neighbors and other people in the town, to hear concerns, and to further get to know the community leaders who so diligently serve our town.

I like to learn more about our town (school and town).

To be educated in the use of our tax dollars.

### Comments from respondents who did not indicate attending any Town Meeting in person from 2018 to 2023:

I don't understand enough about any of the issues/topics so as to contribute in an intellectual and contributing manner.

("can't remember" regarding previous question) Enjoy local control.

Because I believe all votes should be Australian ballot, it's no one else's business how someone votes.

Civic engagement, knowing where my taxes go.

Conflicts.

Did not attend because I had to work.

Did not attend due to work.

Do not attend. Always working.

Generally out of state.

Had to work.

Happen during working hours and cannot get the time off.

Have to work that day.

Health, muddy roads.

Hearing

I am unable to attend as i need to be at work.

I am unable to attend town meeting day because of work a don't understand why they voted on getting rid of absentee ballots when the people that work couldn't be there to vote.

I am working that day.

I can obtain most of my info from the town report or by following the minutes of the various board meetings.

I didn't really know or understand about it.

I didn't while working . I don't now because there is ample information provided prior to the meeting to allow me to cast my votes.

I don't due to work hours.

I have to work.

I have to work and can't come.

I own property in Danville and I attend Town Meeting if virtual.

I was working.

I work and don't take the day off.

I work during the days.

I would like to attend to engage with my community on civic issues and decisions.

I would rather paper ballot on items.

I'M AN OLD YANKEE. THE FACE TO FACE DECISION MAKING OF COMMUNITIES IS IMPORTANT TO ME!!

In regard to property taxes this year. In the past it felt like everything passed. Now we need to discuss.

Just moved to Town and getting to know what it is like.

Lost interest once the vote went to Australian ballot.

My work schedule does not allow me to attend the meeting. I always stop in to vote after work.

Not here.

Other obligations.

Out of town during town meeting day.

Out of town on vacation.

Prefer to vote by mail-in ballot and to read paperwork at home.

Retired in spring 2023. Previous years I was working out of town on town meeting day.

Since covid no large gatherings and prior just the time and travel.

time of meeting, childcare

To be an active member of the town of Danville.

To be part of community, see neighbors and friends and debate important issues.

To have my voice heard.

To know what is happening town, what money is being spent on.

To participate in local democracy, contribute to my community, be an active change agent. When I do not, it is because I am working or out of town on town meeting day.

To see what's up!!

Too much info in too little time. I need to make an effort to go to budget sessions in advance to understand more and have more relevant input.

We moved here in late 2021. I was sick last year, but my husband attended.

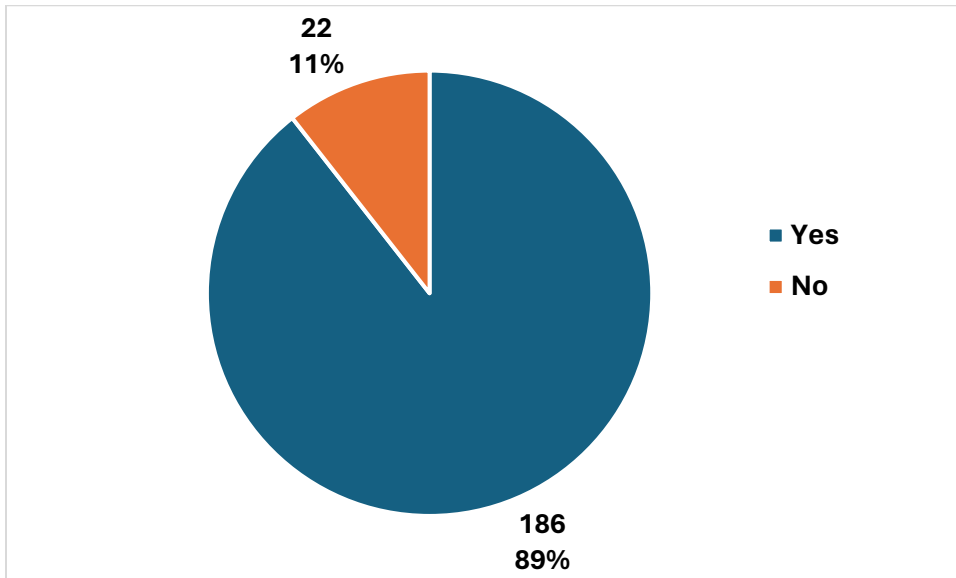
Work

Work conflicts

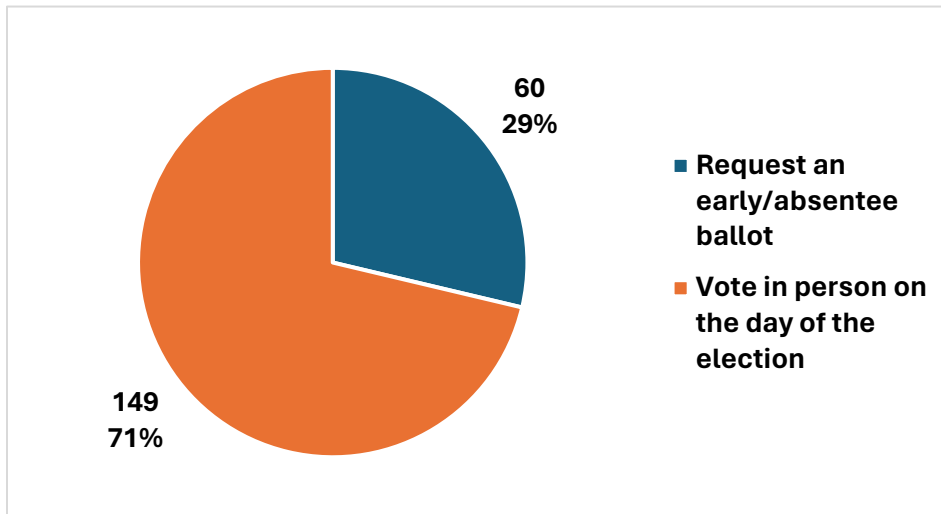
Work schedule interferes

Working

6. In 2021 and 2022, Danville conducted all Town Meeting business by Australian Ballot, mailed to each residence in advance. Did you vote?  
(208 responses)



7. When voting in general elections, do you usually...(209 responses)



8. Have you attended a public meeting (other than Town Meeting) in Danville during the past year?

**Selectboard: 52**

**Schoolboard: 26**

**Development Review Board: 8**

**Planning Commission: 5**

**Conservation Commission: 3**

**Danville Train Station Committee: 3**

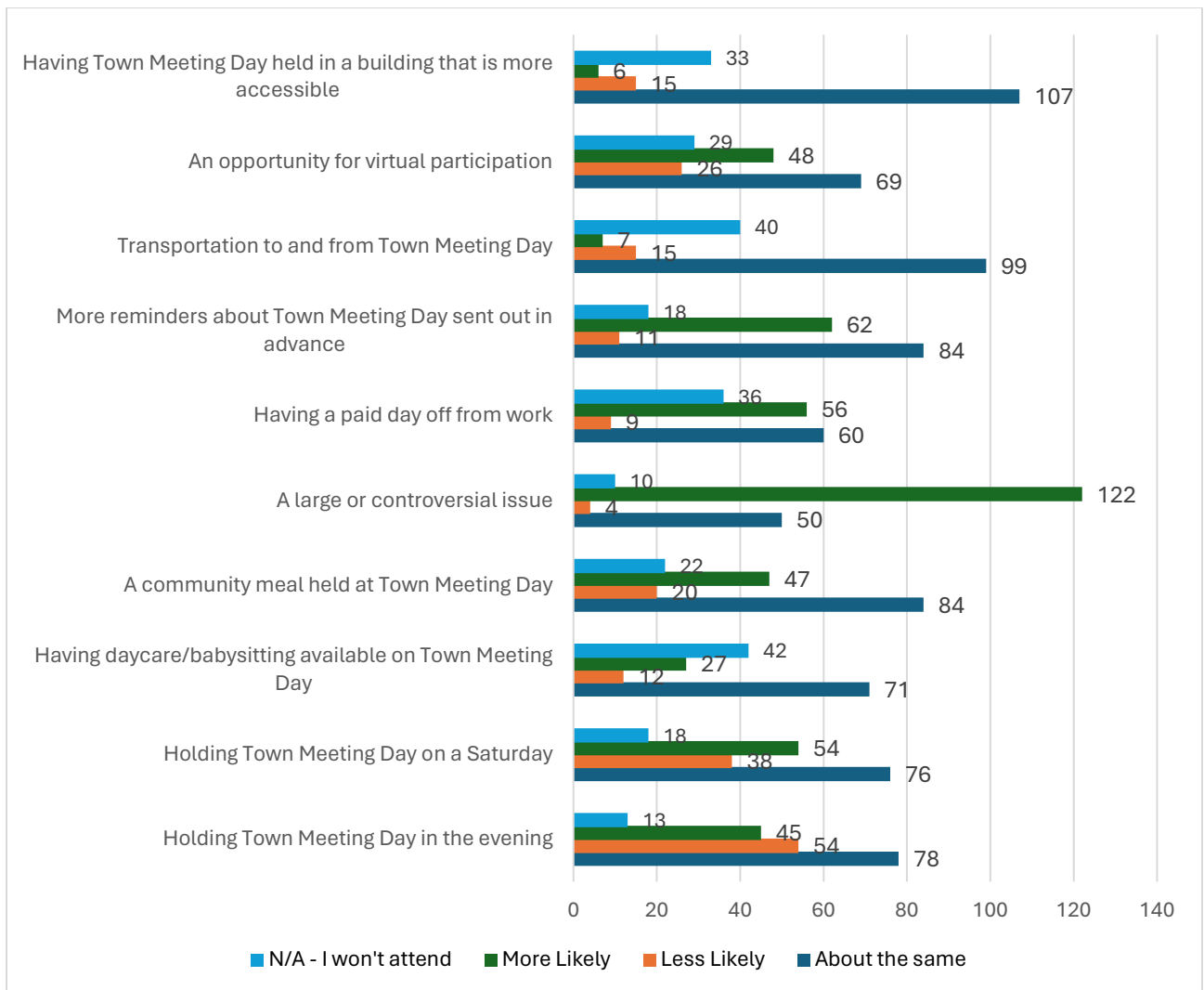
**Others comments/mentions that appeared once: Board of Civil Authority; Dog Park; Caledonia County Republican Committee; School Building Committee; On You Tube; I read meeting notes sometimes; Don't drive after dark.**

9. Have you ever attended a Town Meeting in another Town?

**No: 118**

**Yes: 61 Towns mentioned: St. Johnsbury (9), Barnet (2) Johnson, Vershire, Kirby, Waterford, Walden, Kirby, Middlebury, Cabot, Greensboro, Sutton, Franklin (County?), Springfield, Ryegate**

## 10. What would increase YOUR likelihood of attending Town Meeting Day in Danville? (Choose from the four options.)



## 11. Are there any other measures that would increase YOUR likelihood of participating in Town Meeting Day?

Getting my work schedule aligned!

Making it more available to those who work during the day.

Voting for someone special.

It's unfortunately a system that was great when we were mostly farmers. In the modern economy it doesn't work as well. I would attend if it were evening and shorter.

I will always go as long as I am physically and/or mentally able.

All issues decided by vote in meeting.

I attend anyway.

Evening or Saturday would be great!

Voting everything by Australian ballot.

I'm retiring this year, I'm planning on attending next year.

A more firm schedule of what will happen when.

Barring illness or family emergency, I'll always attend. Being older, night meetings are more difficult in winter.

Evening Town Meeting will help, with a Community Supper - it may require two nights, one focused on School, one on Town.

Taxes, development and services (e.g. broadband availability)

Mail ballots! Why not?

School and daycare staying open.

I have attended many Town Meetings since moving to Danville in 1991 and plan to continue to attend them.

I will be there regardless.

Zoom would not help as my work is hands on.

Knowing young people are involved; scouts, school chorus, something to get kids involved.

I already participate so these questions are hard to answer.

More Australian ballots.

Evening is a good idea.

I'll be there when ever, where ever.

Not here in winter,

Unlikely as I am usually out of state.

Time of day. In between farm chores. 11-4 would be ideal. Monday would be the best day.

Recording of pre-town meeting informational meeting with substitutive presentations and messaging from candidates posted on You Tube a week before TMD.

Always have topics discussed at meeting day before voting Also always have on person voting not by mail. If by mail make by request only. Too many people cheating.

More meaningful activities before or after actual town meeting.

I already participate (mentioned twice).

Ability to debate and amend budgets.

The virtual option would make the meeting much more accessible to families with children with special needs who are more home-bound than regular families. I always want to attend town meeting and wish I could do it in person for the overall experience, but given my limitations I would be delighted to attend virtually rather than having to stay home and wait to hear what happened from someone else.

Better access to information before the meeting. seems like things like budget are predetermined before I can vote.

All votes on money + people items should be voted by secret ballot!

Better sound system.

if it didn't happen when roads were likely to be muddy.

Not sure. Info meeting prior so it's not an all day affair. hard to say it's a whole day and some people are very busy.

(Re: paid day off: this is why I'm currently here--thanks to my employer, SJA); Re Virtual being less likely: the value for me is attending in person.)

I am just leaving Town Mtg 2024, I could not hear anything that anyone said except from the moderator or the selectboard. \*\*DO something about microphone in the audience. There used to be a portable mic that was brought to the audience. Please, it is too bad not to be able to hear what people have to say!

Since we come every year, we would be coming to vote in person.

Shorter, better prepared public comments.

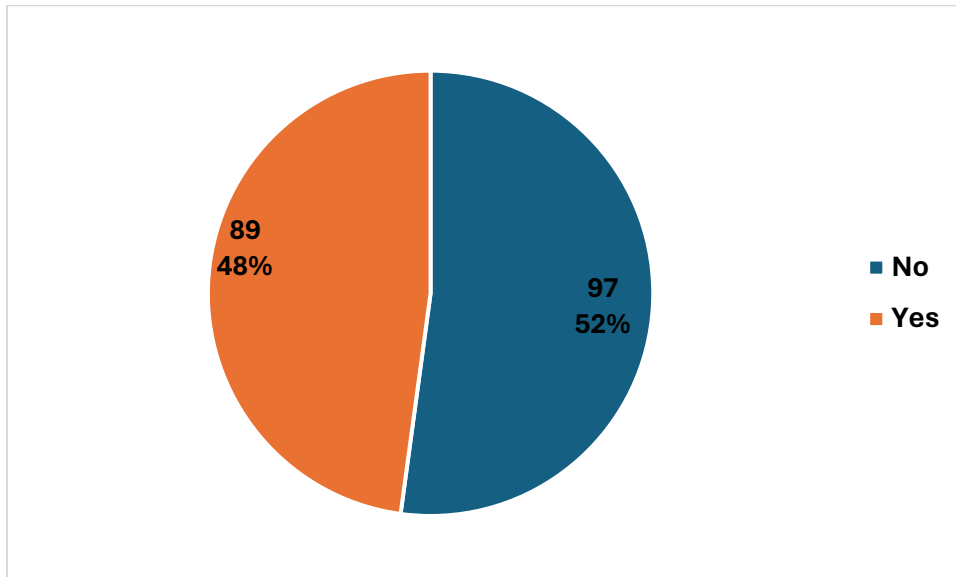
I liked my wife's idea of live streaming of the meeting. She could watch at work. I have attended every year, but am open to change. some people will not attend regardless.

We winter in Arizona Jan - April, meet in May?

I'm fine with it the way it is.

More pre-town meeting discussions.

## 12. Would you prefer Australian Ballot in place of an in-person floor meeting in the future? (186 responses)





### 13. Why or why not?

#### Why not? Comments from those who did NOT prefer Australian ballot in place of floor meeting in the future:

A floor meeting is more informative.

appreciate the opportunity to hear others' opinions while there's still time to make changes

Australian ballot does not allow for debate which is important when it comes to how our tax dollars are spent.

Australian ballot does not allow for debate which is important when it comes to how our tax dollars are spent.

Australian Ballot doesn't allow for in person conversations

can make amendments from the floor

Community and listening to each other

Dialogue is important.

Discussion can be important

Discussion important

FACE TO FACE DISCUSSION OF BUSINESS OF THE TOWN IS IMPORTANT!

Faster process to get results when voting from the floor. Allows for discussion and explanation.

Good participatory government matters.

Having lived with many meetings on zoom, rather than in person, for years, there is a great loss of the importance of our connectedness, our importance to each other. In a part of the world where much of the year brings isolation, we need events to bring us together. Our best lives depend on knowing and caring about each other and the systems we build to support us.

I believe Danville residents have a responsibility to attend Town Meetings. Employers should make it possible for employees to attend.

I believe in in-person town meeting.

I believe it is important to hear from the candidates at the meeting.

I believe that the exchange of ideas is important.

I believe that this would weaken a sense of community in Danville

I don't prefer one over the other

I find it beneficial that people who may not be that active in the town Learn about what is happening in their town and get to vote on issues that may be important to the whole community.

I grew up with town meeting. I think it contributes a huge amount to the community closeness in Danville and other towns. I think students should be taught civics in school so they understand how critical town participation is to a well run town. These towns don't run themselves and almost all of the people working on various boards and committees are giving their time as volunteers. They need to be supported and one way is to show up at town meeting.

I like hearing arguments for and against.

I like that the floor vote allows for a discussion around some things that may not have come up at the preparatory meetings. It also allows some explanation of budgets and how they got that way that a simple Australian ballot does not.

I like the lively comments! (And see above answer about why I attend).

I like to converse about the budget, and change it if needed.

I like to hear different views before voting.

I like to hear the opinions of other voters at the in person meetings. That said, I'm fine with Australian ballots as long as debate is still allowed at the town meeting.

I like to hear what people have to say

I like town meeting.

I look forward to audience discussion/participation.

I prefer direct (??) than the other one.

I think Australian ballots would lower the attendance at the town meeting and the opportunity to discuss the issues on the floor.

I think civil discourse is important, particularly in as polarized a political atmosphere as we face today. Town Meetings are part of what keeps Vermont Vermont, and my out-of-state friends are utterly intrigued by the fact that Vermont still holds Town Meetings!

I think discussion / disagreement is an important element - beyond reading opposing statements.

I think it is very important to have a floor vote and if we can make Town meeting as accessible as possible for as many residents as possible we can and should keep in person floor voted.

I think it's important to gather. People are more respectful in person.

I think it's more important to change the day/time to allow more people to attend than to keep it on Tuesday just for the sake of tradition. If it stays on Tuesdays, I'd rather have Australian ballot for everything so I could vote on the board members and appropriations as well as the budgets. But I would prefer to change the day/time and keep it an in-person meeting.

I think our town holds a sacred tradition. Would like to keep that.

I think public discourse is important.

I value the discussion (including the consideration of budgets) and amendments.

I would like a combination of both.

If you are unable to attend due to work etc. Australian Ballot allows for your participation.

In person floor meetings seem to encourage debate and discussion, and an open, (?) all - floor vote creates consensus in a community-building way. In addition, the outcomes of a floor meeting are immediately known, which is expedient and effective in creating a (unified) & informed citizenry.

In person gives more sense of the community that we live in. So many new residents!

In person meetings and the opportunity for face-to-face debate is important to the health of democracy. Human connections create meaning and civil communities. The value of this is immeasurable.

in person mtgs provide opp for sharing ideas to better informed. And, post Covid we need more person-person contact. Less isolation! Democracy thrives in an active hive.

It doesn't allow for acquiring information behind the decisions being made.

It increases the chance of an uninformed voter making an uninformed decision.

It would be sad to eliminate the opportunity for community dialogue.

It's important for the community to be together, making decisions together, in person. There is great importance in smiling at one another, greeting one another, being sociable. It brings community closer.

Keep the tradition of town meeting alive.

Like the community of in-person.

like the discussions.

Like the in person discussions.

Misinformation. Knee jerk responses worse without discussion.

More discussion.

No chance to talk about items with AB.

Not really sure. I lost interest in participating when I was told I couldn't participate in voting for candidates without having attended the meeting in the morning.

Personal Attendance and ability to see and question is important.

Prefer the community gathering!

Prevent cheaters.

Rather elect select board from the floor.

See Q. 5 above

Some items benefit from discussion and ability to amend and nominate from the floor.

The discussion is informative and helpful in making a decision.

The in person conversations are important!

The in person discussion of points of view are important in making decisions and provide information for making that decision.

Then you may as well not bother with having the in-person meeting.

Want to vote after discussion.

We CANNOT give up the history of Town Meeting, it continues to undermine the sense of Community and meeting others in person.

We need to come together and connect and discuss as a community.

Yes and no, yes because I think we'd get more voters and no because I like the community discussions that occur at meeting day.

## Why? Comments from respondents who DID prefer Australian ballot in place of floor voting.

100 people should not vote for millions of dollars of spending.

A lot easier to participate in elections without sitting through another meeting.

Allows for people who can attend the meeting to vote.

Because while I think that substantive, in-person debate is important, indeed, that interacting with directly our neighbors and fellow citizens is bedrock of democracy, I also believe that when it comes down to brass tacks, I want as many people to participate as possible, and I believe a paper ballot is the best way to increase voter participation. That doesn't mean we should do away with the meeting or the debate. But maybe the actual votes don't need to be there.

Convenience

Depends on the issue. About the way it is done now is ok.

Each person has a known vote and I may say what my opinion is. The Floor should not decide how my money of taxes gets spend. Each person needs to vote.

Easier

Easier

Equal opportunity for all residents

Everyone should have an opportunity to have a say in who runs their town.

Filling out the ballot can be done at my own pace. Not under any time limits or pressure.

For working people to vote.

I am afforded the opportunity to vote by Australian Ballot - because I can vote after work.

I can think better alone.

I do like the in person floor meeting even though it is difficult to attend. But Australian ballot seems to be the more democratic way to give all citizens a true accessibility to their right to vote if they have obstacles preventing them from attending.

I feel it is adequate and that more residents participate and it's easy and doesn't require attendance at a meeting.

I like being able to offer a private vote.

I prefer secret ballots as you are not influenced by your neighbors at the meeting.

I prefer to keep my opinions to myself.

I think it would be better for folks who still have to work.

I think that this would increase participation for people who don't like attending the meeting in person or who may not have the time.

I want to become more active in town meeting, pre meetings so I need some more information prior to vote.

I would like to have my voice heard.

I would prefer to vote on budgets and officers (and other measures) by Australian ballot. The Middlebury town meeting model (meeting in evening w/ voting following day or Australian ballot) is a good compromise position & worked well for me.

I'm not always able to be there or can't be there all day.

if folks can mail in their votes for these items it may increase participation for those who can't make it to the meeting due to work or childcare or transportation issues. But if we are only to vote in person, then I'm happy to retain the floor vote system for some of the smaller items in the interest of saving time.

if it increases the number of voters!

If the details about issues to be voted on are made available in advance to all residents in a simple & clear way & in multiple formats, an Australian ballot would capture more votes than the in-person floor vote.

If you know the issues I don't see any benefit to sit all day listening to others voice their personal opinions. There are many opportunities throughout the year to personally attend numerous board/ committee meetings.

Increase voting

It would allow more people to have a voice.

like the anonymity.

More accessible than having to attend in person.

More convenient

More democratic.

More flexibility, less wasted time

More folks would vote.

More opportunity for more people to vote. It's about who you know now.qqb

more participation

More participation from a wider demographic of the Danville population. Floor meetings are biased toward more extroverted people sharing their opinions, their opinions seem more important as a result.

More people could participate

More people would participate.

More voices heard. Those that attend go for the social benefits (retired), which working people don't have the privilege of.

More voters would be able to vote.

My voice is not being heard by having town meeting during the day.

No point in attending because nothing ever gets accomplished really.

People have to work.

People that work can't be there not every one gets the day off.

Plenty of public information available to base my decisions on.

Privacy is huge.

So that all who are unable to attend can have the opportunity to vote. Which is many of us.

Why not? More participation.

With young kids it's less likely I can stay for the whole meeting.

Would like to vote on everything.

Yes because I have to work.

You may get more people voting that way.

### Why or why not? These are comments from respondents who did not answer question #12 (indicating no preference.):

able to vote, but not be at meeting all day

Again, I don't know enough about the topic to answer adequately. My life is too busy to learn!

Either way is fine

I like having both options for those people who work and can't attend.

I love town meeting, and my preference would be to hold an informational meeting with Q&A/discussion on Town Meeting Day in the evening and vote.

by Australian ballot.

it's easier to participate, but would miss the discussion

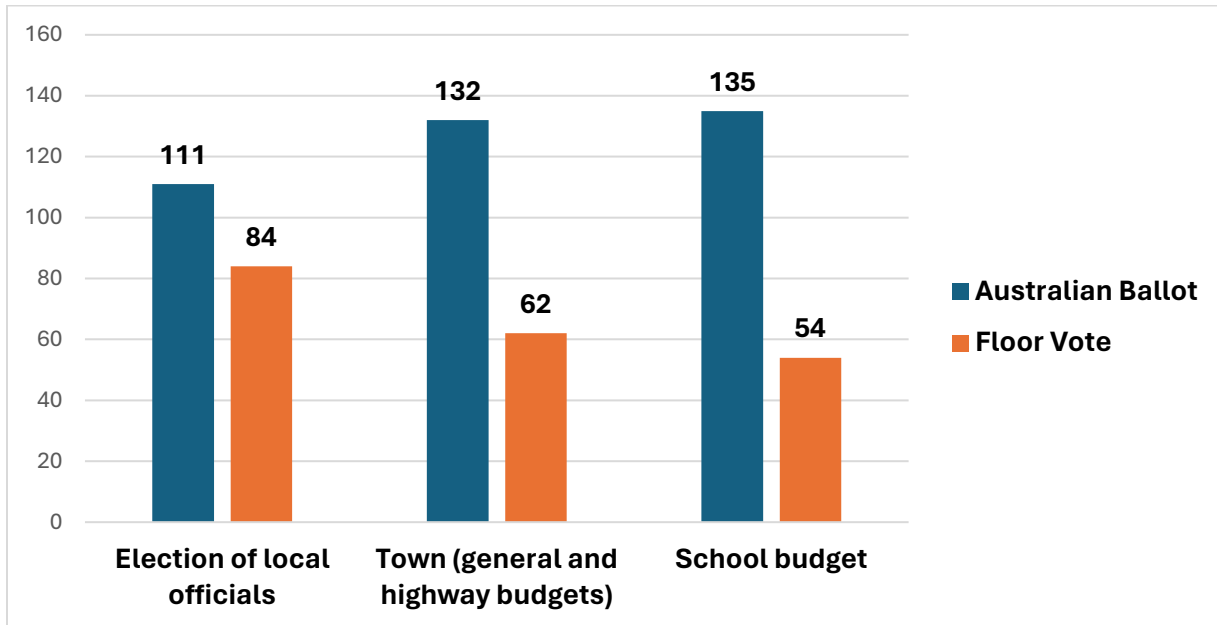
mixed. I think the answer to getting more participation from young working families is to move the time. I think there are real advantages to meeting in person.

No preference.

Not here

Not sure and need to hear more from others.

14. Count of Currently, Danville votes on its Town and school budgets by Australian Ballot. All other business is conducted from a floor vote at Town Meeting Day. What is your preference for FUTURE Town Meetings in Danville?



15. Comments?

\*Extra Appropriations by Australian Ballot - These may be helpful to some in town but not ALL people want to give to all these. If you want to give then you give to these items, not take from me to what I don't approve of.

A. Ballot only way to ensure all people get a vote

All 3 categories available to all registered voters.

As above.

Candidates should declare they are running before TMD and they should have to post their reasons for voting beforehand on the Town and School websites. They should attend the pre-town meeting informational meeting to introduce themselves to the electorate and to tell us why they are running and what their qualifications are. This should be recorded and posted on You Tube so people voting by absentee ballot or Australian ballot have time to become informed before they vote. When folks receive their absentee ballots, they should be informed of the date the recorded informational session will be posted to You Tube and encouraged to watch it before they cast their ballots. The informational meeting should address each of the items that is on the TMD warning to be voted upon. A virtual options should be offered as part of the informational meeting. After all the information has been presented and after candidates have had their opportunity to speak then the meeting should be opened up for questions from in person and online attendees that are registered voters. The Q&A part of the informational meeting may not need to be part of that posted to You Tube in case that would discourage folks from asking questions.

Election of local officials would require preposting of qualifications or resumes.



For those who are not already in the "in-group", it is very intimidating to make immediate decisions on candidates. It would be helpful to know about who is being considered/running in advance and to vote via Australian ballot to see the options and have "think-time"/research time before selecting candidates. It may also encourage more candidates to step forward.

I would not (underscored) want to replace in person meeting with all Australian balloting. I would like to add virtual participation option.

General business conducted every year should be on the Australian ballot. Issues specific to a particular year/meeting should be voted in person.

I don't think paper ballots need to be Australian. I think the point is to get more people to vote. I would favor the town publishing a list showing who voted for what - I think it's one of the great strengths of the current and age-old town meeting system: that people have to put a face to their vote and stand behind it. So the point, to me, is paper ballots, ideally after a traditional town meeting so there can be debate. After that, by all means make us take ownership of what we voted for.

I have limited leave time from work and to take a day for Town Meeting would be a sick/vacation day I would be sacrificing. Would really love to see an evening or weekend meeting so more people could attend. You could try it for a couple years and see if attendance improves.

I think this is the most fair way for people in the community to voice their opinions.

If all Australian - complete info must be part of all presentations - and introduction of candidates

Let us vote by ballot. What harm does it do?

More balloting means more people decide the issues. I don't think it's very fair that 5% decide everything.

None

really like the discussion and debate in-person. find a way to keep this opportunity AND Australian ballot

Same comment as above. I prefer Australian ballot, but only if clear & concise summaries of the issues / candidates are made available to all residents so everyone has the ability to be informed & vote.

Same reason as before. Making the voting available to all Danville residents regardless of ability to attend. I really enjoy seeing people from the town get together and hear their opinions. I think it would be nice to preserve the meeting but have all voting by Australian ballot. If a virtual option were available, that would be even more inclusive.

Thank you for caring for our democracy

Thanks to the Committee for putting in the time and effort!!

There are many reasons why people can't or don't attend town meeting. Allowing other options to vote should continue. Seems majority of people attending town meeting are senior citizens which doesn't reflect the entire demographics of the town.

unsure of my answers as this will be my first-ever town meeting, former PA resident

While the traditional town meeting is popular, many are left out. Time to get with the times.

Without floor meetings, it's a Town Meeting in name only

Would like to vote for all officials by Australian ballot.

You probably should define what an Australian Ballot is for those folks who may not know.

Again, I like to hear different point of view

Allows people who cannot tend to vote on budget

Continue pre meetings for budgets

I do hope we can keep Town Meeting alive and in person perhaps as a hybrid for those who need to stay virtual

I think it's important to keep Australian ballot for the budgets; if someone can't attend they can still vote on those

I understand some people cannot make it to TM, but please don't do away with it for those of us who are able to attend/participate in-person.

I'm old. I still think coming together with your neighbors and fellow townsfolk is crucial. Frankly the alternates we have now aren't showing us much in terms of being neighborly.

In person floor discussion gives me more info for that vote

Is both possible?

It's important for me to see and hear from candidates

only I agree we need a way to enable prospective voters who cannot miss work

Stop cheaters by this Australian vote

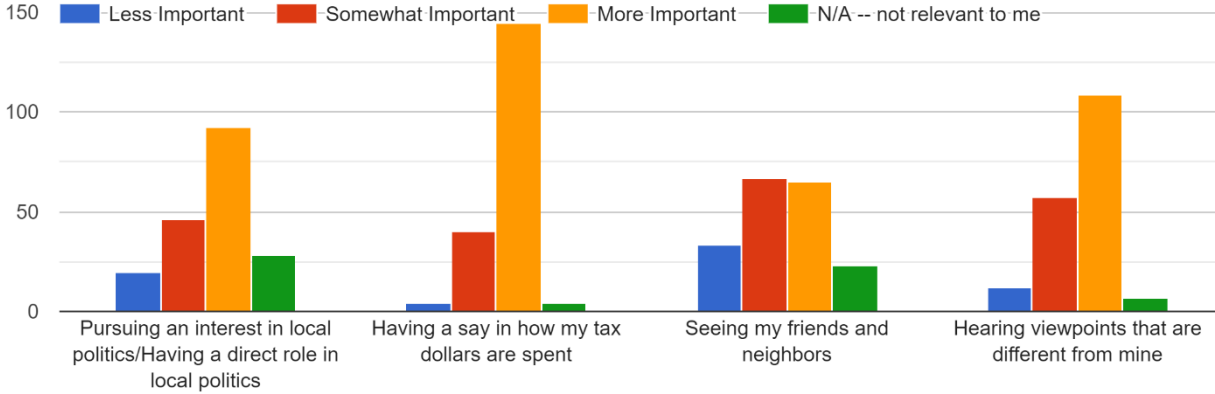
There are so few all-Community events, please do not take this one away. How would you replace a Community event that includes the opportunity for everyone to attend?

This format gives those residents who cannot attend (due to work commitments, etc.) the ability to participate in large, impactful budgetary items.

We need to reach out more to market town meeting it's important. The school should promote it more for young families.

I hope that this effort, to learn more and possibly change the meeting so more people can come will make a difference. There seem to be many new people moving into town. It might take them time to understand the significance of the opportunity town meeting presents.

### 16. What are YOUR motives for participating in Town Meeting Day? (Choose from four options)



### 17. What else motivates you to attend Town Meeting Day?

- civic duty
- Consider it civic duty.
- Civic duty!
- Sense of community
- School board elections.
- grass-roots democracy
- If there is a vote for school board and I have to be there, I might be likely to go. But again, we often go away
- Visiting neighbors
- Civic duty
- Strong sense of community
- Socialization. Local support for folks we know.
- It's a great feeling of community.
- I take my responsibility to be informed and vote seriously, but this is an outdated modality that disenfranchises 90% of the voters. If there is a way to make it work better great but I still think voting by ballot is important.
- If I wasn't needed at the dental office.
- I like seeing everyone else. I like having lunch with people I may not see regularly. It makes me proud to live in Danville,
- It is a right and responsibility

See townspeople

Getting to know who are the leaders in our town.

I enjoy the social aspect and the community meal. It's a nice sense of community and good to remind people that we ARE a community. I like to hear the board candidates talk about their views on major issues before we vote on them.

No choice

No interest in participating in group setting.

Knowing that I'm fortunate to be able to take part in a democratic process

Participation in local community

Democracy, civic duty

Having a say in the kind of town I live in and how our tax dollars are spent

Exhibits, pledge of allegiance and the school band

Learning what is happening on many levels.

I am a State Employee and we get the day off to attend/ it's my civic duty.

Interest in local politics and our local representatives' feedback. First meeting I attended was in 2023, so I am trying to get to know the town and its philosophy better.

being part of community

tradition

Civic duty

My responsibility to civic engagement

Learning what is going on in town.

Participation

xoxoxo

I like being actively involved.

Issues

If I had the day off I would go

N/A

Obligation

Learn more about what's going on in the town.

It's one of the things that makes Vermont great!

Responsibility

Vermont tradition

Danville is a great place to live!

Civic duty/Civic Responsibility

Civil engagement

Community lunch was a fun time visiting with folks we don't usually see.

Reps that reach out to seek my input

sense of community.

Watch how my tax dollars are spent. And remove older politicians from office to prevent cheating

Sense of community and camaraderie

Nothing

The history and tradition

My responsibility to participate in a democracy.

I feel like it is a civic duty, but I don't know enough beforehand to participate.

To know more about the budget

curiosity

I will NOT attend town meeting!

a sense of civic duty

I like all the booths, sales, info

see who hates who (with a smiley face drawn)

I should take more time to learn and get perspective and hear other opinions on the matter.

meeting friends and new people in town

One of the cool things about Vermont

Development of "community feeling." Getting to know people and their needs, beliefs and interests.

Leads to less conflict if you are aware of your neighbors needs and beliefs. Builds an "understanding" of the people in your community.

COMMITMENT TO SMALL TOWN LOCAL DEMOCRACY

The FANTASTIC Meal

Not really motivated

Food, Social

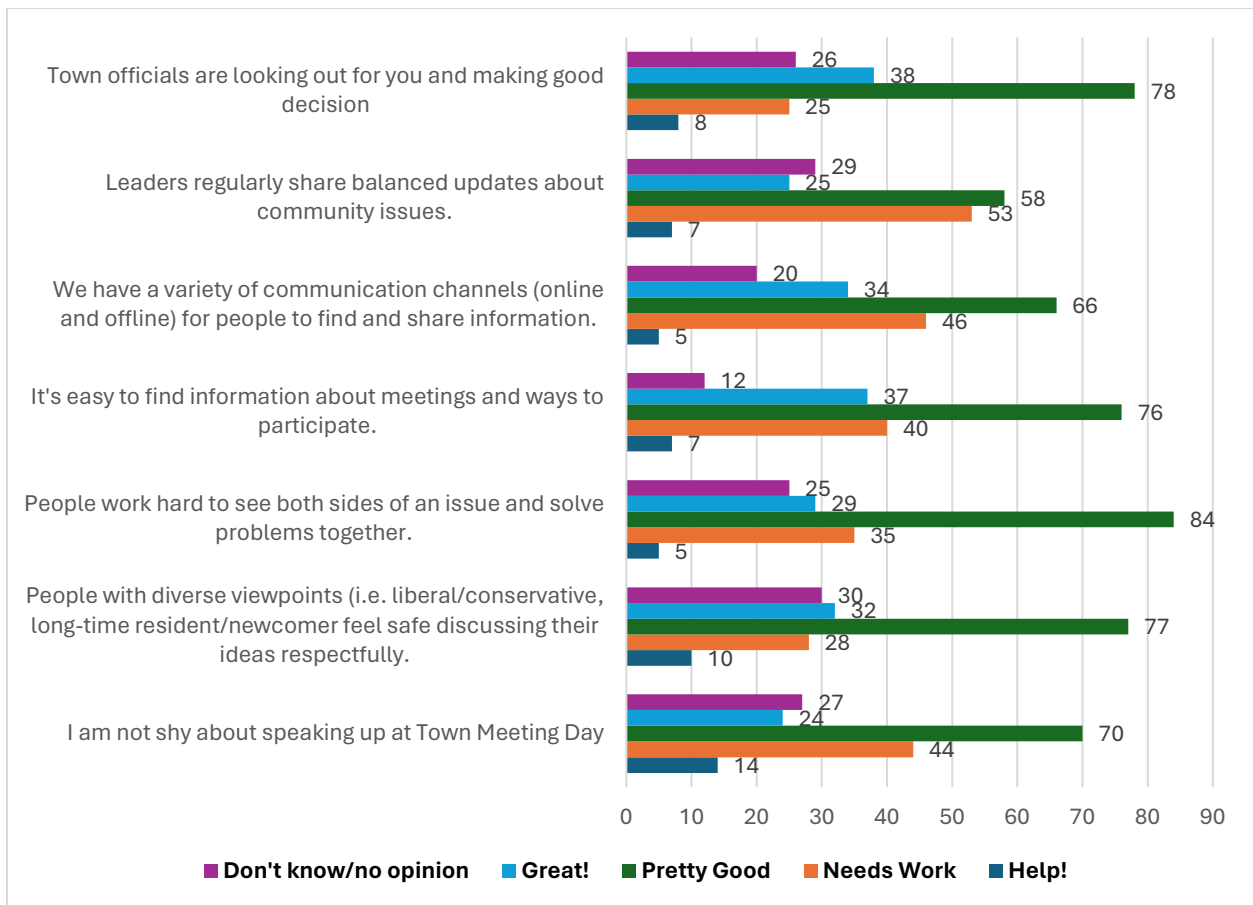
Being part of the community

Meeting new people, listening to other opinions

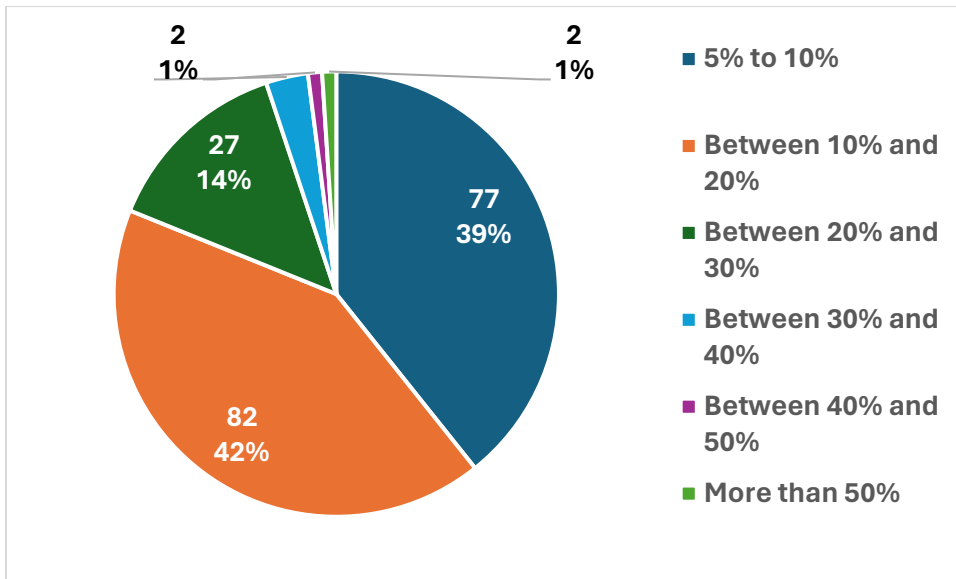
my right to vote

how tax dollars are spent

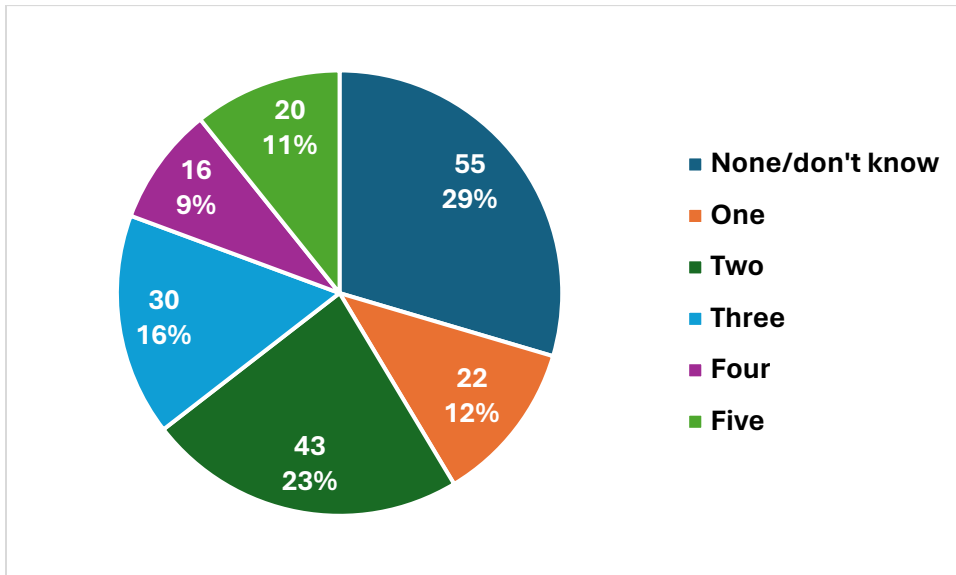
## 18. Please rate the following statements about local governance in Danville:



19. Of the approximately 1,800 registered voters in Danville, what percentage do you think normally attend Town Meeting?

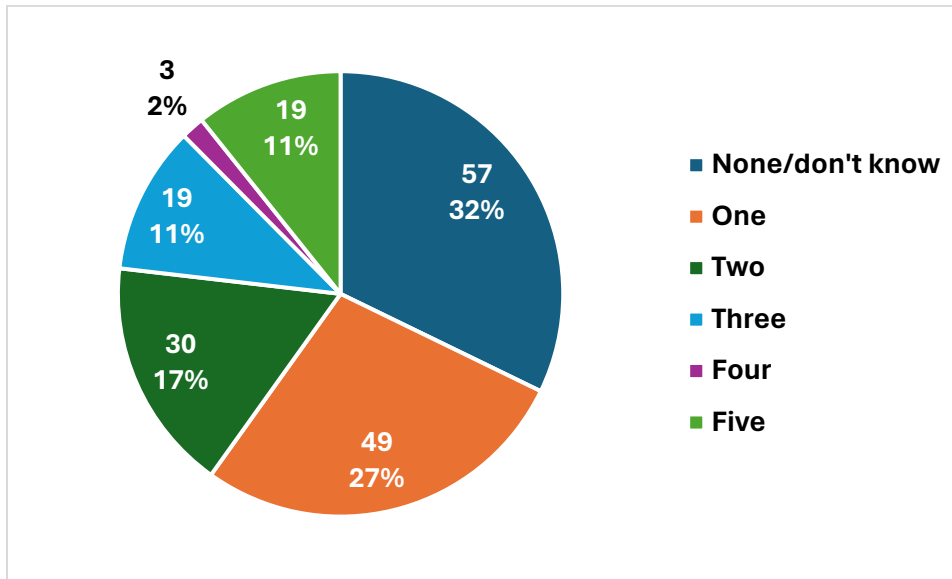


20. How many members of the Select board do you know?





## 21. How many members of the School board do you know?



## 22. Is there anything else that we have forgotten to ask? Please share your comments and concerns!

Thanks for your hard work!

The elderly need to be allowed to have a voice even if they are unable to attend due to weather or disability.

Peoples lives are very busy, most working people can't get off work to attend an all day meeting. There should be as much information as possible available on line re: agendas and meeting notes from each board.

I am curious to see how Town Meeting goes, looking forward to it.

Reach the parents in the school!!! Reach out at church. Older folks don't do social media.

What are leaders doing to seriously reach out to younger folks who will lead Danville in the future? How do we make their voices heard?

I finished and submitted this survey already but want to add that evening meetings do not work for many seniors. We have trouble driving at night in particular and are tired by evening, not as sharp. As many who currently attend are seniors please don't shut us out doing it in the evening. Thank you.

Would like to see the results of this survey published! Thanks!

Providing a Zoom (remote) option for people to at least hear meetings would be helpful. Especially shut ins, people who cannot attend, for whatever reason, could have access to the information provided at the meeting. This includes all public meetings not just Town Meetings.

Having looked into attendance at town meetings options in other towns I believe we'll get about the same number of people attending Town Meeting and that will fluctuate each year no matter when the meeting is held. Saturdays would probably provide the most flexibility for increased attendance. The same people seem willing to give up their time regardless of when the meetings are held. People have to be willing to give up a few hours of their time to provide the best town environment in which to live.

While the School Gym has the space- the sound quality in there is designed for loud sporting events- it is extremely bad for older folks/hearing impaired.

Concerned about the increase in violent and drug-related crime in the state and specifically, in the NEK and Caledonia county. What can local government and citizens do to continue to keep the community peaceful and safe?

Why wouldn't we do mail ballots? Don't we have the right as a taxpayer?

Thank you for doing this work.

The five options question is very confusing- the rating options like "Needs~Help" and "great" make no sense with the statements. I could not answer this way.

I have heard many complaints about allowing voting for Appropriates together as one vote. It doesn't allow individuals to feel they really have a voice. That said, I'm not sure anyone would be comfortable questioning an appropriation for a local organization unless paper voting was called.

Maybe consider sending high school to choice.

I usually request an early/absentee ballot, just in case, but vote in-person if possible.

Thank you for this survey and for looking into how to engage more Danville residents in the town and school governance. Our nostalgic attachment to in person Town Meeting Day is not serving the greater need to facilitate more civic engagement in this town. Over the pandemic we had a number of new people move to town, I did my best to encourage them to attend, but they did not. Danville's self governance can evolve to bring these and others in. Postings to Front Porch Forum have helped broaden outreach to the electorate and residents. Recording meetings to post them is the next step in that process. The legislature dragged its feet on that and I think we can all agree we don't have time to drive to Montpelier to sit in cramped committee rooms to keep abreast of our state's governance, their posting of recordings has been a benefit to civic engagement. I think we can make more use of the pre-town meeting informational meeting by formalizing its presentation more, covering each of the ballot items voters are asked to vote on, clarifying common questions around each ballot measure. Making candidates write up their bio, their qualifications and why they are running ahead of voting and having them recorded telling us these things as part of the pre-town meeting informational meeting should be a goal. While the crafting of the budgets limit the ability to move the pre-town meeting up in time enough for those voting by absentee ballot to do so in an informed manner, information on the other ballot measures could be shared and recorded and posted in time for that. I will note that while I have not attended any of the Selectboard or School Board meetings in person in the last year, I have read through agendas and minutes from those meetings and read the town newsletter. Love the town newsletter idea, so thanks for piloting that!

e-mail blurb to voters, could send periodic info, giving the voters convenient access to town information, discussions, ...

The boards have there personal agendas and that's what the worry about most

Would really like to see a live video of Town Meeting so I can watch while I am working.

The state of the school physical plant and what to do with it is a very big concern.

Thank you for taking the time to conduct the survey.

Would like to see an income tax rather property tax.

consider getting announcements with agendas via email.

approximate attendance "disgraceful".

additional commentary across the "rate Danville " section: It's all hard. Not all of us are tech savvy, have internet, but a paper go out often, etc. Not sure what the answer is for all people to be in the know without having to really 'work' at finding out things.

It was very hard to hear today. (and I don't have any hearing impediments).

New to town look forward to learning more about town government & issues.

I wonder if a free BBQ would turn people out? (Paid for by the Danville Chamber and donations); no cost to the town.



## Danville Town Meeting Committee (TMC)

# Town Meeting Recommendations Briefing

Tom Ziobrowski, TMC Chair and former moderator: It all comes down to striking a balance between enfranchising those who can't attend Town Meeting and giving a meaningful function for the people who do attend

Identifying options for enhancing local participatory democracy in traditional Town Meeting

Presentation as of June 28, 2024



# Purpose and Agenda

*TMC Charter Mission: The Town Meeting Committee identifies options for enhancing local participatory democracy in traditional Town Meeting by conducting research, soliciting and considering public input, and making recommendations to the Selectboard and School Board by January 2025.*

## Purpose

This briefing to the Danville Selectboard and School Board:

- Provides feedback on Town Meeting **Survey**
- Makes general recommendations for enhancing participation **regardless of format**
- Identifies **recommended format options** for conducting Town Meeting in Danville
- Suggests a **tentative timeline** for deciding on and implementing possible options

## Agenda

- Survey Results
- Key Facts and Assumptions
- Recommendations
  - General
  - Day/Time
  - Format
- Summary
- Projected Timeline
- Discussion and Guidance
- TMC Products



# TM Survey Results

## By the numbers...

- Total surveys filled out: 217
  - 145 online
  - 72 written
- 49% retired, 51% employed
- 99% registered Danville voters
- 52% residents of 20+ years
- 29% usually use absentee ballots for general elections
- 89% voted by mail in 2021-22 (COVID)
- 34% have attended TM in another town

## Observations of interest

- A slight majority of respondents were NOT in favor of replacing floor meeting with Australian ballot; however, the majority of respondents preferred Australian ballot over floor vote for election of local officials, town general and highway budget, and school budget
- In reality some respondents favor floor vote for some things, Australian ballot for others – in essence, hybrid
- For those who don't attend, work schedules are most often cited
- Attendees at the floor meeting (who filled out paper ballots) showed a clear preference for floor participation in general



# Key Facts and Assumptions

- **Maximum** realistic turnout is about **~40%** of voters (for hot-button Australian ballot issues)
  - 2022 - no floor meeting (all voters sent absentee ballots), Australian Ballot only: 724 ballots cast (~39% turnout)
  - 2024 - no contentious Town or School floor issues but presidential primary and major school tax increase expected: 306 (17%) floor meeting attendees, 503 (27%) ballots cast of 1,847 registered voters
- Floor meetings serve a **public good** beyond voting:
  - Participation in TM encourages participation in other town bodies and activities
  - Face to face discussion of issues fosters civility and compromise
- Hybrid floor meeting / Australian ballot is a good way to **engage people**
  - Voting for **officers by Australian ballot** is the most meaningful way to give voice to people who don't or can't take time to engage on issues
  - Discussing **budgets and other issues at floor meeting** is the most meaningful way for people to have a voice in major Town and School issues
- **NH SB2** model (floor meeting followed by Australian ballot) tries to serve both purposes... but would be unique in Vermont and therefore extremely difficult to execute and sustain





# Recommendations

- General
- Day/Time
- Format (Overview)
  - Floor Only
  - Hybrid Elections AB
  - Hybrid Budgets AB - Current
  - Ballot Only
  - NH SB2



# General

- Keep some form of **floor meeting**
  - Consider **stabilizing Town-School sequence** instead of alternating
  - Allow **secret ballots** for contentious floor items (like budgets)
- Warn timely action and advisory items every year
  - **Interesting agendas increase attendance**; discussion questions are not binding
  - Hold one of the information meetings (hearings) **during the daytime**
- Appoint a **TM Coordinator** and/or **TM Support Committee** (either standing or annually by January – Selectboard action, School Board concurrence)
  - Advertise services and issues before meeting
  - Coordinate info tables, daycare, and meal
  - Host welcome / TM orientation
  - Support Town Clerk, Board of Civil Authority (BCA), and School during Floor Meeting
- Involve **young people**
  - Assist with seating and act as mic bearers
  - Give the invocation
  - Manage the display
- Ensure floor meeting **accessibility** on par with balloting and offer online attendance (by exception)

*Note newly passed 2024 S.55 allows information hearings to take place up to 30 days before balloting; holding one of the meetings during the day 2 weeks out may attract more people.*



# Day / Time

- **Tuesday during the day**

- There is **no perfect day / time**
- Town balloting must happen on Tuesday

- Keep floor meetings **during the day**

- Evening meetings in general are worse for older residents
- Evening meetings haven't garnered long-term attendance increases in other towns
- Daytime meetings allow for short or long meetings and luncheon gathering

- Keep floor meetings on **Tuesdays**

- While Tuesday is a workday for some, many do get a paid day off and by state law everyone (almost) is allowed time off ([21 V.S.A. § 472b](#)); same day as Australian balloting
- Saturday would be best alternative, but many have other weekend or vacation plans
- Sunday and Monday have many more disadvantages than advantages

	Daytime (~10am-2pm)	Evening (~6pm-10pm)
Saturday	+ not workday for most - weekend, vacation	+ not workday for most - Saturday night ...
Sunday	+ not workday for most - weekend, vacation	+ not workday for most - night worse for older residents
Monday	- workday for majority - vacation	+ not work hours for most - night worse for older residents
Tuesday	+ day off for some, ballot time - workday for some	+ not work hours for most - night worse for older residents



# Format – Overview

**Slides follow with scoring**  
 Each TMC member distributed 10 points to score each format 0-4, e.g. 4 for first choice, 3 for second, 2 for third...  
 Maximum score for each is 7x4 = 28

	Floor (Only)	Hybrid Elections AB	Hybrid Budgets AB	Ballot (Only)	NH SB2 Model
	TM is conducted entirely by floor meeting	TM Elections are by Australian ballot; remainder conducted by floor meeting	TM Budgets are by Australian ballot; remainder conducted by floor Meeting	TM is conducted entirely by Australian ballot	Two-part TM: January floor meeting sets March Australian ballot items
Positives	Allows attendees to legislate any/all TM issues; meeting brings voters together	Allows attendees to legislate (discuss and make changes to) floor meeting items; maximizes convenience for voters to say yes or no on specific types of issue; meeting brings voters together		Maximizes convenience for voters to say yes or no to TM issues; higher turnout	Allows attendees to set potential solutions and maximizes convenience for yes/no voting
Negatives	Attending meetings isn't quick and easy; lower turnout; people who don't attend can't vote	Attending meetings isn't quick and easy; prevents voters from legislating Australian ballot issues (yes-no only); people who don't attend floor meeting can't vote on those issues		Prevents voters from legislating; voters don't need to understand issues to cast ballots	Unique system will be confusing; may not improve participation for meeting or ballot
Officers	Officers elected from floor; only attendees can vote and may or may not know candidates	Officers petition to get on ballot; voters know candidates ahead of time for ballot	Officers elected from floor; only attendees can vote and may or may not know candidates	Officers petition to get on ballot; voters know candidates ahead of time for ballot	Candidates chosen at floor meeting; voters know candidates by ballot time
Budgets	Attendees may modify budgets as needed; TM should always result in official budget	Attendees may modify budgets as needed; TM should always result in official budget	Attendees may only change budgets by voting down, requiring future ballot cycle(s)	Attendees may only change budgets by voting down, requiring future ballot cycle(s)	Attendees may modify proposal at floor meeting; budgets should usually pass at ballot
Expected participation	Floor Meeting ~14%	Floor Meeting ~12%	Floor Meeting ~12%	Floor (Information) Meeting 0%	Floor Meeting ~14%
	For ALL options (including Floor Meeting only), special / high-interest issues can still go to Australian ballot with potential for up to ~40% participation (for example, 2016 voting on ATVs and Act 46 education spending)				
	Australian Ballot 0%	Australian Ballot ~23%	Australian Ballot ~23%	Australian Ballot ~27%	Australian Ballot ~27%
Change Process	2025: TM vote to repeal charter; Legislature rescinds 2026: TM vote to discontinue use of ballot for budgets in following year	2025: TM vote to repeal charter; Legislature rescinds 2026: TM vote to hold elections by Australian ballot and discontinue budget ballot in following year	No changes required, but... 2025: TM vote to repeal charter (budgets continue by Australian ballot unless/until future TM vote to stop)	2025: TM vote to repeal charter; Legislature rescinds (optional) 2026: TM vote to use Australian ballot for all measures in following year	2025: TM votes for new charter with NH SB2 based TM rules ~2026: Legislature approves changes (after deliberation) ~2027: TM begins new format



# Format – Floor Only

Score: 18 of 28

- **TM is conducted entirely by floor meeting**
- Elections
  - Officers elected from floor
  - Only attendees can vote and may or may not know candidates
- Budgets
  - Attendees may modify budgets as needed
  - TM should always result in official budget
- Change Process
  - 2025: TM vote to repeal charter; Legislature rescinds
  - 2026: TM vote to discontinue use of ballot for budgets in following year
- Advantages
  - Allows attendees to legislate any/all TM issues
  - Meeting brings voters together
- Disadvantages
  - Attending meeting isn't quick and easy
  - Discussions may be long
  - Lower turnout
  - People who don't attend can't vote
- Expected Participation
  - Floor Meeting ~14%
  - Australian Ballot 0% (23% special issues)



# Hybrid Elections AB

Score: 22 of 28

- **TM Elections are by Australian ballot; remainder conducted by floor meeting**
- Elections
  - Officers petition to get on ballot [need ~19 signatures, [17 V.S.A. § 2681\(b\)](#)]
  - Voters know candidates ahead of time for ballot
- Budgets
  - Attendees may modify budgets as needed
  - TM should always result in official budget
- Change Process
  - 2025: TM vote to repeal charter; Legislature rescinds
  - 2026: TM vote to hold elections by Australian ballot and discontinue budget ballot in following year
- Advantages
  - Allows attendees to legislate (discuss and make changes to) all floor meeting items
  - Maximizes convenience for voters to choose officials to represent them
  - Meeting brings voters together
- Disadvantages
  - Attending meetings isn't quick and easy
  - Discussions may be long
  - Prevents people from deciding to run for office at the last minute (*other than write-in*)
  - People who don't attend floor meeting can't vote on those issues
- Expected Participation
  - Floor Meeting ~12%
  - Australian Ballot ~23%



# Hybrid Budgets AB – *Current*

Score: 18 of 28

- **TM Budgets are by Australian ballot; remainder is conducted by floor meeting**
- Elections
  - Officers elected from floor
  - Only attendees can vote and may or may not know candidates
- Budgets
  - Attendees may only change budgets by voting down, requiring future ballot cycle(s)
- Change Process
  - *No changes required, but...*
  - 2025: TM vote to repeal charter (budgets continue by Australian ballot unless/until future TM vote to stop)
- Advantages
  - Maximizes convenience for voters to say yes or no to budgets
  - Allows attendees to legislate (discuss and make changes to) floor meeting items
  - Meeting brings voters together
- Disadvantages
  - Attending meetings isn't quick and easy
  - Prevents voters from modifying budget (yes-no only)
  - People who don't attend floor meeting can't vote on officers or other issues
- Expected Participation
  - Floor Meeting ~12%
  - Australian Ballot ~23%



# Format – Ballot Only

Score: 0 of 28

- **TM is conducted entirely by Australian ballot**
- Elections
  - Officers petition to get on ballot [need ~19 signatures, [17 V.S.A. § 2681\(b\)](#)]
  - Voters know candidates ahead of time for ballot
- Budgets:
  - Attendees may only change budgets by voting down, requiring future ballot cycle(s)
- Change Process
  - *2025: TM vote to repeal charter; Legislature rescinds (optional)*
  - *2026: TM vote to use Australian ballot for all measures in following year*
- Advantages
  - Higher turnout
  - Maximizes convenience for voters to say yes or no to TM issues
- Disadvantages
  - Prevents voters from legislating
  - Voters don't need to understand issues to cast ballots
- Expected Participation
  - Floor Meeting (Informational) 0%
  - Australian Ballot ~27%





# Format – NH SB2

Score: 3 of 28

- **Two-part TM: January floor meeting sets March Australian ballot items**
- Elections
  - Candidates chosen at floor meeting
  - Voters know candidates by ballot time
- Budgets
  - Attendees may modify proposal at floor meeting
  - Budgets should usually pass at ballot
- Change Process (requires committee to write new charter)
  - 2025: TM votes for new charter with Combination TM rules
  - ~2026: Legislature approves changes (after deliberation)
  - ~2027: TM begins new format
- Advantages
  - Allows attendees to set potential solutions and maximizes convenience for yes/no voting
- Disadvantages
  - Unique system will be confusing
  - Discussions may be long
  - May not improve participation for meeting or ballot
  - Double meetings may cause participation to wither over time
- Expected Participation
  - Floor Meeting ~14%
  - Australian Ballot ~27%



# Summary

- **Implement** [general recommendations](#) to enhance participation
- **Continue** to hold floor meeting on [Tuesdays during the day](#)
- At 2025 floor meeting, **discuss** recommended format options
  - [Hybrid Elections AB \(22\)](#) – switch Australian ballot from budgets to officers
  - [Floor Only \(18\)](#) – stop Australian ballot for budgets, do everything on floor
  - [Hybrid Budgets AB \(18\)](#) – keep current format including Australian ballot for budgets
- In 2025, **repeal** Town and School charters *because they are unnecessary*
  - Statute allows Town Meetings to opt for Australian ballot budgets at any time, which then continue until rescinded – charters only prevent Danville voters from easily changing back
- In 2026, present options for **voters to choose** for 2027

*Note: Town and School formats do not HAVE to be the same.*



# Projected Timeline

- August – December 2024
  - Selectboard and School Board decide how to proceed for 2025
- January – March 2025 (Town Meeting)
  - Selectboard and School Board warn items in TM agendas
  - Selectboard and School Board hold 2 public hearings including charter repeal
  - Floor meeting item – discuss recommended options (advisory only)
  - Australian ballot item – repeal charter; **budgets remain by AB** unless/until discontinued
- Early 2026/2027 (*may depend on Legislature charter repeal*)
  - Selectboard and School Board set agenda for TM vote on changes (informed by 2025 discussion)

## Town Charter Agenda Item

Shall the Town of Danville vote (Australian ballot) to propose the General Assembly repeal its charter, [24 App. V.S.A. ch. 114, § 101](#): Annual and special meetings. All annual and special meetings of the Town of Danville shall be called and warned in the manner provided by the laws of the State. All voting on the Town budget and the highway budget at all annual and special meetings shall be by Australian ballot.

## School Charter Agenda Item

Shall the voters of the Danville School District vote (Australian ballot) to propose the General Assembly repeal its charter, [16 App. V.S.A. ch. 131, § 101](#): Annual and special meetings. All annual and special meetings of the Danville School District shall be called and warned in the manner provided by the laws of the State. All voting on the school budget at all annual and special meetings shall be by Australian ballot.



# Discussion and Guidance

- Charter Mission – complete?
  - The Town Meeting Committee identifies options for enhancing local participatory democracy in traditional Town Meeting by conducting research, soliciting and considering public input, and making recommendations to the Selectboard and School Board by January 2025.



# TMC Products

- Town Meeting Recommendations Briefing (this)
- TMD Survey Summary
- 2024 TM After-Action Review
- TMC Town Meeting 2024 Presentation
- Town Meeting Task Analysis Briefing



# Situation – Changing Town Meeting

- Annual Meetings are required by law - [17 V.S.A. § 2640](#)
  - A meeting of the legal voters of each town shall be held annually on the first Tuesday of March
  - The annual town meeting shall be the annual town school district meeting - [16 V.S.A. § 422](#)
- Allowable Changes
  - **Charters can override normal Annual Meeting laws; otherwise...**
  - Meeting time and place are set locally
  - Floor meeting may start on any of the three days before the first Tuesday of March (Saturday on)
  - Australian balloting must be the first Tuesday of March
  - Officers, budgets, and public questions may be elected by Australian ballot
- Change Process
  - Floor meeting date shift requires a town vote - [17 V.S.A. § 2640\(b\)](#)
  - Switching to Australian ballot (for elections, budgets, or public questions) requires a town vote; once adopted, Australian ballots continue unless discontinued by a town vote - [17 V.S.A. § 2680\(b\)-\(d\)](#)
  - Annual School District meetings can be between February 1 and June 14, with a town vote - [16 V.S.A. § 422](#)
  - Charter changes require a proposal (Selectboard or petition), 2 public hearings, an Australian ballot vote, and then enactment by the state legislature - [17 V.S.A. § 2645](#)



# Format Scoring

**Rank the best ways for Danville to conduct Town Meeting (higher is better)...**

	Clayton Cargill	Alison Despathy	Glenn Herrin	Eric Hutchins	Alice Kitchel	Alison Low	Tom Ziobrowski	<b>Total</b>
Floor (Only)	1	4	2	4	3	0	4	<b>18</b>
Hybrid Elections AB	2	3	4	3	4	4	2	<b>22</b>
Hybrid Budgets AB*	4	2	3	2	3	4	0	<b>18</b>
Ballot (Only)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
NH SB2	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	<b>3</b>

Each TMC member distributed up to 10 points to score each format 0-4  
 For example: 4 points for first choice, 3 for second, 2 for third, 1 for fourth, 0 for fifth  
*Maximum score for each is 7x4 = 28*

**\*Current system**



# Comments – Clayton Cargill

- Candidates for office need a method of making themselves officially known, and with a deadline, prior to the actual town meeting, in our current format.
- Australian ballots guarantee more votes, but they don't guarantee more informed votes.
- Remote options for informational meetings are excellent opportunities for inclusion. In the cases where people need help gaining access, we need to work out a system.
- No hybrid system will solve all issues. Changing the charter, but making no additional changes, allows us flexibility going forward.





# Comments – Alison Despathy

- Human communication and interaction are integral to building strong communities and solving problems.
- Town Meeting offers the perfect forum for promoting these social benefits and the opportunity for meaningful engagement in town business and decision-making.
- Keeping humanity alive in a world ruled by digital realms and polarizing issues is critical. Prioritizing civic engagement allows us to learn from each other, work together and shape the future.
- The floor meeting and Australian ballot debate is ongoing and significant. Without floor meeting, a community loses connection and their ability to legislate and offer solutions to issues.
- Budget voting offers a glimpse into this debate. Budgets can be amended when they are on a floor meeting agenda. Danville currently has Australian ballot voting for budgets which only allows a Yes or No vote. Amendments are not possible and people who do not attend floor meeting can vote on budgets at the polls. Informed discussions, possible floor amendments, and high voter participation are all goals, especially with controversial issues.
- **Solution** – Increase floor meeting attendance by ensuring access, awareness, amenities, and a comfortable and rewarding experience. A Town Meeting support group can organize, educate, advertise and encourage participation. Robust civic engagement is vital and Town Meeting is key to a connected, thriving community. Preserving in-person floor meeting will serve future generations.

**Alison Despathy, 2023 TM: "I think it really is important for all of us to come together, to see each other's faces, to have the conversations, as we try to sort through and solve problems."**



# Comments – Glenn Herrin

**Crazy Idea: pay people who attend floor meeting (and want it) \$100**

- Offset wage loss for hourly workers
- Cost probably ~\$20,000: less than a tax penny

## Key things I learned in this process

- Shifting to Australian ballot does NOT greatly increase turnout
  - Australian ballot turnout across Vermont seems to be about 150% to 200% of floor meeting attendance; that sounds good – except it's **still only about ¼ - ⅓ of the voters**
  - Using all Australian ballot only increases turnout ~4% over hybrid
  - Floor meetings let a small minority of voters make decision for the whole town – but the same is true about Australian balloting, and then not only is it still a small minority, but **voters can't make changes**
- State law for Town Meetings is surprisingly flexible
  - Towns don't have to make charter changes to change their Town Meeting styles; it's quite **easy to change format** from floor meeting to Australian ballot and back using TM votes
  - Charter changes, however, make changing formats difficult – **one person, one vote, one time...** and now all current and future Danville residents are bound by the will of 670 voters in 2010
- Reports of floor meeting's death are greatly exaggerated
  - Attendance across Vermont is NOT dropping precipitously
  - At the Danville 2024 floor meeting – even with NO real contentious articles to discuss – **energetic advertising got a significantly better turnout** that any of the previous 20 years (306 vs. 250 in 2016)
  - It's not hard for people who are invested in Town Meeting to **spread that enthusiasm** for civic engagement

## My takeaways

- One of the key things that makes Vermont special is the tradition (codified in law) of floor meetings where **residents govern themselves directly**
  - Australian ballot is great for making decisions where there are **only a few choices** and not much to discuss – yes/no, candidate A/B/C
  - Floor meetings allow (require) residents to **discuss** an issue, come to a **common understanding**, set and **modify options**, and then **resolve the issue** through a vote
- Australian ballot gives people a **limited voice** in town affairs, but floor meeting lets people **participate** in the process
- Mandating **Australian ballot abdicates voters' authority** to conduct most municipal business to the boards and officers; that may be appropriate in large towns, but Vermonters have and deserve a **right to participate** in local governance – unless it's given or taken away
  - The loss of the ability of (informed) residents to **discuss issues and come to a compromise agreement** far outweighs a small increase in the size of a minority that votes **yes-no**
  - Mandating Australian ballot makes it easier for **some** people to **vote** – though those numbers are still a small minority - but it deprives **everyone** of their right to **contribute**; **that is not a fair trade**



# Comments – Eric Hutchins

- I entered this process shocked that we would consider ending "traditional" town meeting.
- In the early history of Vermont, in-person town meeting was the only way to do direct democracy!
- Technology and modernization gave us opportunities to make it EASIER to access voting. Now we have a choice.
- Originally, I thought we should uphold Town Meeting Day conventions for the sake of tradition and democracy.
- After hearing others' perspectives, I became more aware of the arguments for Australian ballot and other modifications that can make participation EASIER.
- Upon reflection I realized there were other values to maintaining and enhancing traditional Town Meeting; namely, preserving face-to-face interaction, encouraging civil discourse, and an increased QUALITY of democratic participation.
- In an era where major societal issues are occurring due to depression, loneliness, isolation, and the ills of social media and online partisanship, there are COMMON GOOD reasons to preserve in-person Town Meeting that have real value.
- My understanding of the perspective of people who are concerned about ACCESS to democracy lead me to believe we need more ENHANCEMENTS that break down barriers to participation, but we shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater.
- I think we should do EVERYTHING from the floor, especially budget discussions and votes.
- Summarily, I don't think making participation less authentic and less in-person to make it EASIER is worth what we lose in quality. Preserving civil discourse, creating community bonds, and maintaining authentic participation are in the interest of the common good.



# Comments – Alice Kitchel

While I think that the concept of SB2 is to preserve the value of town meetings, my concern about SB2 is that it disconnects two significant functions by a month. I believe that doing this disconnects the vital essence of debating, and voting in the moment that is so potent for town meetings. I think that it loses the basic reason for a town meeting, even as it attempts to preserve it.

There will never be a perfect time or day to hold town meeting day, and work will continue to conflict.

Town Meeting Day as we know it was allowed to get “moldy” before we promoted it through the ad hoc committee and showrunner approach.

Building on the face to face interaction is invaluable.

I learned to appreciate the framework for town meetings and the purpose of that framework; fairness and safety! Brilliant! Also, it is the one day of the year that the citizens of the town get to legislate! Awesome! And finally, it is important that we educate ourselves about the purpose and value of town meetings so that we know to support it.



# Comments – Alison Low

- Town Meeting Day IS a state holiday, but it's not a PAID holiday. Unfortunately, the ability to attend Town Meeting remains a bread-and-butter issue for those who work full time. We have learned that many do not attend TM because of work commitments. From the survey responses, I see no indication that those who do not attend care less about our town...or would not attend if they had the opportunity to do so.
- It's fair to say that the community is divided on the issue of floor meeting vs. Australian ballot. Hybrid variations on the model seem to offer the best compromise for blending face-to-face interaction and broadened opportunity to participate.
- Floor voting vs Australian ballot is often discussed in terms of qualitative vs. quantitative, which leads to the unfair characterization of Australian ballot as a lower-quality form of democratic participation. It's not. It's just another way for people to participate.
- Informational meetings traditionally have a low turnout, and it's ironic that we only hold them at night, when night meetings are the least preferred meeting times for our elders. Let's try holding informational meetings in alternative times and settings.
- The majority of people who attend Town Meeting now have been attending for 20 years and are not necessarily retired; we may be losing a tradition through a natural attrition rate because there aren't newcomers to replace the current attendees.



# Comments – Tom Ziobrowski

- My concern was to find a way for people who cannot make Town Meeting to have a say. I have come to believe there is no perfect solution, short of making Town Meeting Day a paid legal holiday.
- I believe that making election of Selectboard and School Board members by Australian ballot would empower folks who cannot attend with a voice in directing town business indirectly through elected officials. This would retain the benefits of in person floor meeting, enabling citizens to think and act as legislators, making decisions for the town. By continuing in person discussion and floor votes for budgets and special articles there would still be significant input in the town business to bring people together.