

# Financial Town Referendum is a Change Whose Time Has Come

To the editor:

The Financial Town Meeting Changes Advisory Committee (FTMCAC), formed in August, 2010 by the previous Tiverton Town Council, submitted its proposals to the Town Council last week.

Both proposals create an all-day Financial Town Referendum (FTR) where Tiverton voters continue to be the 'appropriating body' of budgets and differ only in that the version recommended by the FTMCAC allows a voter to 'Vote for One' of the budget proposals, with a runoff referendum to insure a majority vote (if needed). The other version would allow a voter to 'Approve or Reject' a budget proposal, with the continuation of the prior year's budget if all budget proposals are rejected.

In 2006 voters asked to find a replacement for the Financial Town Meeting, and the current referendum proposals are the first time Tiverton voters will have the chance to vote for a referendum-based process with private votes cast at the voters' convenience on referendum day.

Tiverton voters, increasingly concerned about the stridency and intimidation factors present at the Financial Town Meeting, and frustrated by all the procedural matters and last-minute amendments, should be pleased with the proposed FTR. A voter will be able to cast a better informed vote as a result of a Financial Town Hearing two weeks before the referendum where all budget proposals on a ballot will be thoroughly vetted. Absentee ballots will be available to accommodate a voter who can't be physically present to vote. A voter can cast a vote in a matter of minutes and voter turnout will not be limited by how many voters can fit in the high school gymnasium or dedicate four hours of a Saturday to Financial Town Meeting.

The FTMCAC was diligent to maintain the balance of power and voter rights currently in place under the charter. Voters will now have the ability to put their own budget proposal directly on the referendum ballot without modification by the government. In short, under the Financial Town Referendum, all voters, not just those who can or are willing to endure a town meeting, will be empowered to determine budgets and the tax levy.

The FTMCAC sought continuous input from all town officials and Boards, addressed their concerns, and believes the referendum is a significant improvement over the current town meeting process of budget appropriations and tax levies.

The first public hearing on the Financial Town Referendum proposals is at 7 p.m. on Monday, July 11, at the Tiverton High School auditorium. Please attend to find out more about this important proposal for an all-day referendum on budgets and the tax levy.

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