

Report of the East Montpelier Town Meeting Solutions Committee

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Committee Members

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Introduction

As of March 2014, East Montpelier's town and school meetings used a mix of floor votes and Australian ballot voting to decide issues. An article was warned for school meeting to shift the mixture more in the direction of Australian ballot by moving the vote on the school budget from the school meeting floor to an Australian ballot.

Arguments for and against the article were similar to those made in other towns that have considered shifting questions to Australian ballot. Proponents were concerned about access to the ballot for voters who would be affected by the taxes raised and pointed to lower participation rates for town and school meeting floor votes, compared with Australian ballot votes on the same day. Single mothers, soldiers in the military, those who could not leave work, and others who faced challenges in attending town meeting should not be stripped of their rights to weigh in on questions that were of great concern, was an argument. Town meeting votes were portrayed as an undemocratic anachronism, similar to those laws that deliberately barred the vote from women and minorities.

Opponents of the shift pointed out that town meetings provide a give and take that promotes a full understanding of the issues as well as the views of one's neighbors. Amending articles can avoid the expense of repeated budget votes. And floor votes preserve the enfranchisement of direct democracy.

After participants expressed sympathy with the concerns of both parties, voters passed a substitute amendment to explore all options to improve accessibility and to report back to the school board before December 1, 2014. The committee charged with

the task of creating this report looked at what other towns had done, reviewed the literature on the subject, and met with Susan Clark (moderator in Middlesex and co-author of *All Those in Favor* and *Slow Democracy*).

Historical Background

Town meeting¹ attendance has declined across the state over the last forty years. From the dataset of over 2,000 town meetings put together by University of Vermont professor Frank Bryan between 1970 and 2011, several conclusions can be drawn. The most important variable in declining attendance is population. As towns get larger, the percentage of registered voters participating in town meeting goes down (see Figure 1 (Fig. 3.2 from Frank Bryan's *Real Democracy*)).

1 The article that authorized the formation of this committee was voted on in East Montpelier's school meeting and referred specifically to school meeting. However, school meeting and town meeting in East Montpelier are inextricably intertwined. They are held at the same location, on the same day, with the same moderator (by voters' choice; the moderator offices are separate). Which meeting occurs first alternates from year to year. For these reasons, the committee addressed town and school meeting together. Unless otherwise specified, the generic term "town meeting" refers to both town meeting and school meeting.

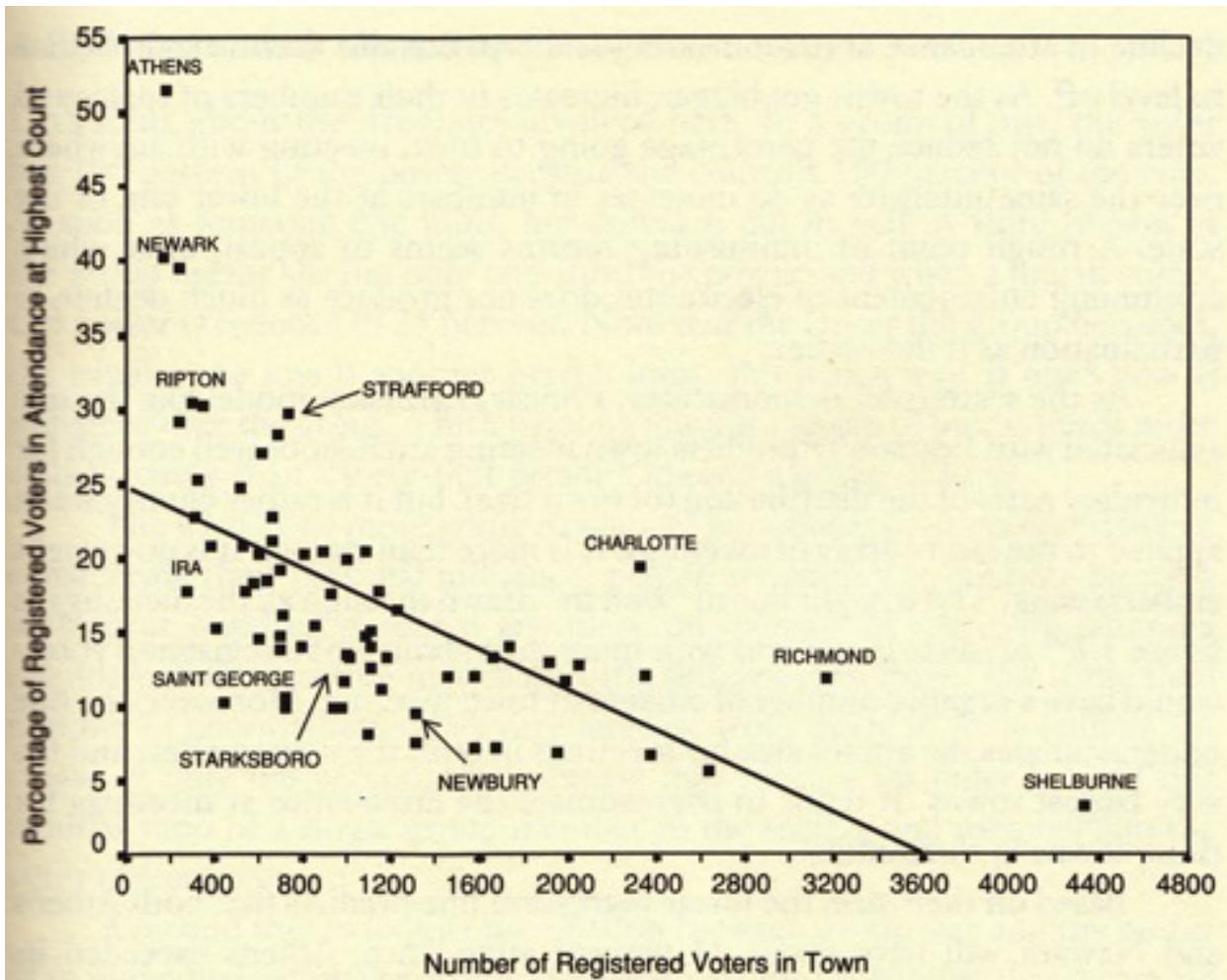


Figure 3.2. Town size and meeting attendance: the linear model (70 town meetings, 1992).

Figure 1 The relationship of population and town meeting attendance

In towns as a whole, participation as a percentage of registered voters has gone down.

Figure 2 shows the statewide trend plotted against attendance data from East

Montpelier.

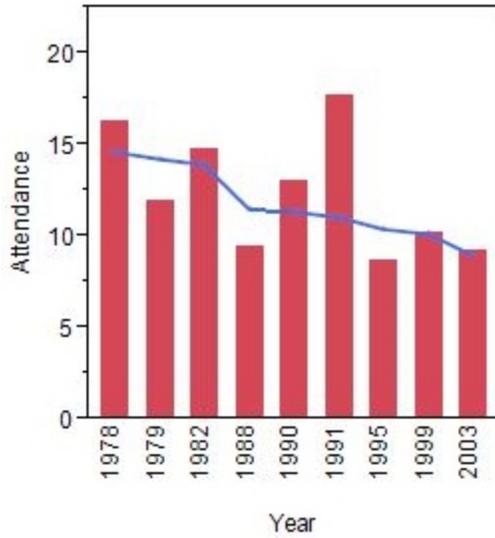


Figure 2. East Montpelier's attendance as a percentage of registered voters (red bars) and expected attendance (blue line) with *only* Frank Bryan's data. Figure by Anders Christiansen, 2014.

Another variable is the use of Australian ballot. Between 1970 and 1998, towns using Australian ballots had significantly less attendance at town meeting than those without (Figure 3; Figure 4.2 from *Real Democracy*). The effect was greater in smaller towns.

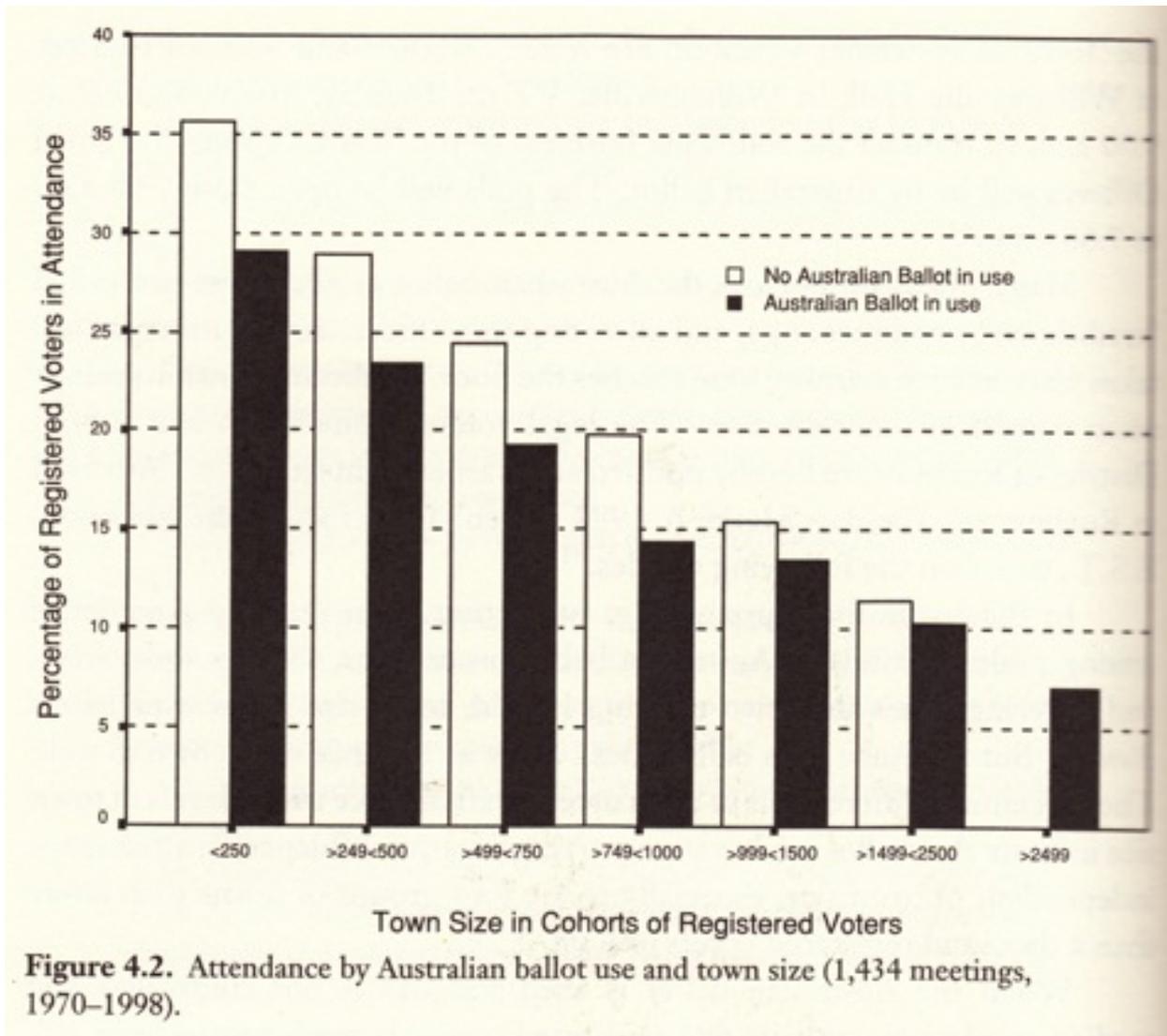


Figure 3. The Relationship between Australian Ballots and Town Meeting Attendance

With the exception of election of officers, Australian ballot was not used in East Montpelier’s first 143 years dating back to 1850, but this changed in 1993 when the town voted on several articles that would move the process to Australian ballot. Article 7 said: “To see if the Town will establish a Reserve Fund, pursuant to the authority established under 24 V.S.A. Section 2804, for the purpose of funding capital

improvements and to be funded from payments made to the Town under the terms of the Host Town Agreement between Central Vermont Landfill, Inc. and the Town, and by Town appropriations. Expenditures from this fund will be approved by the voters.” This was amended by a show of hand-held ballots to remove “by Town Appropriations” and add, “Expenditures from this fund will be approved by the voters by Australian Ballot.” This then passed by a voice vote.

Article 8 read: “Shall the Town of East Montpelier adopt its annual budget, and decide all financial expenditures of \$10,000 or more by Australian Ballot?” This was amended to read, “Shall the Town of East Montpelier adopt its annual town budget and decide all capital expenditures of \$10,000 or more which were not included in the Town Budget by Australian Ballot?” This passed with hand-held ballots by four votes, 116-112. This must have been a contentious issue even then as a motion was made when the meeting resumed after lunch and the School Meeting, to reconsider Article 8. This motion was defeated by a voice vote.

Article 11 read: “Shall the Town of East Montpelier vote by Australian Ballot to adopt, reject, or amend all town plans?” This was defeated by a voice vote.

Twenty-one years later when the town met for its 165th annual meeting, only those budget items below \$10,000 were considered at Town Meeting. Of the warned articles, 96.6% of the total proposed expenditures were decided by Australian ballot and 3.4% were decided by a floor vote at Town Meeting. In the 2014 School Meeting, as it was with the Town and School meetings in 1993, 100% of the expenditures were decided in a Town Meeting. If the Town and School expenditures are added together,

the amount decided by town meeting_rises to 68% and those by Australian ballot are 32%.

There is currently a local effort to move more of the town meeting agenda to Australian ballot. According to the Secretary of State Annual Survey, 45 Vermont towns use only Australian ballot and 112 use it at least partially. Town meeting is used exclusively in 77 towns. At the last Town Meeting Day, in March 2014, three articles to move items of business to Australian ballot were defeated in Calais. A special meeting was called for November to move the vote on the Kellogg-Hubbard Library contribution to Australian ballot, and again the move was defeated. Proponents have vowed to continue calling for special meetings until they succeed. In Warren, an attempt to move the school budget to Australian ballot was defeated 111-48. Under new business, Moretown bucked the trend and decided to warn an article for the 2015 meeting that would get rid of Australian ballot and go back to town meeting_votes.

At the East Montpelier March 2014 School meeting, Article 6 proposed moving the school budget to Australian ballot. A substitute amendment was passed that read, "Shall the School District form a committee representing a broad range of interests from throughout the town to explore options, technological or otherwise, to increase accessibility to the East Montpelier Town School District Annual Meeting and submit their report to the School Board no later than December 1, 2014? This article passed as amended, 103 yes; 67 no.

In May of this year, supporters of Australian ballot successfully petitioned for a special school meeting for the purpose of again voting on whether to adopt school

budgets by Australian ballot. The meeting was held on June 16. Supporters acknowledged that some townspeople worried that adopting the Australian ballot would lead to less discussion about the school budget and would damage the spirit and tradition of the annual town meeting, but their intent was to ensure access to voting “for 100 percent of East Montpelier’s voters.” Arguments were made that town meeting would still be vibrant and could be enhanced by having informational meetings beforehand and by having an online discussion forum.

Another citizen disagreed, saying we were walking away from a couple of hundred years of history, and that he hoped “we’re not doing that lightly.” Without a budget to vote on, he predicted that people would no longer have any reason to come to town meeting, “no matter how good the lunch is” and that within a decade or two the next generation wouldn’t know anything about it. He concluded, “Once you give something up, it’s very difficult to get it back.”

A motion to cease debate and call the question garnered the necessary two-thirds votes (158 of 201 cast) and the article passed on a voice vote. If next year’s [budget](#) proposals are similar to this year, the effect of the vote to move the School budget to Australian ballot means that 99% of all expenditures (Town plus School) will be decided by Australian ballot, and 1 percent will be voted at Town Meeting.

This committee began its organizing meetings in May, before the special school meeting. It determined that as the article warned for the special meeting was silent on the subject of this committee, the charge from school meeting to the committee remained in force. Members were solicited. People were invited to submit their names

for the committee at the special June town meeting, through Front Porch Forum, and by phone calls. To assure balance, people on both sides of the issue were invited to join.

The group as finally constituted began meeting in early October, discussing what we saw as the direction given to us by the March meeting, available accessibility options, and the difference between increased accessibility and increased participation. Looking around our immediate area, we saw that Middlesex had gone through a similar process and had a “Town Meeting Solutions Committee.” Since it has similar goals and some instructive history to draw upon, we adopted that name for our group and invited Susan Clark, who was one of the founders of the committee, the town meeting moderator in Middlesex, and an author of books about local democracy to speak to us.

The East Montpelier Town Meeting Solutions Committee

Much of our information came from our discussion with Susan Clark, analysis of attendance and voting patterns, a phone conversation with the Vermont Secretary of State’s office, and reading the literature available; primarily newspaper accounts, old town reports, and books – *Real Democracy – The New England Town Meeting and How it Works* by Frank M. Bryan (University of Chicago Press, 2004) and *All Those in Favor* by Susan Clark and Frank Bryan (2005).

From Susan Clark, we learned that Middlesex started their committee in 2001 and the goal was to increase participation. First, they did a survey. This explored the question of access to see what the issues are. When it comes to attending town meeting, there are people who can’t and there are people who don’t. She described an “us versus them” mentality in Middlesex of old-timers versus new-comers who had only been in town for some decades. There is a geographical divide (a mountain through the

middle of town). Some people didn't feel comfortable getting up to talk. It was imperative to improve communication. One of their successful projects was to create a "user's manual" for the town written from the needs of a citizen instead of a municipal official. People need to feel invited and welcome, Clark said.

Technology has made remote participation possible, Clark noted, but it requires a heavy-duty commitment from volunteers. The main concern voiced in Middlesex by those advocating Australian ballot was to guarantee access to the meeting for those who were homebound, in the military, or at work. Despite the perception that town meeting denied these people a vote, since 2008 when a remote option was made available, they have only had one consistent user, a citizen who is homebound with an illness. Others have used it from time to time.

Middlesex uses the software GoToMeeting for video streaming and, because of streaming speed issues, they use a phone for the audio. Clark explained that Solutions Committee volunteers go to a user's house for the first time to test and set things up. When a user connects to the meeting, he or she can use a "chat" window on the screen to communicate with the volunteer who is assisting. If a user wants to speak, the volunteer will hold up a card with the user's name on it so the moderator will know who it is. The highest number of users they have had at a time is four people, and one volunteer at town meeting has been sufficient to handle that number.

Votes on the floor by paper ballots pose a problem for legal reasons, then-Secretary of State Deb Markowitz advised the town. Markowitz saw remote access to paper ballot voting as a proxy vote. Because there is time stamp on the video and the chat screen or an emailed vote, those of us on the East Montpelier committee thought it

may be possible to accommodate paper ballot voting after discussion with the current Secretary of State. We also discussed possible new legislation at the state level to clarify the issue.

Clark said it took from 2001 to 2008 to implement remote participation because the committee was split and the Selectboard was opposed. There was a concern about what would happen if 200 people decided to stay home and how it would affect the quality of the meeting for those who were there. To preserve the quality of participation, priorities were set that considered illness, being homebound, public service, and out-of-town work or schooling, or out of town for personal reasons. "This is like a handicapped sticker and is volunteer intensive, and could disrupt the meeting," she said, so setting priorities is important.

Asked if these efforts and their moving the meeting into the evening of Town Meeting Day had increased participation, Clark said that participation has remained consistent at around 175 to 200 people. She reported the Selectboard was happy with the way things have been going, though they lost a few village people when the meeting was moved from the town hall to the elementary school to hold more people. Another thing they do is to vote on the budget at a set time. The meeting starts at 4, but the budget debate starts at 5:15.

We asked her about the advisability of a survey and she said that "a survey could help see what bee is in everyone's bonnet." She said she believed that while arguments were made on behalf of those who couldn't make it to the meeting, the real reasons in Middlesex for supporting Australian ballot was anger over school spending, the feeling that move-ins had taken over the town, and a question of trust and transparency.

To encourage participation, Middlesex sends out a welcome letter to new voters every year. It distributes to all voters a breakdown of where the town's money comes from and where it all goes. The paper uses simple graphics and is written by a volunteer CPA in town.

Middlesex has 6 to 10 people on their Solutions Committee. They meet all year except for the summer. They have no budget and are not part of the town government.

We asked her what the most important things we could do or suggest in our report. Number one would be a survey and two – childcare (but we already have that). Middlesex uses Front Porch Forum a month before the meeting and feeds out tidbits like “Who’s the Robert in Robert’s Rules?” “Why is it called a warning?” and “Why is food important?”, using a little humor.

One of our members asked if we are working at cross purposes promoting a town meeting, when with Australian ballot there is nothing for them to do at the meeting. Why come? Clark agreed there had to be a reason for people to come to a town meeting. It is hard to get them to come if there is nothing for them to do. People generally don't come to informational meetings. Responding to rising property taxes, she said, towns are getting rid of their town meetings, but she sees this as throwing out the baby with the bath water.

One committee member asked if trends in Vermont could be ascribed to a declining interest in democracy in the country. Clark responded that town meeting is still seen by places and organizations that don't have it as something to emulate; there are attempts in business and elsewhere to promote face-to-face meetings which were like town meetings.

In closing, Clark recommended that we collect and report on good ideas and she thought there would be enough work to keep a committee such as ours busy for a year. She recommended the survey, have more online transparency, and have face-to-face meetings.

Options and Recommendations

Many suggestions have been made to the committee and options explained in the books we have read about things the town could do to increase accessibility and participation. They include changing the venue to a larger space to accommodate more people, changing to an evening meeting, moving the meeting to a weekend, having separate meetings for the school and the town, and Australian ballot. Research by Frank Bryan looking at decades of data shows that none of these work to increase attendance. We have also discussed technological assistance for remote participation, which did not exist at the time Bryan's book was published.

Still, there are steps that should be taken if we want to maintain or even strengthen a vibrant local democracy. The first step would be to conduct a survey. We should find out the current level of interest in remote access, for it would be foolish to implement procedures and invest in technologies if there is no interest. The survey from Middlesex offers ideas that could be used in such a survey and can be seen in Appendix 1. The flyer that they give to voters at town meeting is in Appendix 2. The list of questions that our East Montpelier committee came up with were the following:

Possible Survey Questions:

1. Name, email, phone, address, and contact information if desired to be kept informed or to be on mailing list of the Town Meeting Solutions Committee. Can also be anonymous.
2. How many times have you attended town meeting in the last five years?
3. Why did you attend – or not attend the meetings?
4. Was accessibility an issue for you? If so, what could be done to resolve that?
5. If resolved, would you then participate in the meeting?
6. If you had to choose between town meeting and going skiing or some other recreational activity, which would you choose?
7. If you are required to work, could you ask your employer for the day off? If not, is that because of the nature of the job or because of lost income? At work, would you be able to monitor on a phone or other device, the issue you were most interested in if it was clearly designated on the screen (titles, labels, etc.) or would work preclude that?
8. Which is more important for the functioning of a democracy: a face-to-face meeting, or the use of ballots?
9. Would you be interested in technology to increase accessibility for those in the military or those confined to home or busy at work?
10. How important is it to keep the traditional town meeting? Why or why not?
11. Which mode of expression is most clear in giving feedback to the school board:
 - Email
 - Mail
 - Phone call
 - Town meeting discussion
 - Town meeting amendments
 - Australian ballot
12. Would you be interested in a hybrid approach that would have one meeting that would allow direct democracy (to introduce amendments to the articles) and then a later Australian ballot?
13. Do you have access to a computer (your own, a family member's, a neighbor's, a public computer somewhere) to be online?

Having formulated these questions, we conferred with the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont. Michael Moser, Research Specialist and Coordinator for the Vermont State Data Center said that he could provide assistance to

the committee in shaping these questions to be scientifically accurate as well as be suitable as a baseline for future surveys. One hurdle would be the cost of mailing these surveys out to everyone on the checklist. A minimal cost of \$2,000 would cover printing and postage, but there would still need to be data analysis. To reduce costs to the town, there are grants that could be applied for and volunteer labor could be used. One scenario would be to hand the surveys out when people check in to vote in the next election at town meeting and then find volunteers to phone those not checked off the checklist.

Second, serious consideration should be given to extending the term of this committee or encouraging the formation of a new committee to pursue these goals. There are still other scenarios that haven't yet been explored. For example, it may be possible to have a traditional face-to-face town meeting where people could exercise their legislative duties to amend articles on the warning, including budget items and then have that followed up by a vote that would be done at a later date by Australian ballot. Research into ways that state law could be shaped to account for the technological changes we have witnessed in recent years could breathe new life into old democratic traditions.

Third, if East Montpelier has gotten too large for an equitable sampling of its interests in a town meeting, perhaps a representative town meeting like Brattleboro uses should be considered. Although Bryan and Clark (*All Those in Favor*) recommend it for towns of over 5,000 voters (East Montpelier has 2,014 at the time of this report), representative town meeting would least preserve the advantages of a town meeting in

offering face-to-face discussion and flexibility to amend school budgets without having to go repeatedly to the voters for yes-no votes.

Additional suggestions the committee considered:

- Alternate town and school meetings, for 90 minutes apiece, until all business is accomplished. This procedure might keep be more likely to expose all participants to both meetings.
- Ensure non-controversial items are up front and voted on quickly.
- Streamline the meetings by ending oral reports at town meeting, encouraging people to read the reports in the annual Town Report. Perhaps post recorded oral reports at the town web site. However, without the oral reports, many who haven't read the relevant sections of the Town Report may feel disenfranchised.
- For pre-town meeting, streamline the process by not having candidates say anything or have anyone give routine oral reports. Get to items with potential controversy quickly. However, this assumes that organizers of the meeting know where all the potential controversy lies; some may emerge as part of routine oral reports.
- For pre-town meeting, consider asking ORCA (Onion River Cable Access television) to film it and broadcast it.
- If the town does internet-based activities, consider how to ensure it's accessible to older people or others without computers. Perhaps a "democracy-for-seniors" phone tree would help. On the other hand, it's important not to let the perfect be

the enemy of the good; internet-based activities can increase accessibility of town governance for most of the town, even if not everyone can easily access it.

Summary and Conclusion

Democracy is a key issue of our time. In the town of East Montpelier, a debate has been ongoing between those who want to guarantee equal access to everyone to the ballot versus those who want to preserve the legislative tradition of town meeting and who see Australian ballot, as Wes Cate used to call it, “Fly-by voting.”

Everyone wants to see greater participation at our meetings, whether they are town meetings or informational meetings. There may be a deeper problem than accessibility or transparency, or any of the other variables that are cited for declining participation. Indeed, each of the last two years have seen an overwhelming 73 percent of registered East Montpelier voters not availing themselves of even Australian ballots to register their votes on Town Meeting Day. That is why we need to look at what is happening in our community. That is why the committee was formed and why we are recommending the following actions:

1. Distribute and analyze a survey of the townspeople’s priorities and concerns regarding town governance.
2. The formation of an ongoing Town Meeting Solutions Committee that would analyze trends, offer suggestions, and provide information to assist the citizenry in understanding and participating in its local town government.

3. Evaluate on an on-going basis the options and models available for local governance, whether it is through the assistance of new technology, or if there is growth in the town, adoption of a new type of governance like the representative town meeting that is used by larger towns.

One thing that is clear: we can trust that all of our neighbors who passionately debate these questions are eager for what is best for each citizen and for the town.

Appendix 1 – Middlesex Survey (2001)

SURVEY DRAFT, Version 5.0

Town Meeting

Solutions Committee

Questionnaire for Middlesex Residents

1. We are trying to discover why some people attend town meeting, and others do not. Please rank each of the following items from 1 to 3.

“1” means that the item does not create a problem for you in attending town meeting;

“3” means that this is an item that could prevent you from attending.

	No Problem		Could prevent my attendance
A. Have other commitments at that time	1	2	3
B. Don't have enough information on issues	1	2	3
C. Unable to leave home to attend	1	2	3
D. Out of the area at that time	1	2	3
E. Lack of transportation	1	2	3
F. Lack of child care	1	2	3
G. Problems with facilities: (bathrooms, accessibility, seating, etc.)	1	2	3
H. Not interested in the issues	1	2	3
I. Don't feel it makes a difference if I go or not	1	2	3
J. Not comfortable with the process (public speaking, voting, Robert's Rules, etc.)	1	2	3
K. Other (please describe):	1	2	3

2 We are trying to increase participation in our town meeting. Please check any ideas that you think would help (check as many as you wish).

Communications: Making Sure We Know About the Issues

Use more creative ways to get information on local issues out to voters

(e.g., posters, e-mail, field trips, public speakers, celebrations)

Create a Middlesex web site which allows viewer response

More use of the Middlesex Monthly newspaper to publicize issues

Use phone tree or direct mail to encourage participation in meetings

___ Other : **Access: Helping People Participate in Town Meeting**

___ Allow citizens to participate actively and vote in town meeting from other locations (from home or abroad) by using current computer technology

___ Bigger / more accessible space for town meeting

___ Provide interpreters (sign language, foreign language)

___ Provide child care

___ Provide transportation

___ Other suggestions:

Town Meeting Structure and Content

___ Return the town meeting to face-to-face format (not Australian ballot)

___ Re-join the town meeting with town meeting

___ Include more issues that make a difference in town meeting

(Feel free to list other issues you'd like to see addressed at town meeting)

___ Other suggestions:

Civic Education and Celebration

___ Include young people in town meeting

___ Introduce and welcome new voters at town meeting

___ Recognize those who have contributed to the town at town meeting

___ Other suggestions:

3. We are trying to discover the best time to hold our town meeting. Please indicate your first, second and third choices from the list below.

_____ First Tuesday in March, 10 a.m.

_____ First Tuesday in March, 5 p.m.

_____ First Tuesday in March, 7 p.m.

_____ First Saturday in March, 10 a.m.

_____ First Saturday in March, 1 p.m.

_____ Other:

4. Last year's (2001) Middlesex Town Meeting generated an important discussion regarding whether Middlesex should eliminate our sit-down town meeting and change over to Australian (paper) ballot. Please comment on your thoughts or feelings about the pros and cons of town meeting below.

5. We welcome your participation! If you would like to be on the Town Meeting Solutions Committee mailing list, please write your name, address, phone, and e-mail address below. You will receive meeting minutes and notices of future meetings. All are invited to attend!

Appendix 2 – Citizen’s Flyer – March 2010

Welcome! *This flyer is provided simply as background to help all voters participate fully. The Moderator is trained to make sure all voters are heard and their questions answered. If you have any questions, just raise your hand and ask.*

The Warning

The “warning” is the agenda for the meeting. Only articles on the warning (“warned articles”) can be considered at town meeting. The warning for this year’s meeting appears in the Middlesex Annual Report.

Australian Ballot

Some items that appear on the warning are not discussed and voted on at the traditional face-to-face town meeting, but are voted on in the voting booths on pre-printed, paper “Australian ballots.” In Middlesex, you will vote on town officers and school issues via Australian ballot, and sometimes other articles as well. Items that are voted on by Australian ballot may not be discussed at town meeting while the polls are open.

Robert’s Rules of Order

According to state law, town meetings in Vermont are governed by a set of parliamentary rules called “Robert’s Rules of Order.” The Town Moderator is trained in using Robert’s Rules, and will refer to them when necessary. A few of the more commonly used elements are included here.

The Main Motion

Example: “I move to accept Article 6 as written.” Each article on the warning must be “moved” and seconded; it is then ready to be discussed by the group. In discussion, citizens raise their hands and are called on by the Moderator. When you are called on, stand up, state your name, then speak your mind.

The Amendment

“Amending” a motion proposes a change to the main motion. Example: An article is moved and seconded; then, during discussion, someone says, “I move to amend Article 17 by reducing the dollar amount from \$10,000 to \$5,000.” After someone seconds this, debate shifts to discussing this amendment. Once people have discussed the amendment, the Moderator puts the amendment to a

vote. If the voters reject the amendment, the group now returns to discussing the original main motion. If the voters approve the amendment, the discussion focuses on the main motion *as amended*.

The Vote

Once the Moderator feels all points of view have been heard, s/he will call for a vote. If you are in favor of the motion, you will say “Aye.” If opposed, say “No” or “Nay.” Other forms of voting that you may expect to see at town meeting:

--A show of hands or a standing vote: May be asked for if a voter disagrees with the Moderator after the results of a voice vote is announced.

--Paper ballot: Any voter may move that a vote be taken via paper ballot; if seven voters support this motion, pieces of paper will be distributed and you will write your vote and pass it in. It will be counted immediately.

Point of Order

If you don't understand a ruling of the Moderator, speak up, saying “Point of order, Mr./Ms. Moderator.” After you are recognized by the Moderator, ask your question.

Call the Question

If debate has gone on long enough—voters have made up their minds but some people are still repeating the same basic arguments—a voter can move to cut off debate or “call the question.” If you agree that all voices have been heard and you are ready to vote on the issue at hand, you should vote in favor of calling the question. However, if you want to continue discussion, you should vote against calling the question. Two-thirds of the group must vote yes on calling the question in order to cease debate; otherwise, discussion continues.

In most cases, “calling the question” is not necessary. The Moderator will call for a vote when s/he feels that all points of view have been heard, and this avoids having to vote on calling the question.

Pass Over

Sometimes it becomes clear to the voters that they aren't ready to make a vote yes or no, and the preference is to not vote on the article at all. At this point, someone may move to “pass over” an article. (An article may also be passed over because it will be handled by Australian ballot.)

Compiled by the Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee, based on information from the Vermont Institute for Government.

More information on town meeting, as well as the many committees and organizations that help keep Middlesex vibrant, can be found in the **Middlesex Operator's Manual**, available at Town Hall or the Rumney School. This information and more can also be found at Middlesex's website: **www.middlesex-vt.org**.

Town Meeting Evaluation Form: *Your Ideas Wanted!*

The most effective / useful elements of our town meeting were:

What I would change about our town meeting:

Additional comments or suggestions (more room on other side):

Please return this form in the drop-box by the door, or mail to the Middlesex Town Meeting Solutions Committee, c/o Town Hall, 5 Church St., Middlesex VT 05602. The results will be given to the Selectboard and used to improve our town meeting. Thank you!

References

Bryan, Frank M., *Real Democracy – The New England Town Meeting and How it Works*, The University of Chicago Press, 2004

Clark, Susan and Bryan, Frank, *All Those in Favor – Rediscovering the Secrets of Town Meeting and Community*, Ravenmark, 2005

Town of East Montpelier 143rd Annual Report 1992

Town of East Montpelier 144th Annual Report 1993

Town of East Montpelier 164th Annual Report 2013

Vermont Secretary of State's Office Web Site -

<https://www.sec.state.vt.us/elections/town-meeting-local-elections.aspx>

Newspaper Articles:

"East Montpelier: Australian ballot put on hold, at least for now," by Amy Nixon, *Times Argus*, March 5, 2014

"East Montpelier petition leads to special meeting" by Amy Ash Nixon, *Times Argus*, May 7, 2014

"East Montpelier Adopts Australian Ballot for School Budget," by Amy Nixon, *Times Argus*, June 17, 2014

"Panel Works to Improve Town Meeting Access," by Amy Nixon, *Times Argus*, Junly 16, 2014

"Calais: Floor Meeting Survives, with Some Surprises," *Times Argus*, March 5, 2014

"Calais Rejects Ballot Voting for 4th Time," *Times Argus*, November 9, 2014

"In Vermont, Ballots Are Australian," by Tim Johnson, *Burlington Free Press*, March 2, 2014

"Warren Sticks with Floor Vote," *Times Argus*, March 5, 2014